In the Center
of
Religions

Johann Figl

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Belief and Practice
of
Universal Religious Movements

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To the English revised Edition

Professor Figl published his book in 1993 to celebrate the centennial of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893. As he argues in his original foreword, in the hundred years that since have passed, a number of 'new' religions and movements were introduced that proclaimed a unity behind all religions. Often, they were revival movements of existing religions. These religions and spiritual movements, all convinced of the universality of religion, are the subject of his book.

A large part of the book is dedicated to the Sufism as presented by Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan. In 1910, this Indian Sufi mystic brought Indian Sufism to the West, with 'the Unity of religious Ideals' as one of the corner stones. As Prof. Figl notes in his book, 'An explicit focus on the Sufi movement and neo-Sufism shows that this movement has been wrongly neglected – if not outrightly ignored – for a long time in the context of the new religious movements hitherto presented.'

In order to do this movement, called 'Neo-Sufism' by Prof. Figl, justice, the author contacted for this English edition Shaikh-al-Mashaik Mahmood khan Youskine (1927), nephew of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, and was able to make some necessary footnotes and additions to his original German text. One of these additions is in honor of Inayat Khan's daughter Noor Inayat Khan (1914–1944), a war hero, decorated posthumously in England and France.

On top of that, Prof Figl updated his original text with some new chapters on Sufism (e.g. the chapter Three Phases of Sufism in the USA and in Europe), adding data from literature that was not yet available when the book first was published. In this process, a few chapters of the original edition were left out of this English edition.

To further clarify the context of Inayat Khan's teachings, the complex succession history of the Sufi Movement and its offshoots, and to update the English version with more recent research, the Nekbakht Foundation as publishers of this English version followed Prof. Figl's policy and commissioned for another editing and updating of the English translation.

With these additions, we hope that this edition – the first academic publication by a university professor of comparative religions focusing on Inayat Khan – will not only make the research and conclusions of Prof. Figl accessible to an English speaking audience, but will also open the English speaking academic world for further scientific research into Inayati Sufism, which now – over a hundred years after Inayat Khan first set foot on

Western ground – is present in most Western and also a number of Eastern countries around the globe.

The references to used literature are mostly to German books. In a number of cases, the literal translation of the German titles into English are replaced by the original English titles. Likewise, some of the quotes from German books (e.g. from the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas) are replaced by original English quotes. The reference to the page numbers in the original edition mostly refer to German editions.

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January, 2023
The editor

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Introduction

1. Unity and the Center of Religions - the Goal of universal religious Self-Perception

In a global context in which people are becoming increasingly conscious of global unity, interdependence and connectedness, religious self-perception poses the question how it can do justice to the process of globalization. In various inter-religious encounters and joint activities, one feels compelled to establish a common ground, despite the factual differences between the religions, and to foreground essential similarities in view of their historical and cultural differences and various origins, dogmatic beliefs, forms of worship, moral concepts, and so on.

As a result, many have expressed the need to seek out an inner unity between religions, even if this act should result in alienation from their own religious upbringing. This is a general tendency that simply cannot be ignored in secular culture. As a need deeply rooted in the concept of tolerance that emerged during the Enlightenment and in the tendency towards a humanist philanthropic world view, this desire can be traced back to the very advent of modern intellectual history.

New religious and esoteric communities have been seeking to

meet this need for religious unity since the 19th century, firstly by propagating a specific idea of unity between religions, and secondly by conveying a sense of self-perception to the seeker with the aim of empowering them to experience the central ground common to the various religions and to understand this in religious practice.

This work is aimed at present-day religious communities attempting to achieve this. There is a wide range of religious movements and groups (usually coming from a Hindu, Buddhist or Sufi background) that present an alternative to an accepted faith for people whose lives are characterized by the Christian tradition. The majority of these groups and communities wish to guide their members to a form of spirituality that is not exclusively bound to the traditional religious practices followed by humanity. Rather, a new religious awareness – which is often directly associated with meditation – enables followers to transcend these practices.

The major religions are not dismissed. In addition to providing a partial critique, these new movements want to understand the traditional religions on a 'deeper' level, even if this deviates from how these traditions see themselves. This new perspective makes the core messages of various religions relevant for everyone and thus provides a generally accessible guideline of experience that serves as the common and actual center shared by the different religious truths. This survey takes as its starting point the observation of a number of religious communities founded in the 19th and 20th centuries that can be seen as 'universalist'. In this context, 'universal' and 'universalist' are referring first and

foremost to the self-perception of these groups. They self-declare their effort to understand reality and try to live according to a 'nature of being' common to all religions. Part of their global view is that they proclaim a religiosity that regards people regardless of their ethnic, social, gender or other differences. The idea of 'universal' in this sense is sometimes also used to describe tendencies and movements that seek to unite religions under a higher principle. Examples are Vivekananda's teachings or the central concerns of the 'Sufi Order of the West' being classified as a 'universal religion',[1] or the many gurus and swamis in the West who 'espouse a universal religion that is said to have existed before the emergence of all specific religions . . . ',[2] or the 'universal synthesis between religions in 'modern syncretic neo-religions and religious movements'.[3] Many of these new movements, including Theosophy, claim to be the 'new universal religion', with their 'universal religious focus' occasionally being viewed in a critical light.[4] This syncretistic universalist understanding thus refers to a new form of religion.

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[1] K. O. Schmidt, Universale Religion nach Vivekananda [Universal Religion after Vivekananda], Ergolding 1990; for the 'Sufi Movement', see for ex. Issue 2/1992 of 'Sifat. Sufi-Zeitschrift' [Sifat. A Sufi Journal] with the theme: *Universal Religion*.

[2] J. Aagaard, article on syncretism in, in : Ökumene-Lexikon, ed. H. Krüger, Frankfurt/M. 1983, 1152.

[3] R. Hummel, article on syncretism, in: Dictionary of contemporary religious issues, Ed. U. Ruh et al., Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 1986, 460; dialogue article, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen, Szenen und Weltanschauungen: Orientierungen im religiösen Pluralismus [Lexicon of new religious groups, scenes and ideologies: guiding principles within religious pluralism], Ed. K. Baer et al., Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 248.

[4] cf. E. Benz, Neue Religionen [New Religions], Stuttgart, 1971, 160.

2. Establishing new religious Communities -
a poly-cultural Phenomenon since the 19ᵗʰ Century

A universal understanding of religion has been articulated in very different ways both in the past and present. Examples are the philosophical concepts focusing on religion (as expressed by Nicholas of Cusa), the 'universal religion of reason' (e.g. Edward Herbert, first Baron Herbert of Cherbury), the philosophy of enlightenment,[1] as well as political religious endeavors (e.g. the 16ᵗʰ-century Mughal Emperor Akbar, who attempted to reconcile Hinduism and Islam).

It can also serve as the basis for an institutionally unrelated, 'free-floating' piety, as is the case for some New Age movements today, which take content and motifs from all religions at will.

However, this study does not address individual concepts or abstract theoretical agendas. Instead, it focuses on specific communities that have an understanding of religion and that seek to practice it in their piety. For this reason, it is important to first explain briefly the terms new (or neo-) religious movements and new religions.

The terms 'new religious movements' and 'new religions' have entered common parlance in the last decades, often being used

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[1] A brief overview is provided by F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], ⁴1982, 549-555; on Nicholas of Cusas's understanding of the 'only religion in the diversity of religious customs (rites)' and on 'universal religious theism' of Renaissance philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, cf. J. Figl, Philosophie der Religionen [The Philosophy of Religions], Paderborn 2012, 122ff., and ibid., A single religion or a plurality of religions?, in: Die Spannweite des Dasein [The Span of Existence], Ed. K. Baier, M. Riedenauer, Göttingen 2011, 379ff.

in conjunction with 'youth religions' such as jñana yoga, Hare Krishna, the Divine Light Mission, the Rajneesh movement and many more.[1] They have also been branded as 'eastern sects' and 'youth cults'. Many of these groups surfaced in Europe and the USA in the 1960s, often in conjunction with an alternative – and sometimes provocative – religious subculture. Characteristic of these movements are specific ways of living and meditative practices, usually inspired and led by Eastern gurus.[2] The term 'youth religions' was coined by F.W. Haack in 1974, and was based on how he saw the movements. However, this term is not relevant as far back as the 1960s and is even less appropriate when considered purely from an objective standpoint.[3]

Due to its connotations, the word 'sect' as a religious term is not suitable for denoting new religious movements, as it has been used as a polemic far too often and does not reflect the use of

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[1] Cf. esp. Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften [The Religious Communities Handbook], [3] edit. H. Reller/M. Kiesig, Gütersloh 1985, chapter: 'Eastern missionary religions and new religions ('youth religions')', 515ff.

[2] Cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission und neue Frömmigkeit im Westen [The Indian Mission and new Piety in the West], 1980; ibid., Gurus in Ost und West [Gurus in the East and West], Stuttgart 1984; also cf. J. R. Gascard, Neue Jugendreligionen [New Youth Religions], Freiburg/Br. 1984, esp. 12f.

[3] Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack, Die neuen Jugendreligionen [The New Youth Religions], Munich 1974; ibid., Jugendreligionen. Ursachen, Trends [Youth Religions. Causes and Trends], Munich 1979; ibid., Europas neue Religion - Sekten Gurus Satanskult [Europe's new Religion – Sects, Gurus and Satanic Cults], Zurich 1991, esp. 78 with note 7. A problematic perception of new religious movements has thus emerged in German-speaking countries, especially since the 1970s. On the issue of finding a nuanced evaluation of this phenomenon, see: H. Baer, Types of youth religions, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups], Ed. ibid., 659-665, esp. 664.

the term in its literal sense, namely to describe heresies or secessions within a major religion. In English-speaking countries – aside from the term 'cult',[1] which carries various sociological connotations – the more neutral term 'alternative religions',[2] as well as the nomenclature 'new religious movements in the West' are increasingly being used to differentiate them from the 'new religious movements in primal societies'.[3, 4]

So in order to do justice to the phenomena that the term describes, it is essential to broaden the term 'new religious movements', both in terms of time and with regard to various cultural spheres. The use of 'new religions' to describe movements in the European and US cultural spheres should be broadened so that it also applies to non-European phenomena. For instance, it should also include new religious enterprises in the Middle East (Islamic movements), India, and the Far East (primarily Vietnam, Korea and Japan). Also movements (of a principally syncretic nature) in South America, Africa, and the

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[1] The aim of these terms is to reflect the fact that in comparison to a 'sect', this is a neo-religious movement with non-Christian roots: cf. R. Hummel, Dialog mit neuen religiösen Bewegungen aus Asien [Dialogue with New Asia-centric Religious Movements] in: in: Materialdienst 55 (1992), 225-232, esp. 228.

[2] Cf. J. G. Melton, Modern Alternative Religions in the West, in: A Handbook of Living Religions, London, 1988, 455ff.

[3] Dictionary of Religions, edit. J. R. Hinnels, London 1984, 232; H. W. Turner, New Religious Movements in Primal Societies, in: A Handbook of Living Religions, 1988, 439ff.

[4] For the general category of 'religious movement', cf. H.-J. Klimkeit, Antireligiöse Bewegungen in Südindien [Anti-religious Movements in Southern India], Bonn 1971, 28ff.

rest of Asia and Oceania should be mentioned in this context.[1] In other words, religious developments that lead to new communities are not limited to any individual cultural domain, they are a global phenomenon. This comprehensive use of the term 'new religions' can be found in more recent relevant academic publications focusing on religion.[2]

Along with the expansion of geographical boundaries to include non-European cultural spheres as part of the term 'new religions', it is important to consider the broader dimension of the phenomenon described using this term. This goes back to the early 19th century: for around 150 years, independent of one another, new religions have arisen in Japan, India, and Persia, sometimes leading to universalist movements. Likewise, in modern times many new non-church movements have emerged

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[1] Cf. especially Lukas Pokorny/ Franz Winter (Ed.), Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements. Leiden, Boston 2018, see the article titled 'New Religious Movements in Primal Societies', in: Dictionary of Religions, Harmondsworth 1984, 232.

[2] Also in Lanczkowski's work 'The New Religions', (Frankfurt/M. 1971), which documents the various communities that have been newly established since the start of the 19th century, as well as those that primarily remain popular in their country of origin despite activities in the West (e.g. the majority of new religions in Japan), and those that perform missionary work as neo-religious 'movements' in the West (e.g. Sun Myung Moon's 'Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity', later shortened to the 'Unification Church'; or the 'Transcendental Mission', 'Divine Light Mission', and Hare Krishna movement (cf. D. McEoin, Baha'ism, in: A Handbook of Living Religions, 1988, 475f, and J. Figl, article on new religions, in: Lexicon of Theology and the Church, 3rd Edition, Vol. 7, 773-775; ibid., new religions, in: ibid. (Ed.), Handbuch Religionswissenschaft [Religious Studies Handbook], 2003, 457-484).

in Europe and the USA.[1] In contrast to the persistent widespread belief that crystallized with the emergence of the so-called youth religions,[2] the development of these 'new religions' goes back much further than the past 50 years.

Restricting the scope to movements since the 1960s would be problematic even within the Western cultural environment, given that alternative religious currents with a distinctly Eastern flavor have been around since the 19th century. Examples are the Theosophical notions of an esoteric single religion influenced by Eastern ideas, which appeared in the West in the 19th and 20th century, and the Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi teachers of wisdom who traveled from Asia to the USA and Europe around the turn of the century and found many followers in the West. These movements led to the first organized non-Christian religious groups and communities in the Christian cultural space. A key starting point for these tendencies was the Parliament of the World's Religions, which was organized as part of the Chicago

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[1] See. H. Obst, Apostel und Propheten der Neuzeit. Gründer christlicher Religionsgemeinschaften des 19./20. Jahrhunderts [Apostles and Prophets of the the Modern Era. Founders of Christian Religious Communities in the 19th/20th Century], Berlin 31990; ibid., Außerkirchliche religiöse Protestbewegungen der Neuzeit [Non-church Religious Protest Movements of the Modern Era], Berlin, 1991; these movements are not covered by this work, as most do not exhibit pronounced universalist structures; this does not apply to the esoteric direction taken by Theosophy, which emphatically represents a universalist concept of religious unity.

[2] Cf. for ex. F.-W. Haack, Europas neue Religion [Europe's New Religion], Zürich/Wiesbaden, 1991, 15: 'In the past 30 years, a religious revolution has taken place in the former Christian stronghold of the West, winning ground in many areas previously occupied by the historical Christian religion and changing the conception of man that had been handed down as a result.'

World's Fair in 1893. Buddhists and Hindus spoke at the event, and continued their work in the West. The most famous names of the time were Swami Vivekananda and D. T. Suzuki's teacher Soyen Shaku.

In summary, it can be said that the emergence of new religious movements with universalist syncretic intentions is a global, poly-cultural process that has had a decisive influence on the history of religion in the 19th and 20th century – the effects of which can be observed in the present.

3. Perspectives for Documenting and interpreting the Phenomenon (Structure and Intention behind the Representation)

The aim of this work is to exemplify the universalist religious movements, in particular those derived from or influenced by Far Eastern and Middle Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam) in relation to key groups. Of special interest is the question of how significant such groups are within the overall context of more recent religious history.

This work will seek to achieve this aim by first providing a historical, religion-based overview of universal religious movements (part 1), followed by a comprehensive theoretical religious interpretation of these movements (part 2).

In the section on religious history, we will first determine the religious concepts of unity present in Theosophy, which seeks to connect Western esoteric and occult traditions with those of the East (Chapter 1). Theosophy stands at the cradle of shifting Western perspectives towards Eastern religions, and proved to be the ideal basis for Eastern religious teachers to make their entrée into the West, as can be observed clearly around the end of the 19th century.

The importance of Theosophy extends far beyond its small band of actual members. It also served as a catalyst in transferring universalist ideas based on the Hindu tradition or Buddhism. After this introductory chapter, we will directly address the three most significant religions to which the roots of the universalist movements can be traced, namely those influenced by Hinduism (Chapter 2), Buddhism (Chapter 3) and Islam (Chapter 4).

Here, we assume the reader is familiar with the historical and religious background of these three religions. The general overview sketched out in part 1 will be expanded on in this final chapter. We will present in detail one group – Inayat Khan's 'Sufi Movement' (and the later split-off 'Inayatiyya') – in order to gain a relatively comprehensive insight, based on a concrete model. This may serve as an introduction into the ideas and (cult) practices of a religious community that identifies as decidedly universalist, and may illustrate the form of the movement, specifically conceived for Western devotees. An explicit focus on the 'Sufi Movement' and neo-Sufism shows that this movement has been wrongly neglected – if not outrightly ignored – for a long time in the context of the new religious movements hitherto presented. It is only in the past couple of decades and in the present day that Sufism is now benefiting from more attention.[1]

In part two, the focus is on the systematic overall interpretation and analysis of the movements presented in part one. Here, we attempt to limit these more theoretical explanations to the essentials. We will start with setting out the characteristics of the phenomenon of universalist, syncretic forms of religion, based on the essential attributes shared by the various movements (Chapter 5). This is used as the basis for establishing the relationship between universal new religions and the secular modern era (Chapter 6), after which the challenge centering on

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[1] Cf. Mark Sedgwick, Western Sufism. From the Abbasids to the New Age, Oxford 2017: containing the chapter: Toward the One: Inayat Khan and the Sufi Movement, esp. 156-171

alternative (new) religions with regard to traditional universal religions is addressed (Chapter 7).

As will be demonstrated, the neo-religious movements present an alternative both to the modern notion of self-perception insofar as this is rational and autonomous, and to the classical religions, which are considered outdated in their current form. These neo-religious movements claim to offer a level of religiosity suitable for modern people, while fulfilling the original intention of the major religious establishments. It is therefore necessary to clarify the 'structure' denoted by three ideological religious principles that effectively delineates the current situation, namely the interdependent relationship between (universal) new religions, (secular) modernity, and (traditional) universal religions. The descriptions in this work consequently seek to provide a sense of orientation in the present for a situation that is by no means clear, as it sets secular, agnostic, and critical tendencies alongside new, often mystical religious aspirations. Given the changing circumstances, the classical religions need to determine where they stand in an environment fraught with tension. This is especially necessary, as the new religiosity and universal spirituality see themselves as an alternative to the traditional approach of declaring one's allegiance to a single religion. Failure to find an answer to the problems caused by this, may deepen the divide between modernity and religion (especially Christianity), caused by ongoing secularization. This is not the result of voices critical towards religion or atheistic intentions, but is due to the shift to a new type of religiosity – characterized by a neo-religious

spiritual inner self.

This would further intensify the problematic state of a life lived largely without religion, and leave only religious practices that have little application in real life, leading to more divergence between general cultural and individual biographical notions of religious origin and actual self-perception. This might result in a situation in which a culture is a 'religious orphan', as only a small percentage of the population continues to believe that the meaning of life can be found in socially predominant religious institutions and (Christian) traditions. This work wishes to provide assistance in resolving these problematic developments, albeit indirectly, with regard to the redefinition of a culture that identifies as largely secular in relation to the topic of religion as a whole, and consequently to determine the relationship between the Christian religion that defines this culture and the new religious situation that has been steadily gaining ground since the end of the 19th century.

Part One

Universalist Religions
and Movements
of the modern Era

Chapter 1
The orientation of Western esotericism on Eastern religiosity

All forms of esotericism claim – as signified by the Greek word *esóteros*, meaning 'inner' – to understand the inner self, the essence, the heart of a message, in contrast to the 'outer', which in some cases is seen as insignificant and peripheral in nature. This 'deeper truth' is only accessible to a select group of people, who actively search for it. Followers of esotericism perceive religion often in a symbolic sense that frequently deviates from how it is ordinarily understood. The contradiction that arises from this influenced in particular the history of esotericism in the Occident. Western initiation teachings were only able to survive in the fringes of the official realm of

Christendom – and often only in secret covenants.[1]
Against this background it comes as little surprise that the esoteric teachings of Theosophy that appeared in the 19th century became bitterly hostile towards Christianity and deliberately used non-Christian traditions to justify its own system. There had been a powerful, not to mention varied stream of genuine Christian Theosophy – that went unbroken from the Alexandrian theologians to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, via the mystics of the medieval and early modern age (especially Jakob Böhme) through to the 19th century.[2]

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, initially based her theories on spiritualist occult Western and Eastern traditions. Later, she restricted this almost exclusively to Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The Theosophic understanding of the diversity of religions within their supposed similarities – is largely determined by the unity of thought expressed by Indian religions.

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[1] Cf. B. Vaillant, Westliche Einweihungslehren [Western Initiation Teachings], Munich ²1989; J. Wichmann, Die Renaissance der Esoterik [The Renaissance of Esotericism], Stuttgart 1990, 124ff.; G. Wehr, Wege zum Mysterium. Aspekte und Impulse abendländischer Spiritualität [Paths to Mystery. Aspects and Impulses of Occidental Spirituality], Olten 1992.

[2] Cf. A. Köberle, article on Theosophy, in: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart [Religion Past and Present]³, Vol. 6, 845ff.

1. Theosophy,
'the innermost Essence of all Religions'

The Intentions of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

The following observations focus primarily on the Theosophical ideas advocated by the Theosophical Society initiated by Helena P. Blavatsky. This is followed by a brief outline of Blavatsky's intentions as they tie into the subsequent history of the Theosophical movement.

Here, we are interested in determining the extent to which the movement strives towards unity between religions. It is debatable whether this is achieved through a specific syncretic approach and whether Theosophy itself – at least in terms of its spiritual goal — can be seen as a 'syncretic religious learning system'.[1] Theosophy has been described as the 'first non-Christian religion founded in Europe following antiquity', and is said to be characterized by a 'universalist stance'.[2] The following reflections seek to determine the way in which this universalism should be interpreted. The manifesto of the

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[1] R. Hummel, Indische Mission [Indian Mission], Stuttgart, 1980, 192, cf. 187; cf. also the extremely critical assessment offered by R. Guénon, Le Théosophisme. Histoire d'une pseudo-religion, (Réedition) Paris 1965; also St. Holthaus, Theosophie - Speerspitze des Okkultismus [Theosophy - Spearhead of Occultism], Asslar 1989, esp. 160ff.: 'Die neue Weltreligion bei den Theosophen' [The New World Religion for the Theosophists].

[2] Helmut Zander, article on Theosophy, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen [Lexicon of Neo-religious Groups], edit. H. Baer, et al., Freiburg/Br. 2005, 1279-1286, cit.: 1284.

Theosophical Society and the works of H.P. Blavatsky will primarily serve as the basis for this.

The interest in uniting various religions, and identifying and understanding the core and essence of a religion is evident from H.P. Blavatsky's biography alone. Born in 1831 as the daughter of a Russian colonel, she married a man many years her senior at the age of 17, whom she left soon afterwards. She then fled to America. She claimed that she also spent time in India and Tibet. Her travels took her via Cairo to New York, where she founded the Theosophical Society together with Henry Steel Olcott on 17 November 1875, after renaming a spiritualist club at which she served as a medium. In 1878/79, she traveled with him to India and attempted unsuccessfully to unite the Theosophical Society with the Hindu reform movement founded by Arya Samaj.

Next to Hinduism and Buddhism, the Christian faith initially also influenced her beliefs, but she later resolutely took her distance. As she writes, she was not against the pure doctrine of Jesus and his followers, but 'against theological Christianity, the chief opponent of free thought'.[1] Therefore, a center common to religions could not be established based on a single religion, but needed to transcend all religious communities. This interest is expressed in the manifesto published by the Theosophical Society in 1875, with its primary aim being

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[1] Isis Unveiled, ibid 2, IV (cit.: Isis, indicating the volume and page).

formulated as 'to form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color.'

Its other aims are 'to encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy and science', and 'to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.' Theosophy saw it as a society's purpose to 'overcome the barriers of different faiths and nationalities'.[1] For this reason, the Theosophical Society is not connected with any church or community, and 'does not seek to alienate anybody from their religion, but instead encourages them to explore the depths of their religion for the spiritual nourishment that they require'.[2]

Due to its views, the Theosophical Society sees itself as a trans-religious association. It is not necessary for members to renounce their original religion. Members can be followers of any religion as well as of various philosophies. It is of no consequence if someone is a spiritualist or a materialist. It is important is to become a Theosophist internally. Being a member of a society is an exoteric matter, but it is the esoteric understanding that is essential. Society in itself 'cannot make anyone a Theosophist', as Blavatsky states in her book 'The Key to Theosophy' (henceforth Th, see Th 31). However, society

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[1] Cit. in A. Besant, Die uralte Weisheit [The Ancient Wisdom], Leipzig n.d. [1897], 332.
[2] Cf. I.c., 334.

does meet the need for a deepening of its esoteric outlook by conceiving of an inner circle that embodies its own philosophy and 'has its own religious system' (Th 53). In a ritual sense, this conviction manifests itself for instance in the celebration of major festivals of various religions, with their prayers uttered in the cultural center of Adyar, at the same time acknowledging that everything is subordinate to the Theosophical motto 'No religion is higher than the truth'.[1] This manifesto results in the need to establish an understanding of religion that does justice to the sheer variety of religions and to the claim to remain faithful to the religion that one originally followed. It seems rather unlikely that this can be achieved, as the needed 'in-depth understanding' deviates fundamentally from how the religion of origin is seen, as shown in the hermeneutics and explication of the esoteric claim.

The Secret Doctrine decoded – 'the Basis of all Religions'

This paragraph aims to highlight the views on the unity of religions as expressed in the works by H.P. Blavatsky. The primary basis for this is found in her two later works, *'The Secret Doctrine'*[2] and *'The Key to Theosophy'*[3], as they

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[1] Cf. the report by E. Benz, Neue Religionen [New Religions], Stuttgart, 1971, 160.

[2] Die Geheimlehre [The Secret Doctrine], translated by J. Froebe, 3 vols., Leipzig n.d. [around 1899] (Sigel: G); translation of the original 1888 English edition.

[3] The Key to Theosophy, London/New York 1889; [German translation cited from N. Lauppert, Graz 1969 (Sigel: Th).

contain relevant answers regarding the essence and the central ground, common to different religions. The central meaning behind the 'Secret Doctrine' stems initially from the fact that it is 'not only the fundamental work of modern Theosophy, but serves as the original source for countless other occult-based philosophical trends of the present'.[1]

Of similar major significance is the work that appeared in the following year (1889), *'The Key to Theosophy'*. Also published in 1889 were the excerpts of a mystical Tibetan

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[1] Preliminary remarks on the German translation by N. Lauppert, in: The Secret Doctrine Abridged edition in one volume, Ed. E. Preston and Chr. Humphreys, Graz 1975; IX. In H. P. Blavatsky's lifetime, only the first two volumes were published. However, she writes in the preface to the first edition of these volumes that 'the third volume is complete, and the fourth is almost complete' [Volume I, XXIII]. Here, and again at the end of this edition, she states that the third volume, which primarily consists of teachings focusing on action, would depend on how the two previous volumes are received [Volume II, 842]. It is therefore not possible to dismiss this third volume out of hand, as the translator N. Lauppert opines in his abridged edition when he states: 'It is now clear that it was a mistake to release the collection of unpublished manuscripts left behind by H. P. Blavatsky as part of *The Secret Doctrine*. This was never the plan of H. P. Blavatsky, and the publication was not recognized as such by broad swathes of the Theosophical movement, as the texts contained within bear no relation to those in the first and second volume and are therefore clearly not the 'volumes 3 and 4' that H. P. Blavatsky alluded to on multiple occasions.' (I.c., X.). The translator's comment cited regarding the different assessments within the Theosophical movement highlights an interesting aspect of how a canon is established within neo-religious groups, especially in view of posthumous works.

scripture, which were focusing on a smaller group. Bearing the title 'The Voice of the Silence', these excerpts were intended for the 'few genuine mystics in the Theosophical Society'.[1] An earlier work published in 1877, the two-volume *'Isis Unveiled'*, focuses primarily on the occult tradition in the various cultural spheres, including in particular Occidental gnostic traditions. The ambitious subtitle of this work is *'A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology'*. This 'hermeneutic' claim is radicalized in 'The Secret Doctrine', as this work seeks to bring about 'the synthesis of science, religion and philosophy'.

However, the author is unable to do proper justice to any of these three areas. With regard to religious and philosophical statements, there are some serious deviations both in the self-perception of the religions concerned and in the traditional philosophical and historical interpretation.

Equally problematic is the contrast with science in terms of philological and scientific assertions. Blavatsky seems to have sensed this split in cultural self-perception at the end of the previous century, when she writes that it is already 'more than likely that the book will be considered by large swathes of the population to be a novel steeped in fantasy. After all, who has ever heard of a Book of

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[1] Cited based on the edition 'The Voice of the Silence' (Los Angeles 1928), IV.

Dzyan?' (G I, XXV). About the claim 'that human beings physically were originally immense, proto-tertiary giants and existed as far back as 18.000.000 years ago,' she acknowledges that this claim must 'appear absurd to devotees of modern learning' (G II, 8). The over 2000 pages of 'The Secret Doctrine' contain a wealth of very curious reflections. It is not possible to address these speculations, but we can highlight the reasoning behind them. One fundamental idea emphasizes the entire concept on which the work is based. Volume I addresses the Cosmogenesis, while Volume II turns its attention to the Anthropogenesis. The evolution of humanity is thus placed within the broader context of cosmic development.

Volume I seeks to provide a history of cosmic evolution based on an interpretation of the seven days of creation in the form of seven stanzas (or verses), which ultimately lead to the appearance of man, Volume II presents Anthropogenesis initially based on twelve stanzas from the 'Book of Dzyan' (II 15-24). As stated, the author refers to the 'Book of Dzyan' from which the stanzas are taken in order to justify her claims. However, she states that this principal work is not in the possession of any European libraries, and that the *Book of Dzyan* is 'entirely unknown to our philologists' (G I, 6).[1] This book, she states, is only

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[1] Blavatsky offers an interpretation of this word. It comes from *Janna* or *Dan*, which is the equivalent of *ch'an* in Chinese phonetics and

part of the multi-volume teachings on the wisdom of humankind, which she believes are concealed in libraries in Tibet. It consists of a vast number of volumes (G II, 7), which, she goes on to state, 'are now available [to be read] in a European language for the first time' (G I, 50).

Her 'Secret Doctrine' is, as she states, 'the common property of tens of millions of people hailing from different climes, in a time when history turns its back on them, and to whom esoteric teachings ascribe dates incompatible with theories on geology and anthropology' (G II, 838). However, Blavatsky trusts that her views will be proven correct in the 20th century (cf. G II, 21).

The author refers to books unknown to Western readers and, similar to the beginning of her work titled *Isis Unveiled*, in which she also refers to 'an ancient book', the focus here is on making knowledge, which has hitherto remained hidden, generally and publicly available.

The author dubs this language of mystery surrounding the prehistoric age as symbolism, a symbolism that she intends to decrypt (cf. G I, 329ff.). According to H.P. Blavatsky, universal symbolism is a guarantee that an interpretation will be correct (Th 138).

The focus is therefore on the hermeneutics of existing writings. This is why she does not wish to claim to bring

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is defined in antique literature as 'reforming the Self through meditation and perception', and hence bears the name *'Book of Dzyan'*; cf. G I, 4, note 2.

about a religion, nor is she the 'unveiling agent of mystical teachings now being published for the first time in world history'. Instead, her intention is to reveal something that according to her is asserted in all major religions, albeit in an encrypted form that needs to be unlocked: 'The content of this work is scattered across thousands of volumes, in the writings of the major Asian and ancient European religions, hidden behind hieroglyphs and symbols and left unheeded precisely due to this concealment' (G I, XIV).

She wishes to demonstrate that 'wisdom which is secret at present, was once a well, an ever-flowing, unbroken spring from which all the small streams – which would later become the religions of all nations – flowed, from the very first one to the most recent' (G I, 28). The alignment of ideas in the various religions ultimately goes back to an 'original universal revelation' (G III, 381). She wishes to disclose this secret doctrine in the form of fundamental theorems. After all, it is part of all religions and can be found in Indian, Zoroastrian and Egyptian faiths, in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and so on. But it does not belong exclusively to any one of them: 'The secret doctrine is the essence of all of them'; it is 'the basis of all religions' (G I, XXV).

The mission Blavatsky has set for herself is to collect the most ancient theories and 'use them as the basis to create a harmonious, unified whole'; she wishes to unearth the

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'fundamental unity' from which all religions originated (G I, XXIVs).

<p style="text-align:center">Theosophy -
the essential Truth in and behind all Religions</p>

In her work *'The Key to Theosophy'*, H.P. Blavatsky answers the central question if Theosophy is a religion with an emphatic 'no' (Th 21). In her eyes, however, this negative response is the expression of a positive mission, as a Theosophical world view can understand the common center ground for all religions, while an adherence to a specific religion can express this essence only partially and in certain aspects. 'In other words, every religion is only a small element of the divine truth' (Th 52). She contends that Theosophy does not emphasize a lack of religion, but is, in a certain sense, the embodiment of its fullness – Theosophy is religion's essence, its center.

Blavatsky also interprets the name 'Theosophy' in the spirit of a universal truth, as the name means 'divine wisdom, divine knowledge', or, more precisely, 'the knowledge of the gods'. It is 'a wisdom the likes of which the gods possess' (Th 21), the wisdom conveyed by the great, well-informed souls, the true 'sons of God'. However, Blavatsky states that this original dogma had reduced 'the universality of these teachings within strict limits' to the 'sectarian dogma' of her students (Th 52). The 'religion of wisdom', or 'original teachings' as Blavatsky also refers to them (Th 53, cf. 22), should be

understood as the origin of all religions, while all individual religious directions should ultimately be seen as stems and branches of the same trunk: 'Theosophy is . . . as old as the world, and it is the most comprehensive, most *catholic* [universal] system there is' (Th 27). Based on the conviction that this Theosophical religiosity is, to an extent, an intrinsic part of what it means to be human, it also claims that it will outlast all religions and philosophies currently in existence today (cf. Th 24).

Theosophy is somewhat distinct from religions, but at the same time cannot be separated from them. There is a Theosophical 'substrate' that underpins religions and in a certain sense, all religions participate in this truth. H.P. Blavatsky is convinced that 'there has to be a unified truth expressed in all the different religions that exist'.[1] She had already touched on this in *'Isis Unveiled'*. As 'one of the main focuses of this work', she seeks 'to prove that every old popular religion is based on the same ancient doctrine of wisdom that is *one* and identical'. She believes that this 'identity underpinning the teachings in all the old religions' can be found in the secret initiations into mysteries (Isis II, 99). As she states in the closing remarks,

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[1] At this point she notes 'with the exception of the Jewish religion, as it is not found even in Kabbalah', (Th 44). Anti-Semitic statements of this kind are also evident in other places in this work; cf. l.c., 43: the demarcation of purely Christian teachings from Jewish teachings, and 58, where prayer is referred to as an exercise invented by the Jews.

she is convinced that the diversity of faiths around the world is proof that 'all come from the same ancient source' and that religions are simply spectra of a universal truth (Isis II, 649).

As Theosophy is able to understand the core of various religions and even of the major philosophies, it is possible to bring about the unification of religions, at least in terms of ideas and ethos. This is also how Blavatsky understands the motto of the Theosophical Society that 'there is no religion higher than the truth' (G I). In her eyes this means reconciling 'all religions, sects, and nations within a common ethical system which is founded based on eternal truths' (Th 22).[1]

This self-perception is a form of *eclecticism*, which goes hand in hand with putting all religions in perspective. Blavatsky clearly confirms this when she answers which system she favors beyond the ethical teachings of Buddhism: 'All and none. We do not adhere to any one religion or philosophy. We seek out the good we find in everyone' (Th 30).

This eclecticist understanding corresponds to her conviction that all religions and sects are 'more or less

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[1] This is also the approach Blavatsky takes to interpreting Ammonius Sakkas, the Neoplatonic philosopher whom Blavatsky considers to be the first Theosophist. Sakkas 'undertook to unite all religious systems with one another and, by proving their common origin, establishing a set of beliefs founded based on ethics' (Th 217, note 2).

wrong', as each is in possession of only part of the truth (Th 197; cf. 52). The 'esoteric philosophy' can undo this, as it reconciles 'all religions, strips each one of their exterior, their human vestments, and shows that the roots of each religion are identical to those of every other major religion' (G I, 4).

To this end, it is necessary to interpret the individual religions from an esoteric perspective. Blavatsky also does this for Christianity, bypassing the literal meaning of the Gospel. Important for her is 'the secret meaning of the Gospel' (G III, 46). The apostles received a 'secret doctrine' from Jesus (G III, 149). The allegorical interpretation is valued (G III, 47), with wisdom, or 'gnosis' as goal (G III, 54f).

A Monistic Understanding of God and the World

In a mere descriptive sense, it is already difficult to attempt to reconcile the motifs and themes of a host of different religions and cultural spheres over huge time periods, as they can be extremely heterogeneous. It is even more difficult to establish this on a spiritual and intellectual level.

With this in mind, the first thing is to make a decision regarding the relationship between God and the world, as ultimately the basis for the concept of unity can be found through an understanding of divine reality.

H.P. Blavatsky often refers to divinity, which she calls the

'universal divine principle (cf. Th 56). This is 'the root of everything, from which everything proceeds, and into which everything will be absorbed once again at the end of the great cycle of existence' (Th 55). Divinity is 'the mysterious power of evolution and involution, the omnipresent, omnipotent and even omniscient creative potentiality' (Th 56).

According to Blavatsky, this should also be understood as the unity of humankind, as divinity is of the same essence. This essence is unique: 'Infinite, uncreated and eternal, whether we call it God or nature' (Th 43).

Despite this cosmic evolutionary concept of God, Blavatsky refuses to describe her system as a form of pantheism. This is because, she contends, pantheism would mean that everything in nature, e.g. every tree or every stone, could be a god, so pantheists should be regarded as idolaters.

At most, Blavatsky would permit an esoteric interpretation of the word 'pantheism' in the sense that it is not about the external aspects of nature, but about 'the eternal, uncreated nature, not the sum of passing shadows and limited non-realities' (Th 56).

The concept of God that drives Blavatsky, is a pantheistic one in the sense that a 'deity yet to reveal itself' has been able to be identified by humans since the dawn of time. This is – in esoteric terms – the '*one Life*, the '*Self*', or the '*Great Breath*' (G I, 32). It is clearly expressed in the first

three fundamental sentences of the Secret Doctrine, which are as follows: 'An omnipotent, eternal, limitless and unchanging PRINCIPLE about which no speculation is possible, as it transcends the strength of human imagination and only stands to be degraded by any form of human expression or comparison. It is beyond space and the realm of thought – in the words of the Mandukya Upanishad, it is "unimaginable and unutterable".' It is AN ABSOLUTE ESSENCE (G I, 42). Within the individual, then, the 'personal divinity' can be perceived as an 'immortal being' – it is 'its own immortal principle' (G III, 62f.).

In the light of this understanding of the Divine, the gods of the 'so-called monotheistic religions' appear to her 'as a blasphemy and sad caricature of the eternally unrecognizable' (G I, 4). The criticism of the Christian concept of God is the basis and the consequence of this perception of the Divine. Against this backdrop, the God of the theologians appears as 'a cluster of contradictions and logical impossibilities'.

The Theosophists expressly reject a 'personal, anthropo-morphic God that exists outside the cosmic realm'. Based on this, the expression 'Father' should be rejected as it addresses a god outside the cosmic realm. For Blavatsky, God can only be understood esoterically 'according to which the inner self is the only God'. She refers to a divine essence inside the human being as 'our Father in

heaven', and He is recognized as such through spiritual consciousness (cf. Th 59). This is the basis for understanding the criticism of prayer as well as the alternative to it, namely: action instead of discourse (cf. Th 57).

Summarizing, the position of reconciling and uniting the religions and synthesizing them in a selective, eclectic manner stems from the conviction that divinity encompasses everything, that 'God is a universal, all-pervasive, infinite principle' (Th 58).

In this way, the author believes she can identify the core of truth common to all religions, while being compelled to reject their dogmatic self-image, which she believes to be unjustified. The divinity recognized here is not the subject of a special revelation. On the contrary, '[it was] dogma alone that was always responsible for killing the original truth'. She goes on to say that no set of beliefs is able to compare to the 'holiness of the religion of nature' (G II, 842). The idea, defined by Blavatsky at the end of the 19th century, of a deity that can be perceived in nature and should be venerated would, a century later, become a maxim for a new religious consciousness, given the entirely different circumstances that have led to a new ecological awareness in the world.[1] This special *leitmotif*, related to the primary concern at the heart of Theosophy,

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[1] Cf. for ex. H. Mynarek, Ökologische Religion. Ein neues Verständnis der Natur, Munich 1986.

shows that H.P. Blavatsky – despite her strange theses and unusual views that stood in stark contrast with the then common faith in science – has, in certain respects, understood the central factors underpinning peoples' religious needs in an age characterized by scientific progress.

In a two-pronged attack on Christianity and modern science (including the human sciences), she has expressed the concern that neither the prevailing denominations nor a sober scientific world view are satisfactory, as the latter eliminated occult themes and interpretations with the progress of the modern era.[1]

Despite her status as an outsider, she managed to gain significant attention, and – in spite of having to suffer several setbacks (e.g. proof of spiritual manipulation by the *Society for Psychical Research*) – some of her views continue to be discussed and have been adopted beyond the confines of the Theosophical Society.

This includes, without a doubt, the belief in an inner unity between religions. As expected, this central leitmotif continued to guide the development of Theosophical thought following the death of H.P. Blavatsky.

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[1] Cf. K. Hutten, Parapsychic phenomena and occult movements in the judgement of theology, in: Neue Wissenschaft 16 (1968) 36ff.; also C. R. H. Frick, Die Erleuchteten, Vol. 1, Graz 1973, 205f.

2. The Mission of 'Unity across Religions'
The key Areas of Focus in Theosophy

As stated, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York. Its first president was Blavatsky's colleague, US Colonel *Henry Steel Olcott.* Since 1882, its headquarters were based in Adyar, Madras (the present Chennai). After the death of Colonel Olcott, *Annie Besant* became president of the Society. From 1907 until 1938, she was the International President of the Theosophical Society from its base in Adyar.

 A number of splits leading to new organizations occurred just a decade after the Society was founded. The main trends (the complex history cannot be reproduced here) were the following: *Franz Hartmann* (1842-1912) founded the *'International Theosophical Brotherhood'* in 1897, whose followers reformed under the banner of the *'Theosophical Society in Germany'* after the end of Second World War. In this context, it is important to mention the *'Liberal Catholic Church'* founded by *Charles Webster Leadbeater* which has close ties to the Theosophical Society in Adyar. The ordination of the bishops is derived from the Old Catholic Church, with the church claiming that it follows the apostolic succession.[1] It holds a gnostic view towards

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[1] Cf. H.-J. Ruppert, article on the Liberal Catholic Church, in: Lexikon der Sekten [The Lexicon of Sects], 593ff; H.-J. Ruppert, article on the Liberal Catholic Church, in: Lex neureligiöser Gruppen [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups], 2005, 742-744; H. Zander, Anthroposophie in Deutschland [Anthroposophy in Germany],

Christianity, whereas the influence of Hindu anthropology is also evident.

Another major split-off is the *Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society*, which was founded in the USA in 1898 by *William Quan Judge* (1851-1896) and his colleague *Katherine Tingley* (1847-1929) in Point Loma (California). This was followed by several splits in the Theosophical tradition in the USA.[1]

The Theosophist author *Gottfried de Purucker* (1874-1942), who served as the president of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society from 1929, rechristened the association as the Theosophical Society once more, and sought to unify the key movements that had seceded.[2]

Vol. 1, Berlin 2008, 233ff.; also R. S. Ellwood/ H. B. Partin, Religious and Spiritual Groups, [2]1988, 107ff.

This looks at the gnostic 'Church Universal and Triumphant', which was founded as part of the wider New Age movement in the second half of the 20th century (102ff.).

'The name 'Church Universal and Triumphant' was announced by Elizabeth Clare Prophet on July 2, 1973, [...]. In 1895, Mary Baker Eddy used the terms 'universal' and 'triumphant' in her first Church Manual as referring to the church she founded', see 'Church Universal and Triumphant' in Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Universal_and_Triumphant (25.05.2019).

[1] Cf. entry titled 'Theosophical Society in Modern America, New Jersey, [2]1988, in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosophical_Society_in_America (25.05.2019).

[2] In German-speaking countries, Theosophy's body of thought is disseminated via the writings of Gottfried de Purucker, in particular through his 'Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy'. The

The most significant group whose roots were also partly based in Theosophy – which later developed independently – is *anthroposophy*, founded by *Rudolf Steiner*.[1] Steiner had been the general secretary of the Theosophical Society from 1902 to 1913. The official reason for his split from the movement, was the proclamation that *Krishnamurti* was the reincarnation of Christ, a claim advocated by *Annie Besant* (1847-1933) and *Charles Webster Leadbeater* (1847-1934), who discovered the young Hindu and groomed him to become the new World Teacher.

Since the dawn of the 20th century, Theosophical ideas have branched off in many different directions, resulting in their adoption, continued development, and acceptance in new constellations. The Theosophical ideas have doubtlessly influenced the background of many occult movements.

The new Rosicrucian orders and societies should be mentioned here, with Masonic ideas playing a major role. Hartmann, who was a member of various secret Masonic societies, did his bit to spread the Rosicrucian Order. However, further research would be necessary in this

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Theosophical lodges which had sprung up around Germany were banned by the Gestapo in 1936.

[1] Cf. for the fundamental details: Helmut Zander, Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis [Anthroposophy in Germany: A Theosophical World View and Social Practice], 2 volumes, Göttingen 2007.

field.[1]

Furthermore, the many occult and spiritualist tendencies and activities that flourished after the Second World War and at the dawn of the New Age movements should also be mentioned in this context. Examples here include the *'Lucis Trust'* founded by *Alice Bailey* (1880-1949) in 1922, and the occult tradition found in the *'Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn'*, founded at the end of the 19th century and originally counted *Aleister Crowley* (1875-1947) among its proponents. Crowley later went on to head the *'Ordo Templi Orientis'* (OTO).[2] Other occult-focused groups – often strongly influenced by Sufism – go back to *George Ivanovic Gurdjieff* (1877-1949), who had an impact on everyone from *Peter Damian Ouspensky* (1878-1947) to *John G. Bennett* (1897-1974), and whose ideas continued to be promoted by the Gurdjieff Society, which was founded in 1955.[3]

In all of these movements, the idea of an esoterically conceived unity between religions plays a central role.[4]

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[1] Cf. H. Zander, I.c., Vol. 1, 1ff.: Die Gegenwart einer unerforschten Vergangenheit (abbr. RGG) [The Present of an Uncharted Past].
[2] Cf. J. Aagaard, Modern religious movements, in: Ökumene-Lexikon [The Lexicon of Ecumenism], Frankfurt/M. 1983, 840f.
[3] Cf. I.c., 842.
[4] See. also J. Wichmann, Die Renaissance der Esoterik [The Renaissance of Esotericism], 104ff. Karl R. H. Frick, Die Erleuchteten. Gnostisch-theosophisch und alchemistisch-rosenkreuzerische Geheimgesellschaft bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts – ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte der Neuzeit [The Enlightened. Gnostic

Here, we only focus on the Theosophical branches in the stricter sense of the term, and exemplify by highlighting key basic statements.

'The Unity underlying all Religions' (Annie Besant)

Annie Besant (1847-1933) joined the Theosophical Society in London in 1889, and quickly became one of Blavatsky's close collaborators. In 1897, she published *The Ancient Wisdom*.[1] The title of the introduction encapsulates the central focus of this work: '*The Unity underlying all Religions*' (9). She opens the introduction with comparing theories on the genesis of various religions (e.g. being derived from animism, fetishism and comparative mythology) with the Theosophical explanation for these phenomena. Besant contends that according to the former explanation, religious ideas are simply the product of fantasy or the personification of natural forces – ultimately a 'pure illusion' (10) – while the latter explanation claims that 'there is an ancient wisdom guarded by a brotherhood of great spiritual teachers'. These 'ancient teachings', she states, are a form

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Theosophical and Alchemistic Rosicrucian Secret Society up to the End of the 19th Century – a Contribution to the Intellectual History of the Modern Era], Graz 1973.

[1] Die uralte Weisheit, Adyar Verlag, Graz 1957 (cited in the form of page numbers in the main body of the text). The first authorized German edition by L. Deinhard was published in Leipzig (n.d.) [1899], and bore the subtitle: 'An outline of theosophical teachings'.

of 'divine wisdom', which is what the name 'Theosophy' stands for (10f). In essence, she builds on the ideas of her teacher Blavatsky (to whom the book is dedicated) and clarifies these ideas through a series of vivid images. As 'the origin and basis of all religions', Theosophy is both 'the boulder from which all are hewn, [and] the opening in the depths from which they have all been brought to light' (11). These general statements are then made concrete through the following five 'basic spiritual truths':

1. An eternal, infinite BEING underlies everything.
2. From this BEING God is manifested, developing from unity through duality to trinity.
3. From this trinity, in turn, many spiritual entities appear 'which are the guides of the cosmic order'.
4. Humans, as a reflection of the manifested god, are also therefore a trinity, with their innermost self being 'eternal and one with the self of the universe'.
5. 'Human beings evolve through repeated incarnations into which they can set themselves free through knowledge and sacrifice.' (12).

Besant seeks to demonstrate the presence of all five of these points in the major religions: starting with China (especially the Tao Te Ching), she moves on to 'the Aryan race' and its 'oldest and largest religion, that of Hinduism', followed by Buddhism, the religion of the 'Hebrews', the hymns of Ancient Egypt, the teachings of

Zarathustra, the Orphic system of Ancient Greece and finally the Christian religion (15 ff.). All of these religions demonstrate 'agreement regarding their ideas of the universe', share experiences of 'higher spheres', and have common ethical views (29ff.).

For Besant, these similarities between the various religions point to a 'common source, namely the Brotherhood of the White Lodge, the Hierarchy of Adepts who watch over and guide the evolution of humanity' (29). The search for unity is expressed through the term 'Universal Invocation', with which Besant opened each meeting of the Adyar branch of the Theosophical Society, as well as through the content of this prayer, which states:

> *O hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness*
> *May all who feel themselves as one with Thee*
> *Know they are therefore one with every other.*[1]

Given the central meaning of the motif of religious unity in Theosophy, it comes as little surprise that it is also fundamental to the Point Loma Universal Brotherhood, which seceded from the Adyar branch: for *Katherine Tingley*, Theosophy is 'the essence of all philosophies, just

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[1] Cf. Karl Baier, Meditation und Moderne [Meditation and Modernity], Vol. 1, Würzburg 2009, 405. To compare the similarity of this invocation to the introductory prayer of the Sufi movement and the Sufi Order ('Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty, the Only Being, United with all the Illuminated Souls [...]'), see below.

as all philosophies are the essence of all religions.'[1]

As expressed in his 'esoteric philosophy', her successor *Gottfried von Purucker* was convinced that 'behind all major world religions [lies] the original source of truth' and that therefore 'the same basic teachings' can be found behind all religions.[2]

In the 'International Theosophical Brotherhood', the branch represented by *Franz Hartmann*, the idea of Theosophy as the 'goal of all religions' also prevails.[3] Hermann Rudolph, who would later become secretary of this organization, expressed the idea of unity through the Sanskrit name 'Atma', and understood the word 'god' to mean 'the universal spirit, Allah, Brahma-Ormuzd, Christ, Logos, Tao, Odin, Zeus et cetera'. He also refers to God as 'father-mother', which is taken from the New Thought movement[4].

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[1] K. Tingley, Der Pfad des Mystikers [The Path of the Mystic], Hannover. ²1986.

[2] Cf. for a general overview: 'Esoterische Philosophie. Weisheit der Zeitalter. Einführung' [Esoteric Philosophy. The Wisdom of the Ages: An Introduction], Esoterische Philosophie - Studiengesellschaft, Hanover ²1989, 13, 19, 78ff., and passim.

[3] For a more in-depth depiction of his position, cf. Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften [Handbook of Religious Communities], ³1985, esp. 373ff.; H. Zander, Anthroposophie in Deutschland [Anthroposophy in Germany], Vol. 1, 2007, 281ff.; K. Baier, Meditation und Moderne [Meditation and Modernity, Vol. 1., 2009, esp. 407.

[4] Cit. in K. Baier, I.c., Vol. 1. 409; cf. for use of this double expression, e.g. by Mary Baker Eddy, one of the founders of the New

The differentiation between inner content and outer appearance, backs up the hermeneutic approach that enables Blavatsky, Besant, Tingley and others to conceive the unity of religions. It also allows Hartmann to refer to an 'inner spiritual church' in contrast to the 'outer form', and to unearth the concealed meaning in the symbols of the Bible and the sacraments of Christianity.[1]

Lat but not least, we need to mention the anthroposophy of *Rudolf Steiner*, which split off from the Theosophical movement.[2] Steiner is not eager to renounce the unique significance of Jesus Christ. Following him, through the idea of Christ as a cosmic entity, anthroposophy can now 'bring about the great, sympathetic union, the synthesis of religious faiths on Earth.' It is able to fulfil this role as a mediator, as through it, 'something should be given that takes a higher view than the religious standpoints that existed in the past and still do today.'[3]

The idea of inner understanding within the Christian religion and the intention to contribute to the unity of

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Thought movement, ibid. 430 and 437; cf. also 440 and 448: 'Material as a divine motherly principle'.

[1] Cf. F. Hartmann, Die Symbole der Bibel und der Kirche [The Symbols of the Bible and the Church], [around 1980], 76f., esp. 44ff.

[2] Cf. H. Zander, I.c., Vol. 1, esp. 151ff.

[3] R. Steiner, Erfahrungen des Übersinnlichen [Experiential Knowledge of the Supersensible] (1912) [= complete edition, Vol. 143, 1970], 152 and 132 (cited by B. Grom, Anthroposophie und Christentum [Anthroposophy and Christianity], Munich 1989, 99, cf. 173: Anthroposophy as a 'trans-religious' path.

religions is stated in all branches of Theosophy. Starting at the end of the 19th century, this movement formulated a concern in a way that had been familiar to the history of ideas in Europe since the Late Middle Ages. Nicholas of Cusa already had postulated 'the one Religion in the diversity of rituals' and in the Renaissance period, a syncretic approach to establishing unity between ancient religions emerged. In the philosophy of the Enlightenment the endeavor to reveal a common ground, shared among different religions, prevailed.

Ultimately, with respect to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the differences that have developed over the course of history should not be seen as conclusive (or at least conclusive in terms of their true nature), as is vividly illustrated in Gotthold Lessing's parable of the rings (which are indistinguishable in appearance).

New in the second half of the 19th century, however, was that the focus shifted to the Eastern religions. The history that goes all the way back to the missionary encounters with Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism of the 16th century, was followed by a focus on Indian literature in Europe from the early years of the 19th century.

This started with Romanticism, as is particularly evident in the works of Friedrich Schlegel, the founder of Indology, and led via Schopenhauer to the religious academic Max Müller. However, these efforts amounted to a knowledge of Eastern religions along literary,

scientific or philosophical lines, they did not demonstrate a commitment to them.

The initiators and followers of Theosophy fundamentally altered this situation. They now sought to establish a direct connection with non-Christian religions that would also reflect in real life. In a religious denomination or theoretical system, the elements of Eastern and Western traditions were mixed, in some cases rather idiosyncratically. In life, the conversion to different religions was practiced.

Initially, the first 'Theosophical Society' with its headquarters in Adyar, was successively headed by two personalities who had directly affiliated themselves with the religions of the East. Colonel Olcott ultimately converted to Buddhism together with H.P. Blavatsky after her invitation by Buddhists to Ceylon. Through their activities, the two contributed to the newly found awareness of this religion, also in a political sense.

Annie Besant identified as a Hindu from 1893 and became a vocal advocate of the Indian reform movements that emerged at the dawn of the 20th century. The path that eventually led her to becoming a fully-fledged follower of Hinduism is dramatic, and, in its basics, is typical of that of many spiritual seekers who had lost their religious roots in Christianity. After a brief marriage to an Anglican pastor, Besant, who had feminist leanings, initially turned to the National Secular Society in Britain,

which embraced an atheistic, materialist world view.

After over a decade and a half of fighting for free-thinking and socially critical ideals, her encounter with H.P. Blavatsky and her writings, turned her towards Theosophy and subsequently to Hinduism. Coming from a background of staunch Christian piety, she went from being highly critical of religion back to embracing a deep sense of religiosity. Not by returning to Christianity, but by being convinced of claims that surpass the Christian faith, without – as she did during her atheist phase – dismiss it altogether. This way, she integrated Christianity into a new school of thought characterized by religious unity.

It is not only the existential decision taken by these founding figures that paved the way for Eastern ideas in the Western cultural sphere. The Theosophical movement itself made also a significant contribution to this. On the one hand by ensuring the widespread distribution of literature, which established a basis for understanding Eastern religions, and on the other hand organizationally, as at the start of the 20th century, the movement frequently provided the external social framework for their activities by importing Eastern wisdom teachings to the West. Its own ranks predominantly consisted of people who were very open to the messages from Eastern religious teachers, particularly those who preached the unity of religions.

For example, 'Abdu'l-Baha, the son of the founder of the Baha'i Faith, had close ties with the Theosophists, and many of the first followers of the Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan came from a Theosophical background.

Even so, the Theosophists and others with religious inclinations who had been alienated by Christianity, were not only open to these Islamic oriented heralds of a new unity of religions, but also turned to the representatives of those religions who were of major influence for the founder of Theosophy and her closest colleagues, namely the Hindu tradition and Buddhism.

Theosophy is a conception of a belief in religious unity in which the Western occult and esoteric traditions are consciously united with Eastern, Hindu and Buddhist ideas in a characteristic synthesis. Eastern religions are not exclusive and are open to other ways of faith. This made them highly fertile soil in which to plant seeds of inspiration and grow new, universalist movements whose missionary ambitions would soon gravitate towards the West.

Chapter 2
Universal religious Tendencies of neo-Hinduism

1. Historical and religious Background of the revival Movements in the 19th century

Among existing religions, Hinduism is the one that has 'contributed probably the most to overcoming a deeply rooted sense of exclusivity between cultures and religions and has therefore either – to a large extent – precipitated an extensive series of convergences, dialogues, influences and discussions or at least made such processes possible.'[1] This has led to syncretic processes of reception that have crossed cultural boundaries. The encounters of the Western Theosophists with Hinduism, discussed in Chapter One, are a prime example of this.

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[1] Cf. C. Colpe, The syncretism, renaissance, secularization and regeneration of religions in the present day, in: Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte [The Handbook of Religious History], Vol. 3, Göttingen 1975, 442.

From the last thirty years of the 19th century to the public emergence of the new religious groups influenced by Hinduism in the 1960s, the relationship between East and West is a complex one.[1] Hinduism demonstrated its intrinsic inner power of renewal in the 19th century and, through dynamic expansion, reached the Western cultural sphere. This was combined with the claim that it should be perceived as a world religion. A series of historical and religious developments enabled this religion to strongly develop its activities both internally and externally.

One of these ideas is the basic religious concept of the Advaita Vedanta school of philosophy. This has shaped the spiritual background of these processes and even remained significant within the context of the universal character of the neo-Hindu understanding of religion.

To understand the background of neo-Hindu revival movements, it is important to address these basic thoughts and the ideas applied in the religious traditions of India, as they can help to facilitate a universalist understanding in the modern era. In these introductory remarks, we also need to take into account the colonial circumstances, as they are contextual for the religious and political revival of modern Hinduism.

A religion's revival involves more than internal religious forces alone. Encounters with non-religious powers and

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[1] Cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission [Indian Mission], 1980, 23ff.

with other religious traditions – necessitating adaptation or negation – are just as important. For modern Hinduism, this was largely the challenge presented by European culture and Christianity.

Many characteristics and basic ideas of the Hindu tradition can be cited to support the thesis that among the major religions of the world, Hinduism may offer the most prerequisites for universal religious tendencies.

For one thing, it is – in contrast to Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – not based on an exclusive founding figure, but on holy scriptures, in particular the Vedas. These scriptures precede every single founding figure.

Another factor distinguishing Hinduism from these other three world religions is that it contains a plurality of branches so different to one another that it is more appropriate to refer to Hindu religions in a plural sense.[1] This alone means that the encounter with and the connection between various religious traditions is inherent to religion. Moreover, the veneration of different gods and the invocation of a specific divinity expressed through various names is conducive to religiosity in a syncretic sense. This is best illustrated in

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[1] Cf. H. v. Stietencron, in: Küng, Christentum und Weltreligionen [Christianity and World Religions], München 1984, 216ff.
For this reason, 'Hinduism' with all its branches is often referred to as *Sanatana Dharma* (the 'Perennial Religion'), an umbrella for all different Indian faiths (note editor).

the *Bhagavad Gita*, the most significant, widely read basic document of *bhakti* piety (based on love and devotion), in which even the veneration of other gods can be perceived as a path to Krishna, the supreme divinity. This speaks for the tolerance of Hindu religiosity that brakes through the barriers of religion, as well as through its inclusiveness, since any act of piety by a person of another faith is also an act towards Hinduism's supreme God:[1]

> *Those who worship other gods with faith and devotion*
> *also worship me, Arjuna,*
> *even if they don't observe the usual forms.*[2]

According to the judgement of a number of prominent authors who have addressed the 'mystical' unifying dimensions of the Vedas,[3] a unifying spirituality can be found in the basic concepts of these classical holy

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[1] Cf. also G. Oberhammer (Ed.), Inklusivismus – eine indische Denkform [Inclusiveness – an Indian Way of Thinking], Vienna 1983; reference is made to the quoted Bhagavad Gita stanza in several articles; Puthiadam also refers to this in Hinduistische Religionsphilosophie [Hindu Religious Philosophy] in: :Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 70 (1986) 2.

[2] Bhagavad Gita IX: 23. For the English version, the translation of Eknath Easwaran (Nilgiri Press, 2007) is used.

[3] Cf. G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], 1981, 115ff.; R. Zaehner, Mystik, Harmonie und Dissonanz [Mysticism, Harmony and Dissonance], Olten 1990, passim; H. Zimmer, Philosophie und Religion Indiens [The Philosophy and Religion of India], Frankfurt a. M. ³1979, 300ff.; Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], Stuttgart 1982, esp. 144ff.

scriptures. This is evident first of all in the idea that the other gods are related to a central deity, to 'Agni' (literally: fire, light):

> A *firm light hath been set for men to look on:*
> *among all things that fly the mind is swiftest.*
> *All Gods of one accord, with one intention,*
> *move unobstructed to a single purpose.*[1]

In experiencing a spiritual center, the notion arises that the many lights and fires are the evolution of one light underlying them all. This may ultimately lead to the notion that the world, as it unfolds, is one single principle.

This numinous quality is conveyed through natural processes, such as fire. The answer to the question 'How many *agnis*, how many suns, how many dawns and how many waters are there?', is as follows:

> *Only one is the agni that is kindled in many places,*
> *only one is the sun that permeates the universe . . .*
> *There is only one, and this one has unfolded*
> *into the world as a whole.*[2]

With regard to the present topic, it is important to

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[1]Rigveda VI 9, 5. For the Vedas, the translation of the Rig Veda Complete (Sakala Shakha, https://archive.org/details/rigvedacomplete) is used.

[2] Atharvaveda VIII 58, 2. Cf. G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], [4]1982, 125, who cites the passages quoted in this text.

consider that an even more radical tendency towards unity can be seen in the Vedas, seeking a neutral unity before and beyond the gods:

> *Then was not non-existent nor existent:*
> *there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.*
> *What covered in, and where? and what gave shelter?*
> *Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?*
> *Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal:*
> *no sign was there, the day's and night's divider.*
> *That One Thing, breathless,*
> *breathed by its own nature:*
> *apart from it was nothing whatsoever.*[1]

The Other is experienced impersonally and constitutes the negation of every positive reality. So the Other can only be articulated in negative terms. The Hindu tradition is an example of the negative language of mysticism and of the corresponding experience of a unity beyond non-existence and existence. This is the central aspect of the *Upanishads*. In comparison to the Vedas, the Upanishads express a new religious and spiritual world view with key terms as Brahman and Atman.[2] *Brahman* originally referred to a supernatural power activated by

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[1] Rigveda X 129.
[2] Cf. G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions, 127 and 128; cf. the differences in the supplement by B. Bäumer, in: F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 152.

this ritual word. Brahman is the discourse.[1]

The divine word of the Veda works in heaven and on earth according to the ideas of sacrificial mysticism. This term refers to the creative elemental force of the world, a cosmic Absolute, ultimately the essence of the universe and the essence created by the gods.[2]

In the Mundaka Upanishad, Brahman is presented as the god Brahma, 'The creator of the universe, the custodian of the world', the 'first among the gods' (1,1): the god Brahma (masculine) is derived from Brahman (neutral).[3] Important to note here is that Brahman is the embodiment of a principle that preceded the gods and that runs through the entire world as its very essence. This Absolute is both beyond all relationships and at the same time the creative source of everything, thus being the cause of countless correlations and relations.

The other key concept we need to explain briefly in order to understand this concept of unity, is *Atman*.[4] The word Atman means the inner self, a person's center, the essence of one's existence. This center is distinct from the many organs and energies and from the mental efforts

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[1] Aitareya Brahmana IV 21, cited in G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], Wiesbaden 1981, 131.
[2] Cf. G. Mensching, ibid.
[3] Cf. Le Saux, Der Weg zum anderen Ufer. Die Spiritualität der Upanishaden [The Way to the other Shore. The Spirituality of the Upanishads], Düsseldorf/Cologne 1980, 123f.
[4] Atman is etymologically related to the Germanic term for 'breath', e.g. the German 'Atem' and the Dutch 'adem'.

that are otherwise psychosomatic; it is the very deepest depth of what it means to be human, the inner spirit.[1]

The core tenet of mysticism in the Upanishads is to express the unity of Atman and Brahman: the essence of a human being is identical to the essence of all existence. In other words, the basic idea is 'that the individual Self, called Atman, is identical to the universal consciousness, Brahman, the original Absolute'.[2] To understand and experience this is the aim of this mysticism and the focus of all of its followers' efforts. The Self is ultimately no different in relation to the world or to the reason of existence in a greater sense, but the same. Everything is part of the same whole, is one in itself, so anything presented as 'different' is a mere illusion. *Advaita* (literally not-two, so non-duality) is a basic word describing this mystical realization. The Upanishads express this is the phrase *tat twam asi* (thou art that): you are everything that you, as a human being, encounter.[3]

Atman and Brahman are part of philosophical and theological studies of the Upanishads (especially the older variants, which appeared in the 7th–5th century BCE) and experienced through meditative practice. In the 7th-8th century CE, the belief in the unity of all things in the

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[1] Cf. H. v. Stietencron, in: Küng, 314f.

[2] H. v. Stietencron, in: Küng, 280.

[3] Cf. for ex. the well-known instruction that Shvetaketu receives from his father: Chandogya Upanishad XIII 1-3, (E. Easwaran: The Upanishads. Nilgiri Press, 2007, p. 133 – 137.

Advaita Vedanta was concisely and effectively expressed by the prominent religious thinker *Shankara.*[1] As a result, the 'Vedanta' (literally: the end or conclusion of the Vedas), one of the six orthodox schools of Hinduism, was developed into a philosophical religious system.[2]

The 19th century heralded a new heyday for Vedantic philosophy. Advaita Vedanta was adopted and modified by the Hindu reform movements under entirely different historical conditions, and used in the interest of a universal religious understanding of Hinduism.

The basic philosophical religious principle – Atman and Brahman are identical – is, as stated, the most significant idea that influenced the movement towards a more universal perception of religion in the 19th and 20th century. This idea transcends all limitations and all religious forms of expression. Brahman as the all-pervasive principle on which everything rests, and every person essentially being identical to this elementary center of the universe (*atman* of the soul-self is identical to *Atman* or the cosmic Self), is both the basis for putting the external form within a religion in perspective and for including other religions.

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[1] Cf. H. v. Glasenapp, Die Philosophie der Inder [The Philosophy of the Indians], Stuttgart 1985, 4th edition, 110ff.; H. Zimmer, Philosophie und Religion Indiens [The Philosophy and Religion of India], Zürich 1979, 365ff.

[2] Cf. Article on Vedanta, in: Dictionary of Religions, London 1984, 345.

These historical parameters, stated above, already in classical Hinduism resulted in acceptance of a diversity in religious pathways. This is expressed in the principle of spiritual readiness (*adhikaritvam*) and the principle of religious preference (*ishatvam*).[1] Spiritual seekers should align themselves to these two principles. A choice was necessary as many movements and ritualistic practices had split off from the main branch of Hinduism.[2]

Also significant in coming to terms with this religious plurality is the concept of *Avatara* (literally: 'descent'), the incarnation of a god in a specific form. Strictly speaking, Avatara refers to incarnations of Vishnu,[3] but in a broader sense it can be applied to other gods, even from other religions. For instance, many modern Hindus consider Jesus to be an avatar.[4]

In conjunction with the belief in an avatar is the notion that various extraordinary spiritual masters have proclaimed the existence of a single divine truth at different times in history. The basic teachings, prescribed

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[1] Cf. article on Ishta-Deva, in: Lexikon der Religionen [The Lexicon of Religions], 164; cf. also R. Hummel, Indische Mission [Indian Mission], 1980, 152.

[2] Cf. I. Puthiadam, Hinduistische Religionsphilosophie [Hindu Religious Philosophy] (1986) 1.

[3] Cf. A. Thannippara, Article on avatars, in: Lexikon der Religionen [The Lexicon of Religions], 29.

[4] Cf. St. J. Samartha, Hindus vor dem universalen Christus [The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ], Stuttgart 1970, esp. 74f., 111ff.

as part of the religious tradition, gain new relevance when placed side by side with Christian beliefs and Western culture. They were able to provide an interpretive framework for understanding other religions and the diversity of religions in general.

Generally speaking, we cannot look at the Hindu reform movements since the start of the 19th century with ignoring the Western influence, whether in a positive or negative respect. From a positive perspective, we can refer to the social reforms (abolition of the practice of self-immolation by widows (*sati*); to new education and school systems; to criticism of the caste system, in particular the exclusion of 'untouchables' from the system. These reforms gathered momentum when India came in contact with the English colonial powers and the Christian missions.

The negative demarcation from the West is evident in the increasing self-awareness of the Hindus, being confronted with the religion and culture of Europe. It was a generally accepted view that Hinduism in the 18th century (after the British arrived in India) was a static, indeed stagnant religion, and that it had gained assurance and awareness once the British left the subcontinent in the mid-20th century.[1]

This new self-awareness contributed to the development

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[1] S. Weightman, Hinduism, in: A Handbook of Living Religions, 1988, 227.

of universalist ideas as represented by e.g. Vivekananda and gave Hinduism the status of a world religion with missionary tendencies.[1] In other words, the reform movements were also an expression of assertiveness and self-reflection on the roots of the religion's own tradition and on central Hindu views, with the Advaita Vedanta teachings at the center.

The Hindu reform movements and neo-Hinduism covered the entire period from the start of the 19th century through to Gandhi's national liberation movement in the 20th century. In this context, we are mostly interested in the universal religious aspects of this revival movement and not primarily on the social aspects, although it is not possible to make a division between these two dimensions based on the self-image of the major reformers or the Hindu background.

The revived religious self-image and the social reform program are two complementary sides of the different movements, each of which primarily focuses on one of these two aspects. From a universal religious perspective, both aspects are essential, for a program that seeks to revive a religion and incorporate various other religions – as we will show in detail – by definition contributes to equality between genders and between various social classes, and to social justice. In India, this revival actually led to major success.

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[1] Cf. Handbook of Living Religions, 231.

2. From the neo-Hindu reform Movements to universalist religious Communities

The 'Brahmo Samaj' community of 'Believers in Brahma' founded by the Bengal Brahman *Ram Mohan Roy* (1772-1833), can be seen as the first reform movement of modern Hinduism. Founded in 1828, this community was influenced by Christianity, but Roy's goal was to establish a rationalist, purified form of Hinduism. He rejected the veneration of icons and images and even the belief in reincarnation. His particular focus was on implementing Christian principles from a social perspective. The community's followers met once a week to attend readings from the Upanishads, to listen to sermons, and to sing hymns. The monotheistic approach that the movement adopted was important, as was its resolute criticism of cult idols and any form of dogmatism.[1]

The community's religious activities and new, 'enlightened' perception of itself remained restricted to just a few intellectuals,[2] but the consequences of Roy's social ideas were felt far and wide. Western-style social reforms and educational measures (such as setting up schools) and legal reforms, and the ban on the practice of self-immolation by widows in 1829, can be traced back to

[1] Cf. A. Kolencherry, Universality of Modern Hinduism, Bangalore, 1984, 19.
[2] Cf. Handbook of Living Religions, 228.

his efforts.

After Roy's death, *Debendranath Tagore* (1817-1905) assumed control of the community. He conceived a monotheism based on the Upanishads, influenced by Christianity.[1] His reflections can, in a specific sense, be understood as being universalist. He believes that the truth as a universal concept is not covered fully in the Quran, the Bible, or the Vedas. He refers to his own religion as universal in the sense that it is the 'religion of truth'. Brahman, the sole formless creator and preserver of the universe is the god of all humankind, and the religion that venerates him is therefore a 'universal religion'.[2] Nevertheless, despite the influence of Christianity and the universal focus, Debendranath – like his famous son, the poet Rabindranath Tagore – was a practitioner of Hinduism from birth, as demonstrated in particular by the continuation and modernization of Atman-Brahman mysticism.

While these tendencies can be understood as internal Hindu reform movements, a split within the 'Brahmo Samaj' community ultimately led to the Church of the New Dispensation (*Nava Vidhana Brahmo Samaj*), which can be classified as a new religion. Its founder, *Keshub Chandra Sen* (1838-1884), split from Tagore in 1865 due to additional demands around the caste issue. At

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[1] Cf. F. Heiler, 257.
[2] Cf. A. Kolencherry, I.c., 120 with note 51 and 52.

Keshub's instigation, Brahmo Samaj had rejected the Hindu sacraments and created its own rites. However, he also insisted that the caste system should be questioned and the male followers of the upper castes, known as the 'twice-born', should divest themselves of the sacred thread.[1] They are called 'twice-born' as they undergo a second, spiritual birth during an initiation ceremony (in which they are presented with a sacred thread) after their first, corporeal birth. This rite is only possible for male followers of the upper castes and demonstrates their superiority over the other castes, women and the caste-less[2].

Keshub and a group of younger members of the community split from the movement and formed their own group in 1868, called the 'Brahmo Samaj of India'. The intention behind the name was that this Samaj was conceived for – and should be accessible to – all Indians. As a result, Debendranath called the 'old' community 'Adi Brahmo Samaj', i.e. the original (actual) Brahmo Samaj.[3] After the split, he was highly active on the social reform front. He improved the status of women and girls (such as rejection of child marriage), propagated marriage that crossed caste boundaries, and advocated remarriage

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[1] Handbook of Living Religions, 229.
[2] Cf. G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], 1981, 136.
[3] Cf. A. Kolencherry, I.c., 40.

for widows.[1]

It is a strange twist of fate that one aspect of these reforms indirectly contributed to a split with the Adi Brahmo Samaj led by Keshub. He had promised his daughter's hand in marriage to a prince despite the fact that neither had reached the required age to marry. On top of that, there was no guarantee that this prince was a theist and opposed to idolatry and polygamy.

Although Keshub stated that God came to him and approved of the marriage, his critics believed this marriage was inadmissible for the leader of a strictly monotheistic movement and incompatible with the decisions of the community.

In 1878, an assembly decided to rename the movement to 'Sadharan (i.e. general) Brahmo Samaj'. |The movement was constituted in January 1879, whereupon the followers of Keshub united to form the 'Nava Vidhana' or 'Church of the New Covenant'.[2]

This new religious community wanted to 'strive for a symphony of religions in which each preserves its own timbre'. Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Islamic and Christian texts were read out in the services.[3] According to the resolutions of the Brahmo Samaj of India, texts of religious scriptures of all nations that

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[1] Cf. Handbook of Living Religions, 229.
[2] Cf. A. Kolencherry, I.c., 45f. and 52f.
[3] Cf. F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 257.

express the principles of a monotheistic Brahmanism should be extracted and published.[1]

The conception of this 'church of reconciliation' was regarded as a reformed religious community in which every set of beliefs could maintain its specific features, but that strived towards establishing unity and a sense of identity between the various religions.

Keshub's movement can be called an all-encompassing, 'all-inclusive super-church, the fulfilment of all religions'.[2] Keshub believed all religions have a mutual relationship and form a harmonious unit. According to him, all prophets and saints exist in harmony; he saw unity in all scriptures and believed in a continuity in all revelations. For Keshub, this view was new, as nobody had discovered this connection between the religions before. It showed the uniqueness and originality of this movement.

As a result, he exclaimed: 'I have finally found the science of revelation: unity in diversity. Over here is Hinduism, over there is Buddhism. I perceive them to be connected with one another. Over here is Judaism, over there is Christianity. I see unity in this duality.'[3]

Keshub saw his own community as God's final revelation. He sent a new message to complete all existing religions

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[1] Cf. A. Kolencherry, I.c., 41.
[2] I.c., 122.
[3] A. Kolencherry, 46f.

and establish harmony between them.[1] This concern is also aptly expressed in Keshub's symbol for harmony between religions, which symbolizes the six world religions or six major religious traditions (Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism).[2]

Intending to bring about unity between religions, Keshub created a series of new rites, such as a naming ceremony, a Last Supper in which rice and water are offered as a sacrifice, and a mission ceremony for the apostles of the new religious community.[3]

Keshub's community practiced a universal religiosity with texts of various religious traditions being read as the divine word of God. However, this eclecticism was clearly difficult to achieve without a guide to facilitate its integration, and the community effectively ceased to exist after the death of its founder in 1884.

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj movement from which the former group seceded is still a highly influential group today, even though it is low in numbers.[4] With more than one million members, the Brahmo Samaj movement continues to be highly active today, particularly in North

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[1] Cf. ibid. with note 68.
[2] Cf. A. Kolencherry, cover page and last page.
[3] For more information, see I.c., 47ff.
[4] A. Kolencherry, 54, states that there are 1,500 members.

India.[1]

As mentioned, the Keshub movement ebbed away soon after his death. Nevertheless, in the 19th century, the idea of actively practicing the various religions, i.e. implementing their actual message, persisted in India. On an individual level, this practice was embodied by an important holy person who was sought out by many of the followers of Brahmo Samaj – including Keshub Chandra Sen and Debendranath Tagore[2] – namely the mystic *Sri Ramakrishna.*

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[1] Vgl. H. Waldenfels, article on new religions, Asian, in: Lexikon der Sekten [The Lexicon of Sects], Freiburg/Br., 1991, 733.

[2] Cf. esp. Ramakrishna, Das Vermächtnis [The Gospel of Ramakrishna'], Bern 1981, (cited: The Gospel) 129ff. Christopher Isherwood's 'Ramakrishna and his disciples' (Advaita Asrama, 2007) offers a fine and shorter biography of Ramakrishna (note editor).

3. Ramakrishna – The Embodiment of universal Religiosity in Practice

One of the most fascinating figures in Hinduism of the 19th century is the monk Ramakrishna (1836–1886). Born Gadadhar Chattopadhyay, he was the son of impoverished Brahmans. He is one of many Hindus venerated as avatars, as someone 'who, from his own experience, attested to the fact that all religions can lead human beings to the realization of God'.[1]

In 1856, he became a priest in a Kali temple close to Kolkata. The construction of this temple was financed by a rich widow, Rani Rasmani, a member of the low shudra caste. Her main focus of worship was Kali, the Divine Mother. This is a goddess whose likeness incites great fear among Europeans. Richly adorned with gold and pearls, she wears a garland of human skulls and bones, and holds a decapitated head in one hand while distributing blessings with the other. She is the embodiment of destruction and of motherly affection and a symbol for the cosmos in all its contrasts, for death and life. As such, she symbolizes harmony between contrasts (cf. The Gospel, 15).

This symbolism is important to properly understand Ramakrishna's ardent desire to catch a vision of the

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[1] Article on Ramakrishna, in: Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren [Lexicon of Eastern Wisdom Teachings], Bern/München /Wien 1986, 202.

Divine Mother. He wants to become one with the divine origin of the universe, rather than indulge in the fantasy of an idol.

Ramakrishna experienced the elementary power of Kali in many visions. Whether crying, screaming, dancing, laughing, or even naked (The Gospel, 121), he would experience the Mother of the Universe in his trance state. Due to his ecstatic behavior, which often disregarded established ritualistic boundaries, people believed he had lost his mind and doctors were sent for to come up with a diagnosis. In the end, a Brahman woman – a Hindu nun and a guest of Ramakrishna – explained his behavior: Ramakrishna expressed a mania for God, which stands for a rare spiritual experience of intoxicating divine love.

The woman accepted Ramakrishna as her guru and introduced him to Tantra, a meditation system in which Kali plays a major role (The Gospel 27 and 30f.). A central tenet of Tantra is the belief that Shakti, the creative power, is the personification of divine energy (for Ramakrishna in the guise of Kali).[1]

This cosmic relationship can therefore not be achieved primarily through understanding and asceticism as in Vedanta, but through objects of the senses that allow the

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[1] Cf. article on Tantra, in: Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren [Lexicon of Eastern Wisdom Teachings], 377; see also A. Nayak, Tantra ou L'éveil de l'ènergie, Paris 1988, 56ff.

path to God, the love towards God, to be realized in a spiritualized form. The structural, the ritual, the illustrative, and the symbolic are of fundamental importance for experiencing the Absolute. This background is essential in order to understand that Ramakrishna's ecstatic states before the image of Kali represents an encounter with the universal Divine.

The strong effect of Tantric mysticism and his veneration of Kali was no obstacle to a formless experience of the Divine as an Atman-Brahman identity. In fact, it made this experience possible. Through the grace of Kali, the Divine Mother, the limited ego can be lost in the infinite ego of Atman-Brahman. From the depth of such a Tantric experience, one can understand that the experience of Atman-Brahman, the way of the Vedanta, reveals the Divine in the same way. For Ramakrishna, God can be perceived both as having a form and being formless, as a 'personal god' or an 'impersonal truth', as he frequently stated in his talks (The Gospel, 283, 225f.). The decisive factor lies in encountering God. Ramakrishna was able to experience this in such an intensive way that he could even see God directly: 'As I see this fan directly before me, in exactly the same manner have I seen God'. He goes on to add: 'I have seen that He and that which lingers in my heart is one and the same' (The Gospel 324, cf. 333). In 1886, he initiated several monks, thereby laying the foundations for the Ramakrishna Order, which was later

continued by one of his greatest pupils, Vivekananda.

This order is founded in the tradition of the spirituality of Shankara, i.e. that of a non-dualism (Advaita) in which the unity of everything, the identity of Atman and Brahman, is assumed. The true nature of human beings is divine and, as a consequence, all the ways of different religions lead to the goal of experiencing this inner divinity.

The immensity and clarity of experiencing the Absolute also enabled him to see the paths taken by other religions as equal to the Hindu religion, and moreover to also practice these different paths. Over the years, he explored various spiritual systems under the guidance of gurus. What is remarkable here is the fact that he practiced (at least for a limited time) also Christianity and Islam. He attested that he became enlightened through each of these paths, and therefore declared that the followers of all religions can experience the reality of God:

> I have practiced all religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. And I followed the ways of various sects within the Hindu faith. And I have found out it is the same God to which all people turn in different ways. You must each of you practice all of the various faiths and explore the different paths. I see that people quarrel in the name of religion. They do not consider the fact that he who is called Krishna, is also Shiva, the primordial Shakti, Jesus

and Allah. A single Rama with a thousand names. A lake with many landing places. On the one side the Hindus draw their water in jugs and call it jal, on the other side Muslims draw their water and call it *pani*. On a third side, the Christians draw theirs and call it water . . .

The substance is the same, but it has different names. All seek the same substance. Only the climate, temperament and name are different.[1]

In a vision, he recognized Christ as a divine incarnation. He states: 'See, this is Christ, who spilled his lifeblood for the redemption of the world, who accepted eternal suffering for his love of humanity. He is the master yogi who lives in perpetual union with God. He is Jesus, love incarnate' (The Gospel, 48).

The striking phenomenon underlying the biography of Ramakrishna is the fact that he followed the major religions in a real, palpable sense, and achieved the goal of meditation as a Sufi and as a Christian. In this sense, he practiced a unification of different religions in his lifetime. It should be noted that it is not possible to follow these various religious paths synchronously. Ramakrishna followed these paths successively. He illustrated this in the example of climbing onto a roof:

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[1] Cited in: P. Ravignant, Derwische [Dervishes], Munich 1985, 100f.; cf. Vermächtnis, 306.

God is on the roof; it is therefore a matter of climbing up onto it. One person uses a ladder, another uses a rope or a set of stone steps or a bamboo pole, and yet others climb up in their own way. The important thing is that the person makes it onto the roof. The manner in which this is achieved is of little importance. The only restriction is to not choose multiple paths, at least not at the same time. Choose one after the other.[1]

This experiential insight is particularly noteworthy, as it shows that every religious path in itself has the ability to reach the Absolute, but that mixing different religions puts this ultimate experience at risk. In any case, when following other paths, Ramakrishna withdrew from Hinduism in most aspects of his life. He even stopped attending the Kali temple. As well as practicing the meditative path of Sufism, he observed Islamic celebrations, times of prayer and dietary rules,[2] prayed to Allah and quoted from the Quran, so his experience of this religion was therefore quite comprehensive. However, this happened without an exhaustive focus on the dogmas and fundamental teachings of Islam or Christianity: Ramakrishna's interest lay in the experience of God through other religions, not in the recognition of

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[1] Cited in P. Ravignant, I.c., 101.
[2] Cf. P. Ravignant, Derwische [Dervishes], 99; Cf. Vermächtnis [Legacy], introduction, 48.

their doctrinal truth.[1]

This overall identification with other religions is impressive, but after some time Ramakrishna would return to his original Hindu path. However, the experience influenced his fundamental attitude, as he now saw that non-Hindu beliefs, in their tolerant and open aspect, are also pathways to God. In terms of his overall outlook on the world, he remained a Hindu throughout his life. It is also from this perspective that he ultimately interpreted the understanding of God by other religions. Based on the notion that 'Rama is One, but He has a thousand names' he believed for example with regard to Christianity: 'He whom the Christians call God is addressed as Rama, Krishna, Ishvara and other names by the Hindus' (The Gospel, 306). Despite his universalist outlook, Ramakrishna remained, deep down, bound to the basic central religious tenets of the Hindu tradition. For him, it was unnecessary to leave the Hindu faith, just as it is unnecessary to convert followers of other religions, He believed that the decisive is to be guided by their love of God, who is ultimately the true inner guide. In that sense, all people have to follow their own path.[2] The different ways to God mean that people living in different eras are able to achieve this goal. In a temple belonging

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[1] Cf. I. Puthiadam, Hinduistische Religionsphilosophie [Hindu Religious Philosophy] (1986) 3f.
[2] Cf. P. Ravignant, Derwische [Dervishes], 102.

to the Brahmo Samaj community (to which Ramakrishna was invited on several occasions), he says:

> Do you wish to know the truth? God has created the different religions, so that different seekers in different lands are assisted at different times. All teachings represent a host of different ways, but the way is not synonymous with God. One can reach God if one follows one of the paths with complete and utter devotion. Even if there were misconceptions within the religion that one chooses to follow, God will correct them if the followers are dedicated and sincere about their intentions (The Gospel, 225).

One of his biographers and followers said of Ramakrishna that he was 'the first religious prophet in history who declared harmony between all religions' (The Gospel, 54). This esteem is not a historical statement, as similar efforts at achieving harmony had already been made in the history of religion prior to the 19th century, e.g. by the Mughal emperor Akbar in India in the 16th century.[1] However, the statement does reflect the self-image of the *Order*, which is committed to the legacy of Ramakrishna and sees itself as a community that aims to reconcile religions.

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[1] F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 504, 549.

4. Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Order - The Dawn of Eastern Movements in the West

Ramakrishna's legacy with its universal religious perspective was to become one of major significance for the West. Nobody had expected that one of India's spiritual gurus – who dismissed book learning and called scholars 'vultures' (The Gospel, 101, 236, 239 et al.) – would serve as the initial impulse for the dissemination of neo-Hindu ideas in the US and Europe, particularly among intellectuals.

These ideas were spread first and foremost by one of Ramakrishna's most trusted pupils, Narendranath Datta, who would become known by the name of *Vivekananda*. Ramakrishna had gathered around him a number of pupils during his lifetime, and initiated some of them shortly before his death (The Gospel, 247ff., 333ff.). After his death, the young and unmarried followers formed a monastic community (cf. The Gospel, 347ff.). It was Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who formally made the community into an order, establishing it on 25 December 1887. The people gathered for the ceremony realized only afterwards that the Christian world celebrated this date as Christmas.

Vivekananda, spread the teachings of their founder Ramakrishna all over the world as teachings of unity and

truth among all religions.[1] It was also Vivekananda who brought the ideas of religious unity to the West.

In 1893, he went to Chicago, where the World's Parliament of Religions took place during the Chicago World's Fair. He left a great impression among the audience despite being uninvited and being the last speaker to step up to the podium. Later, he traveled through the USA and visited England, France and Switzerland, where he founded a series of Vedanta centers.

Vivekananda propagated the idea that all religions can be considered as paths to salvation[2] and declared the existence of a 'timeless, neo-Vedantic religiosity'.[3] His goal was to bring the 'essence of the Hindu religion' to the West, i.e. the infinite nature of the soul (*atman*) and the Creation and God as the highest, most perfect version of ourselves.[4]

This concept develops in two directions. First of all, the Vedanta concept seeks to bring about a new unity and consolidation of all religions based on an all-encompassing philosophy.[5] Secondly, this does not lead to a destruction of these religions, but rather to a repro-

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[1] Cf. Article on Vivekananda, in: Lexikon der östlichen Religionen [The Lexicon of Eastern Religions], 437.
[2] R. Hummel, Article on new religious movements, in: Lexikon der Religionen, 452.
[3] R. Hummel, Indische Mission, 1980, 129.
[4] Cf. I.c., 128.
[5] Cf. I.c., 127.

duction of neo-religious groups.

Vivekananda was inspired by the idea, also expressed by Inayat Khan, of the complementing nature of East and West, of the mutual need to complement the spirituality and materialism of each.[1]

The unifying principle of all religions through a hidden, eternal religion is expressed in the Vedanta Society's declaration of accession, which states that all religions are paths leading to God, and that peace and communion with all religions is sought against the background of this hidden, eternal religion. The declaration that every new member has to adhere to, reads:

> I believe that Sri Ramakrishna is an illustration and embodiment of the Eternal Religion whose life and teachings help me to understand the plan and purpose of all religions of the world, and the truth and harmony that underlie them.
> I consider all religions to be paths to God and will strive to live in peace and kinship with the followers of all religions.[2]

Vivekananda paved the way for the concept of a universal religion. The idea is not tolerance or acceptance, but the acknowledgement of equality between religions, as they

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[1] Cf. I.c., 124.
[2] Cited in R. Hummel, I.c., 151.

are all true and one in their most fundamental essence.[1]

Despite this harmonizing equal status between all religions, it is not possible to ignore that the leading basic perspective is a Hindu one, with all other religious paths appearing to be provisional in relation to it. Based on the Advaita Vedanta, all religions are deemed to be possible, but they represent lower paths to reaching the supreme goal.[2]

Vivekananda made a substantial contribution to propagating the paradigm of a new religiosity – of a distinctly Hindu character – in the Western cultural sphere as a new outlook with regard to the relationship between religions, and indeed in a methodical, conceptual and organizational sense.

In a methodical sense, he sought to explain the central ideas of the Vedanta in dialogue and in critical debate with European philosophy and the Christian religion.

As with many other followers of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda experienced Western education through the lens of the British colonial power in India. The subjects of European philosophical and religious history were broached in many disputes between followers of Ramakrishna and Brahmo (Vivekananda himself came

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[1] Cf. K. O. Schmidt, Universale Religion nach Vivekananda, Ergolding, [2]1990, 20.

[2] Cf. H. v. Stietencron, Article on Hinduism/Hindu religions, in: Lexikon der Religionen, 294; cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission, 151ff.

from a Brahmo Samaj background).

This knowledge was a useful guide when it came to explaining the concerns of Hinduism in a neo-Vedantic sense to European intellectuals. This translation process required the followers to renew their efforts to engage with Western ideas and, in places, even to adapt to them. In a conceptual sense the idea of a comprehensive religiosity that includes other religions took center stage. A universalist spirituality based on Vedantic foundations was the key to interpreting the external forms and historical character of the religions.

From a sociological perspective, this piety was expressed through the founding of new religious groups of the Ramakrishna Order, and in Vedanta centers whose task always has been to experience Hindu spirituality in the Western world, and to foster a universal sense of religiosity that includes Christianity.[1]

The three aspects stated above helped to introduce a new form of religious spirituality to the West around the turn of the 20th century, a universal religiosity with Hindu qualities, albeit one which transcended the historical restrictions of Hinduism as a folk religion in a relativistic sense, and with non-Hindu religions being included in this Vedanta approach to piety.

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[1] Right down to the calendar of festivals and holy days: Christmas and Easter are celebrated; cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission, 155; H.-P. Müller, Die Ramakrishna-Bewegung, Gütersloh 1986, 221.

The way in which this religiosity is presented in lectures and publications in European languages, and the way in which reference is made to the culture and religion of the West (i.e. in direct contact with Christianity) constitutes new ground in the association between East and West. However, the most significant new development can be seen in the institutionalization of centers and groups (Vedanta centers and societies; branches of the Rama-krishna Order), as a way to practice Hindu religiosity in the West.

The activities that started with Vivekananda in propagating Vedanta as a new form of piety and the groups that were founded as a result, can be seen as the emergence of a new way of bringing Eastern spirituality to the USA and Europe. This approach reached another apex at the end of the 1960s. Some universalist tendencies with a Hindu character during this period will be discussed in this chapter. However, this did not constitute a total rebirth of the movement. It was more of a new stage of the journey with different historical conditions to contend with. The main change took place at the dawn of the 20th century, when a religiosity of non-Christian origin found followers in the Christian cultural sphere. As well as learning about this religiosity in a theoretical sense, people practiced it in real life and banded together as neo-religious groups.

From this perspective, we can correctly state that through

these efforts, religious teaching shifted in the opposite direction with teachers coming from the East to primarily Christian countries. The newly awakened self-awareness of India, gradually liberating itself from colonialism, geared this shift, that found fertile ground due to the growing sense of a spiritual crisis in the West.[1] The process that started at the turn of the previous century is therefore of paradigmatic importance for all subsequent developments involving the arrival of Eastern teachers of wisdom in the West.[2]

The early stages also include the work of the Indian Sufi master Inayat Khan, which will be explored in greater detail in this study. Although the content is different, as Sufism relates to Islam, all three aspects stated also apply in a structural sense to his work and his movement, and they will become clearer as his ideas and activities are presented in detail below. The universal religiosity propagated by Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Order were not only well received in the West, but also influenced various movements and personalities in India. This continuation and shaping of neo-Hindu spirituality in philosophical religious speculation and in practical, social and political ideas became widely known.

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[1] Cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission [Indian Mission], 453; 1893 is stated as the start of this reversal, with missionaries arriving from the East.
[2] See R. Hummel, Gurus, 1984, 11; cf. also Handbook of Living Religions, 456f.

5. The ongoing Development of the neo-Hindu Self-image

Mahatma Gandhi is generally seen as the leading figure in guiding the Hindu reform movement of the 20th century towards its ultimate goal of independence . His political work and fight for liberation – based on the principle of non-violence – was embedded in key Hindu premises, with the concept of compassion and causing no harm (*ahimsa*) as the guiding principle.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) – also known by the honorific *Mahatma* (great soul) – represented a universalist spirituality based on a Hindu religiosity, reformed in a social sense.

His basic principle of 'Truth is God'[1] includes other religions, such as Christianity and Islam. Although he was a critic of the Christian mission, he was always a firm advocate of peaceful coexistence between followers of different religions, especially between Hindus and Muslims, since the reconciliatory concept of religious universality also had to be reflected in the political reality. As the basic ideas of *Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, who would later serve as President of the Indian Republic, were 'identical in their most fundamental essence' to those of

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[1] Cf. St. J. Samartha, Hindus vor dem universalen Christus [The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ], Stuttgart 1970, 83ff., citation: 93.

Vivekananda',[1] only one quote is required to illustrate his idea of the unity of religions, based on the belief that the world as a whole is moving in the direction of unity:

> The empirical fact that the various religions all come with their own specific structures and idiosyncrasies should not mask the transcendental unity of religions.
>
> The key differences between the living world religions are surpassed by a fundamental unity in vision and goal that encompasses all of humanity.[2]

Regardless of whether one is of a Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, or Christian background, all religions lead to the same goal and their followers should – despite their affiliation with a visible church or denomination – be viewed as members of an invisible 'Church of God' or a common allegiance of the spirit.[3] This basic belief is expressed by many neo-Hindu thinkers, including *Sri Aurobindo* (1872-1950). It is a guiding principle in numerous *ashram* establishments to the present day.[4]

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[1] I. Puthiadam, Hinduistische Religionsphilosophie [The Hindu Philosophy of Religion] (in: Zeitschrift für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft 70 (1986), 10.

[2] Occasional Speeches and Writings, July 1969-May 1962, p. 235, cited in I. Puthiadam, 11.

[3] Cf. Occasional Speeches and Writings ,310, cited in Puthiadam, 12.

[4] Cf. Article on Sri Aurobindo, in: The Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 1, 527f.; cf. overview in E. Pulsfort, Christliche Ashrams in Indien [Christian Ashrams in India], Altenberge 1989, 16ff.

From another perspective, however, this belief is characteristic of the religious communities in the West (to which neo-Hinduism belongs), which initially became known under the problematic name of 'youth religions'.

6. Critical religious Syncretism in Key Meditation Movements of Hindu Origin

As already mentioned when discussing Vivekananda, it is possible to identify the start of a new way in which Eastern spirituality was communicated and practiced in the West. In some neo-religious movements since the 1960s, the basic concept of neo-Hindu universality propagated as part of this process can also be seen in forms that were, at least in part, highly simplified, heavily adapted to Western environments and therefore deviated from their original intention.

A number of these groups are undoubtedly characterized by a strong syncretic tendency. Illustrating their structure for each individual group would be the subject of a study in itself. In the context of the reflections made here, it is only possible to point out the intentions of some of the founders of neo-religious movements, and to emphasize a particular aspect of this, namely to see how they relate to the conventional religions and to scrutinize and question their self-image.

The critical religious tendency due to religious motivation was expressed by *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*, whose spiritual concept known as 'transcendental meditation' found a considerable following in the USA and Europe in the early 1960s and continues to receive support today. With this universalist claim, he, too, is rooted in the sense

of mission indicative of the Hindu reform movements.[1] One basic concept in all certainty is the view that the fulfilment one gains from religion, comes from the fact that 'it gives a person a direct path through which to realize God'[2]. In other words, the goal is the realization of divine reality in a direct manner which can be experienced.[3] This was, Yogi stated, the task that the historical religions intended to fulfil. Over time, only rites and dogmas remained and as a result, religion no longer seemed to have an inner spirit at all. The religions, he stated, are in a state of enlightenment. In a quote, reminiscent of Nietzsche's declaration that 'God is dead', he claims: 'Religion today is like a body without the human being.'[4]

The conventional religions are therefore unable to offer any fulfilment to people today. Mahesh Yogi believed the way to solve this religious aloofness lays in the application of transcendental meditation. Through meditation 'it is possible for people of all religions to attain an integrated state of life and an absolute, pure consciousness – the state of the divine being'.[5] The center of natural life, the spirit of every religion, and even the existence of God can

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[1] Cf. Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften [Handbook of Religious Communities], 520ff., esp. 527.
[2] Die Wissenschaft vom Sein und die Kunst des Lebens [Science of Being and Art of Living], 1969, 283.
[3] Cf. R. Hummel, Indische Mission [Indian Mission], 108.
[4] Wissenschaft vom Sein [Science of Being], I.c., 284.
[5] I.c., 286.

be seen in the realization of consciousness. Given this experience of the truly Divine, 'it doesn't matter which rituals one practices on the crude level of religion and of life'.[1] He goes on to state the following:

> As long as the spirit of religion controls human life, it does not matter which name one gives to one's religion or which rites one practices in churches, temples, mosques, synagogues or pagodas. As long as one immerses oneself in the spirit of religion and has reached the state of divine consciousness, as long as the current of life flows with the cosmic flow of evolution, it doesn't make a difference whether one is Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist. Every name is meaningful.
>
> On the crude level of life, these names have meaning. On the level of being, they all carry the same value. All that is important is that human beings should lead a life in divine consciousness and eternal freedom – a life of total integration. The key to the fulfilment of any religion is to regularly practice transcendental meditation.[2]

While Mahesh Yogi continued to describe the transcendence of concrete religions in a positive light,

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[1] I.c., 287.
[2] I.c., 290.

Rajneesh Chandra Mohan (1931-1990) – called *Bhagwan* ('Exalted') by his students or *Osho* ('monk' or 'teacher' in Japanese Buddhism) – was critical, even hostile, towards traditional religions. He wished to bring about a 'religion without religion' that had no institutions or structures:[1] 'The religion that has its end in temples, mosques and churches is a dead religion . . . an authentic, living religion unifies with the whole.'[2]

True religion is a holistic experience shaped by elements of Hindu philosophy. As with Mahesh Yogi, the experience of unity of being constitutes the center of meditative practice. It cannot, by definition, be defined or restricted, and is therefore 'empty'.[3]

All religions are limiting and therefore need to be transcended. The *'Bhagwan' Rajneesh Movement*, which found a great deal of support in the USA and Europe, particularly in the 1970s, sought to demonstrate a way for followers of various religions to achieve this transcendence. A publication by the movement from 1971 states:

> Acharya Rajneesh inspired and initiated a so-called 'neo-sannyasin movement' in which seekers were inducted into the Rajneesh movement from

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[1] Cf. Y. Karow, Bhagwan-Bewegung und Vereinigungskirche [The Bhagwan Movement and Unification Church], Stuttgart, 1990, 25.
[2] Cited in Y. Karow, 298, note 323.
[3] However, this does not mean, as Y. Karow (I.c. 25) believes, 'the void could be filled at will.' This thought, related to the neo-positivist suspicion of futility, ignores what is meant by this conviction.

religions as wide-ranging as Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism, thus enabling a family of religions to come to life.[1]

The idea of unity among religions – albeit connected with their criticism and destruction – was important in the early years of the Rajneesh movement, so from the time it positioned itself as an organized movement. Following a spectacular break with his closest confidante, Sheila Silverman (*Ma Anand Sheila*), who was accused of having turned the movement into an authoritarian organization, Bhagwan declared the death of the movement as a religion in 1985 with the dramatic statement – again strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche – that 'a religion has died for the first time in human history'.[2] As a result, he went on to emphasize the distinction between religion and religiosity or religiousness, as he referred to it.[3] Religion is dead – religiousness is that which lives and should represent its true message.

With this step towards a specific form of religiosity, Rajneesh returned at the end of his life to the enlightenment experience he had had as a 21-year-old

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[1] Cited in: Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften [Handbook of Religious Communities], 576; 'Acharya' means: teacher, master; the original Hindu meaning of 'Sannyasin' is one who renounces the world entirely.

[2] Cited in Y. Karow, ibid., 26.

[3] Cf. Y. Karow, 26.

philosophy student, in which he encountered the 'other reality, the truly real, though in a way it can be called however a person wishes to call it: God, truth, dharma or Tao.' [1]

The structure of religiosity as indicated by the two initiators of the meditative guru movements stated above is relatively easy to understand. Both movements share a central tenet, namely spirituality or a spiritual outlook on life transcends the concrete religions, whose goals can be understood to be outside and beyond the conventional religions, and whose experience can be obtained through the specific practice of meditation.

Analogously – albeit without this radical critique on religion – the search for a 'pre-religious' or 'trans-religious' meditative dimension can be found in other groups inspired by aspects of Hinduism both within and outside India, such as Nirmala Devi, who aspired the unification of all religions through Sahaja Yoga ('natural' or 'spontaneous' yoga), which she simplified to cater for Western pragmatism.[2] This also applies to other groups, e.g. Radha Soami Satsang Beas, an organization founded in 1861 based on Sikh ideals, as well as to the various

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[1] Cf. Handbuch religiöser Gemeinschaften [The Handbook of Religious Communities], 574.
[2] Cf. S. Kakar, Schamanen, Heilige, Ärzte. Psychotherapie und traditionelle indische Heilkunst [Shamans, Saints and Practitioners. Psychotherapy and Traditional Indian Medicine], München 1984, 199ff

successor movements that split off from this, including the *Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission* under the stewardship of master *Darshan Singh*,[1] and the *Unity of Man* movement, which is influenced by the belief in a 'unity between all religions within a 'true religion'.[2]

In this context, however, we only need to point towards basic neo-Hindu themes in Western movements. These claim by to their deeper religiosity and spirituality to transcend the conventional religions, and to lead to the original source from which they all sprang forth.

This original source is not separate from human beings. On the contrary, it is innate to human existence. The divine Being is ultimately one and the same as all that exists, and can be experienced primarily through specific forms of meditative contemplation.

This is a modern, sometimes highly simplified version of the Advaita Vedanta, adapted to Western audiences, teaching the identity between Brahman and atman and putting the outward form of all religions into perspective.

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[1] Cf. Darshan Singh, Die Bedeutung von Christus [The Meaning of Christ], Stuttgart 1988 (= Sawan Kirpal Publications), esp. 6f., 14; ibid., Spirituelles Erwachen. Ein Führer für die Suche nach geistiger Wahrheit [Spiritual Awakening. A Guide for the Search for Spiritual Truth], Berlin 1987, esp. 41f.

[2] U. Tworuschka, Die vielen Namen Gottes. Weltreligionen heute [The Many Names of God. World Religions Today], Gütersloh 1985, 186.

Chapter 3:
New religions in a
Buddhist Context

1. Historical religious Background

During its two and a half thousand years of existence, Buddhism has changed and evolved in many different ways. One of the most significant changes may be the transformation from an essentially monastic religion into one that is able to bring laypersons to completeness and enlightenment. This is the path of Mahayana Buddhism, a branch that has been most significant for laypersons.[1]

In the 19th and 20th century, changes took place that led

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[1] Cf. for ex. E. Conze, Eine kurze Geschichte des Buddhismus [A Brief History of Buddhism], Frankfurt a.M. 1986, 42ff.; ibid., Der Buddhismus. Wesen und Entwicklung [The Essence and Development of Buddhism], Stuttgart 8-1986, 65ff.; and especially: Sh. Ueda, Sein - Nichts - Weltverantwortung im Zen-Buddhismus [Entity, Nonentity and Global Responsibility in Zen Buddhism] in: Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt, ed. R. Panikkar, W. Strolz, (1985), 45ff.

to new religions, some of which directly used Buddhism as their starting point, or at least were influenced by it and incorporated Buddhist key elements. In overview, some of these forms that are associated with universalist syncretic tendencies will be presented here.

In relation to Hinduism, Buddhism can be seen as a new religion in itself, especially due to its rejection of the Vedas as binding canonical texts. Buddhism was not only 'new' due to its rejection of the Vedas, just as important was the way it challenged the caste system and, from a religious point of view, rejected the teachings of the soul (*atman*) as the center of human nature.

A common characteristic of all Buddhist movements until this day is the doctrine of non-self (*an-atman* or *anatta*).[1] Another important novel aspect is the experience of *nirvana* as the goal of the path to salvation, and this religion's fundamentally non-theistic nature.

The departure from the Hindu caste system and opening the path of salvation to all people, instead of exclusively to the members of a certain community or population, turned Buddhism into a world religion.[2] It led Buddhism

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[1] Cf. H. Dumoulin, Religion und Politik - Die Entwicklung des japanischen Buddhismus bis zur Gegenwart [Religion and Politics – the Development of Japanese Buddhism Through to the Present], in: M. Eliade, Geschichte der religiösen Ideen [The History of Religious Ideas], Vol. 3/2, Freiburg, 1991, 404.
[2] Cf. G. Mensching, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], 1981, 38ff.

to other cultures and peoples and is connected to the missionary idea that the message of salvation is not only relevant for who wants to be enlightened, but should be passed on to other people as well. This idea laid the foundations for the later spread of Buddhism. Starting in India, Buddhism traveled across all of Asia, which profoundly influenced and shaped the continent.

One of the most striking aspects of the religion, which as a whole is essentially sympathetic towards other movements, is the tolerance with which it accepts other forms of worship and pathways to seek salvation. This means that instead of eliminating the religions, native to the countries to which it introduced itself, Buddhism left them to co-exist side by side, partially integrated them, or synthesized with them. Examples of religions standing alongside and intertwined with Buddhism include Bon (or Bön) in Tibet, Taoism and Confucianism in China, and Shintoism in Japan. This coexistence was not always without conflict, but did fundamentally contribute to an open attitude towards other religious traditions and often led to close associations with elements or basic ideas of indigenous religions.

Two classic examples can illustrate this. The 'three teachings' (Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism), which are one and jointly lead to the same goal, were widespread in

China in the 10th and 11th century.[1] Secondly we can refer to the syncretism which points to the connection between Shingon Buddhism and Shinto in Japan, namely Ryobu Shinto ('twofold Shinto').[2]

So an account of the history of Buddhism would not be complete without its syncretic aspects. This applies to Japan in particular, from the popular syncretism of the early period (7th to 9th century) until the present era. A look at statistics on religions in Japan shows that the number of religious followers is around 75% higher than the actual number of inhabitants of Japan. This indicates multiple affiliations to various religious traditions.[3]

The substantive conditions favoring this degree of tolerance – which can lead to syncretism – consist of the religion's key basic tenets first of all. It should be pointed out here that the concept of *avatara* (Japanese: *gongen*) – already mentioned in the discussion on Hinduism – is now understood to mean the various manifestations of Lord Buddha. Another condition is the belief in adapting

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[1] Cf. F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 84; G. Mensching, article on syncretism, in: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart [Religion Past and Present]³, Vol. VI, 564.

[2] Cf. P. Gerlitz, Gott erwacht in Japan [God Awakens in Japan], Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 1977, 18; S. Ono, Shinto. The Kami Way, Tokyo ²²1991, 85ff.

[3] Cf. D. Reid, Japanese Religions, in: A Handbook of Living Religions, 1985, 377ff.; contribution in the new 2nd edition John R. Hinnells (Ed.), A New Handbook of Living Religions, 2nd Edition, 2007, 479-513.

to the understanding of the listener through pedagogy (*upaya*).[1] These elements, together with the ethics of Buddhism based on sympathetic compassion, enabled the religion over its two and a half thousand years of existence to adapt to all manner of cultural and religious conditions in the areas into which it spread.

In the 19th and 20th century, the Buddhist religion also showed its strong ability to adapt. This holds true for all main branches of Buddhism, so for Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan Buddhism. These adaptions were mainly caused by increasingly intensive encounters with European culture. Significant revival movements started in Sri Lanka, today the heartland of Theravada Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism underwent an unforeseeable development due to the Chinese occupation and the subsequent exile to India of the Dalai Lama along with ten thousand followers. However, the most intensive efforts towards modernization can be found in traditional Japanese Buddhism with the humanistic ideal originating in the Enlightenment in Europe as the guiding principle.[2] That said, Buddhism proved its dynamism through more than just those movements that led to its self-revival. It is also evident through its influence on new religious

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[1] Cf. H. Dumoulin, article on syncretism, in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1460; article on upaya, in: Lexikon östlicher Weisheitslehren [The Lexicon of Eastern Teachings of Wisdom], 418.

[2] Cf. H. Dumoulin, in: Eliade, Vol. 3/2, 337ff.

movements that incorporated Buddhist elements into their teachings or that are derived from Buddhism as new religions.

The new religious foundations in Japan are the most significant examples here. The matter should be addressed in relation to these movements above all; when looking at the characteristics and tendencies of these new religions, it is important to emphasize the basic syncretic trait – the aspect that connects or transcends the various religions – and to demonstrate the specific example of a dedicated 'universalist' syncretic new religion (Seicho no Ie). It is also important to highlight Caodaism, which originated in Korea and positions itself as a 'renewed form of Buddhism'.

2. Japanese new Religions – historical and phenomenological Aspects

Japan is the classic example of a country that contains new religious foundations. In 1990, Thomas Immoos stated that of the more than 700 registered with the Ministry of Culture since Second World War, 371 new religions have been officially certified. This figure has risen sharply in the decades that followed.[1] The multitude of Japanese new religions makes it exceptionally difficult to highlight the specific characteristics of the groups, or to classify them accordingly. Similarly, it is a challenge to identify the traits shared by these new religions. According to Heinrich Dumoulin, a generally accepted classification has not yet been provided. Even so, he believes there are two aspects that allow a general distinction to be made, namely 'the genealogical depend-

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[1] Cf. Th. Immoos, Ein bunter Teppich. Die Religionen Japans [A Patchwork. The Religions of Japan], 1990, 172; L. Pokorny, Neue religiöse Bewegungen in Japan heute [New Religious Movements in Japan Today], in: H.G. Hödl/V. Futterknecht (Ed.), Religionen nach der Säkularisierung [Religions after Secularisation], Vienna/Berlin 2011, 177-199; F. Winter, Japanese New Religious Movements. An Introduction, in: L. Pokony/ F. Winter (Ed.), Handbook NRM East Asia, 2018, 17-32. The number of members for Japanese new religions refer to the year 1990 and are taken from the entry titled *'Japanese new religions'* on the website Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_new_religions#Statistics (25.05.2019). The basis for this is the work: Susumu Shimazono, From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan. Trans Pacific Press, Melbourne 2004, 234–235.

encies and the ties they share, and the relation to the traditional, antiquated religions (Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity)'.[1] The overwhelming majority of these religions (166 in total) come from a Buddhist background. The second-largest group (144) has a Shinto background, while 36 have Christian roots. A smaller group (28) has no established religion as background.[2]

As a general characteristic of these religions, they don't share the traditional way religions see themselves, based on their principles, which allows for more free transitions. Furthermore, we can point towards a few characteristic qualities that are virtually applicable to all the movements, allowing for a better understanding. In his overview of the Japanese new religions, Dumoulin cites six of these characteristic qualities:

1. A charismatic, strong leading figure, often a woman.
2. A streamlined organization – every religion has its 'Mecca'.
3. Syncretic eclectic elements: taken from Shinto, Buddhism and Christianity in particular.
4. Simple teachings that are easy to understand; shamanistic and magical elements.
5. A strong grounding in the real world.
6. A connection between religion and life; understood

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[1] H. Dumoulin, Neue Religionen [New Religions], in: Japan-Handbuch [Japan Handbook], ³1990, 1412.
[2] Cf. Handbook of Living Religions, 373; cf. Th. Immoos, I.c., 172.

in a socio-religious sense to be an answer to oppressive social conditions (the farming population, poverty-stricken areas of cities, uprooted persons),[1] or the grim experience at the end of the Second World War.[2]

Each one of the traits mentioned is important for how these new religions position themselves, often by highlighting one of these characteristics. For our purpose, the focus here is on the syncretic element. As a classical religious phenomenologist said about the Japanese new religions, they 'demonstrate syncretism as one of their main characteristics'[3], which for them is something positive.[4]

The expression 'syncretism' is often used in a negative sense, especially from the perspective of monotheistic or very different religions. From a religious studies perspective, the term is used in a neutral descriptive sense in accordance with Ulrich Berner's distinction between a syncretism at system level, where the religion in question is viewed as a whole, and a syncretism at the elemental

[1] H. Dumoulin, in: Japan-Handbuch [Japan Handbook], 1411f.
[2] Cf. also M. Pye, Nationale und Internationale Identität in einer japanischen Religion [National and International Identity in a Japanese Religion], in: Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung [Religious Studies. An Introduction], Ed. H. Zinser, Berlin 1988, 239ff., esp. 246ff.
[3] F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 101.
[4] . Cf. P. Gerlitz, 155f., 28f. and 27.

level, which focuses on the reception, transformation, integration, etc. of individual elements.[1]

The latter in particular is evident throughout the entire history of religion. In universalist religious communities, this leads to a connection (but not a unification) on the level relating to the religion as a whole, and on the level of individual elements.

As a result, these new movements largely demonstrate syncretic tendencies, and incorporate aspects from Buddhism, Shintoism and Christianity in particular.

Some of these new religions position themselves directly as bringing previous classical religions together. These are of primary interest in this work, and we'll discuss one of these new groups – although not one of the largest in number – as an example: *Seicho no Ie* ('House of Growth'). Before doing this, it is important to provide a brief overview of new groups in chronological order, as this background – even on a very broad scale – will allow for a better understanding of the tendencies of the Japanese new religions that transcend and compound the classical religions.

The historical background goes back to the first half or middle of the 19th century. Today, the distinction is generally made between three or, more recently, four

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[1] Cf. U. Berner, Synkretismus [Syncretism], 1982, ibid., article on syncretism, in: H. Cancik et al., Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe [The Handbook of Basic Religious Concepts], Vol. 5, 143-152.

major stages in this development. First come the new religions formed during the Edo period (until 1867) or Meiji period (1868-1912). Second are those new religions that belong to the period between interbellum (so in the 1920s and 1930s), and finally come the new religions that arose in the decades following the Pacific War (1941-1945) and that proliferated based on new, more positive legal conditions (especially the Religious Corporations Law of 1951).[1]

The period starting in the 1970s is accepted as a fourth phase in the development of new religious movements in Japan. Some of the themes addressed by these movements had an influence on the New Age movement that originated in the United States. This phase came to a disastrous end with the terror attack on the Tokyo subway by the neo-religious movement *Aum Shinrikyo* in 1995.[2]

One of the earliest and, at the same time, most significant new movements is *Tenrikyo* (literally: 'Teachings of divine

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[1] Cf. Th. Immoos, Ein bunter Teppich [A Colourful Tapestry], 1990, 172; Immoos additionally refers to these three phases as involving 'older', 'new', and 'the newest' neo-religions. Today, however, the term 'new new religions' (*shin-shinshuky*) is used for the newest developments; this term is not universally accepted.

[2] F. Winter, Japanese New Religious Movements: An Introduction, in: L. Pokorny/F. Winter (Ed.) Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements, 24 and 26. Cf. also Susumu Shimazono, From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan. Trans Pacific Press, Melbourne 2004, 234f.: this work also distinguishes between four periods in its statistical overview.

truth' or 'religion of divine reason'). This religion was founded in 1823 by a woman – this fact alone is a novelty in the history of religion – by the name of *Miki Nakayama*, a farmer's wife (1798-1887) who had to endure the illness and death of her children. She believed to be a receiver of divine messages and offered herself as a medium during an exorcism, where she experienced the appearance of a parent god. From 1838 onward, she believed that the original God had come to dwell in her residence and used her as a conduit through which to speak. As a result, she gave away all her possessions and found great popularity among pregnant women, due to her ability to make childbirth easier for them.[1]

Originally, the movement gained much of its support from the general populace. As new religions were not tolerated – religious freedom only became legal in Japan in 1946 with the abolition of State Shinto – her movement was either forbidden or registered under the category of Shinto. Miki herself was arrested several times.

The key content of these teachings, which is of particular interest when compared to traditional religions, is the belief that God's work is represented as both the father and the mother. He is understood to be a parent god in

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[1] Cf. J. Laube, Tenrikyo, in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], ³1990, 1473f.

heaven and She is a parent god on Earth.[1] In incorporating the female element into the conception of God, the significance of a woman as the founder of a religion is now clear. This is distinct from all major religions, all with male founders.

A streamlined organization is an integral aspect of Japanese new religions. Tenrikyo, too, is strict in its stewardship. Its current headquarters in Tenri-Shi (Tenri City) is close to Nara, and is a city in itself, with temple complexes, schools, education centers, universities, museums, and the like. Today, the religion positions itself as a 'world religion' along the lines of Christianity and Buddhism. In 1990, Japan counted some 1.8 million devotees and the religion has missions in the USA, South America and Europa.[2]

It maintains ties with Shintoism, and also incorporates elements from various religions. After the war, in keeping with the times, this polytheism was reinterpreted as monotheism. The ability to change the religion's basic ideas with relative ease can be attributed to the fact that the doctrine itself is of little importance.[3]

Another prominent new religion is *Oomoto* (also known

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[1] Cf. the fundamental work of J. Laube, Oyagami. Die heutige Gottesvorstellung der Tenrikyo [Oyagami. A Contemporary Conception of God in the Tenrikyo Religion], Wiesbaden 1987; esp., Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1475f.

[2] Cf. J. Laube, Tenrikyo, in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1475.

[3] Cf. Th. Immoos, 175.

as Oomoto-kyo) with a following of around 1.7 million people. At the turn of the 20th century, this religion instigated the rise of various independent syncretic new groups, many of which have a personal or contextual connection to Oomoto. For this reason, we can speak of an 'Oomoto group' when attempting to classify the Japanese new religions – a task that has yet to result in a universally accepted outcome.[1]

This religion was driven by the revelations that *Deguchi Nao* (1836-1918) had on New Year's Day in 1892. She recorded thousands of divine messages in syllabary and believed salvation comes from contact with gods and spirits during ecstasy. She incorporated Christian and Buddhist elements into her views, which made her religion syncretic. She declared a messianic, chiliastic[2] message of truth, or the 'great origin' (*omoto*). One of the groups that split off, the 'messiah religion', places its focus on healing opposing Western medicine.[3]

The new religions that arose in the interbellum (the second phase) were predominantly oriented around Buddhism. Some of these religions had their heyday after 1945. They include *Soka Gakkai* ('society for the creation of value'), which was founded in 1930 and whose

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[1] Cf. H. Dumoulin, article on new religions, in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1412.
[2] The belief in a 1.000 year period of peace and prosperity (note editor).
[3] Cf. Th. Immoos, 175.

membership totaled 17.7 million in 1988, and *Rissho Kosei Kai* ('society for the foundation of law and community'), which appeared a few years after *Soka Gakkai*.

Both religions are heavily inspired by the Nichiren school. Revived in the 20th century, this branch of Buddhism has its origins with Nichiren (1222-1282), who believed the path to salvation lies in reciting the Lotus Sutra. This religion that preceded both of the two stated above (*Reiyukei*), has its foundations in the veneration of this Sutra and in ancestral rituals.

As religious practice is connected with social matters, *Soka Gakkai* is primarily characterized by social and political activities. Its message of salvation is strongly influenced by this, with its followers being promised good health and success in business.[1] *F. Heiler* cites Soka Gakkai as 'the most vital of the new religions'.[2] The religion sees itself as Buddhist.

In 1958, *Rissho Kosei Kai*, (founded in 1930), due to its president Nikkyo Niwano, found support well outside Japan. Today it has around 6.8 million members. In addition to this president's socially determined image of human beings, his inter-religious activities – above all the

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[1] Cf. Th. Immoos, 176.
[2] F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 100.

World Conference of Religions for Peace – draw attention.[1]
Spiritual welfare is the religion's main focus.

According to this approach, around five to ten people have daily group therapy lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. The aim is to provide those present with a new sense of self-confidence.

Personal issues relating to marriage, family, profession, beliefs, etc. are discussed, and lay therapists, trained for this purpose, try to resolve all issues, using the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and other basic Buddhist assertions.[2]

In the period between the two World Wars, many religions sprung up that can be categorized as neither Shinto nor Buddhist, but can only be classified as 'other'. This category includes PL (Perfect Liberty) *Kyodan* ('the religious community of total freedom', 1.2 million members), which teaches that a fulfilling life is 'art', and the syncretic *Seicho no Ie*, which we will look at separately below.

In this brief overview, it is worth mentioning of a religion that originated in the third phase of the new religions (since 1945), namely *Tensho Kotai Jingukyo* or the 'dance religion', which is based on Shintoism and also was

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[1] Cf. D. Reid, Japanese Religions, in: Handbook of Living Religions, 386.
[2] Cf. U. Tworuschka, Die vielen Namen Gottes. Weltreligionen heute [The Many Names of God. World Religions Today], Gütersloh 1985, 240.

founded by a charismatic woman, Kitamuro Sayo (1900-1967). The deity Tensho Kotai Jingu possessed her spirit and communicated with her. The day of her first sermon – 22 November 1945 – is taken as the date on which the religion was founded. Official registration followed in 1947. Today, it has spread in smaller numbers to the USA, Europe and Asian countries. The total number of members is reported to be 439,000. In the teachings of Kitamuro Sayo, God is a male-female couple. An important element of this religion is a religious dance invented by the founder: the ecstatic dance of the non-ego. Emptiness through the medium of ecstatic dance can be interpreted as a basic Buddhist requirement.[1]

As stated, the fourth period is influenced by the New Age of the 1960s and 1970s, in close connection to Western esotericism. *Franz Winter* writes: '

> The development of Aum Shinrikyo (1984) and Kofuku Kagaku (1986) show a clear inspiration originating from features such as the importance of 'channeling,' its interest in 'esoteric' topics and 'occult' traditions, 'lost continents' . . . [It shows a] tendency to connect to various religious traditions as a proof of their own special status, which is said

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[1] Cf. M. Pye, Ein Geflecht von Traditionen. Religion in Japan [A Web of Traditions. Religion in Japan], in: Handbuch Weltreligionen [The Handbook of World Religions], Ed. W. Metz, Wuppertal 1983, 266; and H. Dumoulin, 1415.

to comprise and unify everything.[1]

In this comprehensive and unifying tendency, there is a characteristic that – although the accents may differ – can be found in some of the earlier Japanese new religions, such as the Seicho No Ie movement.

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[1] F. Winter, I.c. 24f.

3. Syncretism, an essential Feature of Japanese new Religions: the Example of *Seicho no Ie*

The new religions mentioned differ in many ways from their religions of origin. They see themselves as a continuation of the old and elements of the religion of origin are included, but these are adapted and often combined with elements of other religions. As such, the Japanese religious movements stated above exhibit clear syncretic tendencies.

But there are also religious movements expressing the aim to combine the major religions, who want to be seen as a universalist new religion and who formed an organization that reflects this.

One example is, as mentioned, *Seicho no Ie* ('House of Growth'). A journal bearing the same name was published for the first time in 1930, and this is the year cited as the founding date of the movement, even though it was first registered as a new Japanese religion in 1941. The founder of the movement is Dr. Masaharu Taniguchi (1893-1985), the journal's first publisher.

Today, Seicho no Ie has, according to its own figures, around 1.5 million members (approximately 500,000 in Japan and around a million in other countries).[1] Outside

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[1] See the Seicho no Ie homepage, : http://www.seicho-no-ie.org/eng/whats_sni/index.html (25.05.2019) (Information dated December 2014). In 1990, the movement had as many as 2.4 million followers: see Japanese Religion. A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Tokyo and New York 1972, 81990, 262. Cf. in

Japan, the movement can be found primarily in South and North America, though it has also acquired a following in China, Korea and Western Europe.

Following the death of the founder, the torch was passed on to his son-in-law Seicho Taniguchi. After he died in 2008, the latter's son Masanobu Taniguchi became the president of Seicho no Ie.

Its headquarters are located in Tokyo and the religion's two most important locations are in Nagasaki and Uji, on the outskirts of Kyoto. The movement also has groups in many countries in North and South America, and in Europe. The monthly journal *'Truth of Life'* (the title of the founder's magnum opus) is subtitled *'Magazine of health, prosperity and harmony'* and reflects the essential elements of earthly happiness and success – characteristic of Japanese religions.

One of the main teachings of this new religion is 'There is an inner unity between all religions, as they are based on one and the same God of the universe.'[1] Based on this principle, Seicho no Ie positions itself as a super denominational religion, so as a religion that transcends the various individual religious denominations and branches. The homepage of the website of this new religion states:

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general: Birgit Staemmler, Seicho no Ie, in: L. Pokorny/ F. Winter (Ed.). Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements, 88-108.
[1] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seicho-no-Ie (25.05.2019).

Any principal image for salvation in true religions, whatever the name of God or Buddha, is worshipped as the principal image of this Religion . . . *Jisso* (the True Image) lies behind the principal image of every religion.'

This motif is based on the founder's intentions. Taniguchi Masaharu speaks of 'a movement that teaches the same truth of all religions', where 'all religions have the same core and only differ in details'.[1] He has written over three hundred books, including his 40-volume magnum opus, titled *Seimei no jisso* (The Reality or Truth of Life). One of his more comprehensive works is a spiritualistic explanation of the Gospel of John.[2]

The author's writings feature a mix of Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, modern psychology and philosophy, and shows the influence of spiritism, especially the New Thought movement that developed in the United States in the 19th century. Seicho no Ie is currently the largest single New Thought group in the world, with over half of all New Thought adherents belonging to Seicho no Ie today.[3]

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[1] H. Dumoulin, 1414, and Birgit Staemmler, I.c. 98.
[2] The text was published in 1960, and an English translation is available: Masaharu Taniguchi, The Taniguchi Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, Gardena/California 1988.
[3] See Peter Clarke (Ed.), Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements, London/New York 2006: J. Gordon Melton, article on New Thought, 459. Cf. Birgit Staemmler, Seicho no Ie, in: L. Pokorny/

The Japanese religious organization enjoys a particularly close relationship with the International New Thought Alliance. Therefore, Taniguchi's religious movement can best be compared to 'Christian Science'.[1] Taniguchi often refers to this, though he believes the latter's commitment to the Bible is too restricting (cf. LG 72).[2]

Many elements in his work are not only incorporated from other religions, but also from philosophy. Masaharu Taniguchi was introduced to the world of English literature as a student. He read Western poets and philosophers, including Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Bergson and others.

One day, a revelation came to him that told him the law of the spirit: 'You yourself are reality! You are Buddha. You are Christ. You are eternal. You are unfailing.'[3] What is important for humanity is the knowledge of the truth, which consists in 'being spiritual, a son of God like Christ or Buddha, a bearer of divine power' (LG 10).

The syncretic dimension of this belief is evident from this

F. Winter (Ed.), Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements, esp. on New Thought 95, note 18 and 97.

[1] Cf. on these movements: Lexikon der Sekten [The Lexicon of Sects], 156ff., 721f.

[2] for ex. Masaharu Taniguchi, Leben aus dem Geiste [Spiritual Key to Abundant Life] (hereinafter 'LG'), Pfullingen/Württemberg 1964, 64, 87. et al.

[3] Seimei no jissô, Tokyo 1958, Vol. 20, 163f.; cited in P. Gerlitz, article on Seicho no Ie, in: Lexikon der Sekten [The Lexicon of Sects], 948f.; cf. Masaharu Taniguchi, Leben aus dem Geiste [Spiritual Key to Abundant Life], 10.

revelation with links to Buddhism and Christianity. At the same time, the meaning of syncretism is that the factual religion is transcended, as the truth being expressed applies to the entire universe and all areas of life, and therefore does not contradict any religion, as it is 'the basic law of life to which religions, like all existence and life, obey'.

Taniguchi teaches this 'universal spirit of life', the 'basic law of life' (LG 9). As he states at the beginning of his commentary on the Gospel of John, his teachings are connected with Christianity, Buddhism or Shintoism, but not restricted to one single religion, as they represent the universal truth which is the origin of all religions.[1]

This attitude of transcending religions and being open at the same time, is also expressed in the first principle, the message of Seicho no Ie, written on the 'seven golden candlesticks' of revelation. They are summarized in the declaration:

> Free from prejudice against religions and sects, we believe in the spiritual nature of human beings, which is in consistent with the spirit of life. (LG 14)

The truth to which it is referring is 'universal' (LG 72, cf. 9). An often repeated idea is that the goal of all religions was to lead to this knowledge of the spirit or real life (cf.

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[1] The Gospel according to St. John, 1.

LG 56, 65). However, Taniguchi believes the task of Seicho no Ie and the reason for this community's existence is to express this truth in a modern form and in a language that can be understood by all (LG 66).

Recognition of this truth does not require any special effort or specific methods, but calls for an understanding that comes from the heart: 'We carry the truth common to all religions in the world inside us, which is to say real life in its clear purity and perfection.' (LG 65)

The structure of Taniguchi's religion demonstrates a spirituality aiming to perceive the center of all religions in an anthropological way, i.e. by reflecting on the inner dimension of humankind, and points to the transcendental realm of the spiritual reality. Perceiving the truth can also lead to the healing of physical illnesses. However, this is not the core, as the main focus is on the 'universalist' religiosity, as is expressed in the claim that the truth common to all religions should be taught and experienced in a form suitable for modern people.

These teachings are essentially the same as the basic intention of Inayat Khan. This shows that global cultural factors (reflecting modern conditions) are more important than the origin of any specific religion (Buddhism or Islam). Both movements are also interlinked with 'Christian Science' and its basic neo-gnostic views.[1]

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[1] Cf. below for a biography on Inayat Khan.

For Masaharu Taniguchi only the spirit possesses reality.[1]
This spirit is the 'Eternal Wisdom', the 'Eternal Life' and
the 'Eternal Abundance' that one becomes conscious of
through meditation.[2]
Buddhism is only seen as the spiritual and historical
religious background against which the new conception
of religious experience is articulated, as in a number of
other new religions that have been founded within this
domain of propagation.

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[1] Cf. P. Gerlitz, loc.cit., 948.
[2] Cf. M. Taniguchi, Book of Meditative Practices (= Truth of Life,
Vol. 8), 1962, (in English: 1989); the main form of religious reflec-
tion that is superior to all other forms is Shinsokan (meditation for
the purpose of visualizing God).

4. Caodaism: the Synthesis of all major Religions

One of the most significant non-denominational attempts at unification in the 20th century was the Vietnamese Caodaism, which once again falls within the religious and geographical sphere of influence of Buddhism. The goal of this religion is to achieve synthesis between all major religions, encompassing both Eastern and Western religions and traditions. This is summarized in the '*Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements*':

> The Vietnamese Cao Dai is the most well-known example of a movement accommodating both European, Western features (most conspicuously from Catholicism and from Cardician Spiritism) and Asian elements in the course of the formation into a new comprehensive religious system'. Both Spiritism and New Age influences are highlighted here.[1]

Followers believe that Cao Dai as a religion is 'foretold by Western Spiritism and the Theosophical Society'.[2] The religion is considered to be universal in its intent and integration, even if it is strongly influenced by Buddhism,

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[1] Introduction, in: L. Pokorny/ F. Winter (Ed.), Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements, 7.
[2] Cf. Sergei Blagov, The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement, Moscow 1999, 17.

and positions itself as a 'renewed form of Buddhism'.[1] The movement seeks to overcome two shortcomings of Buddhism, namely the lack of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and the lack of active charitable ethics.[2]

The name *Cao Dai* goes back to messages from the supreme deity *Cao Dai* ('great palace' or 'high tower'), which the Vietnamese Ngo Van Chieu (1878-1932) is said to have received during a number of spiritism sessions in 1919.

In 1926, the movement organized a great festival celebrating the founding of the religion. There, Le Van Trung, a Mandarin, was appointed as its 'Pope'. The religion's hierarchy is based on the example of the Catholic Church, though female priests and bishops are permitted, and women and men are equal in these offices.[3]

This religion is positioned as the umbrella under which the five religions of Vietnam fall: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor and spirit worship, and Christianity (or 'Western religions').[4] On top of that, Kabbalist and Hindu elements are also integrated.

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[1] Cf. F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 551.

[2] Cf. G. Lanczkowski, Die neuen Religionen [The New Religions], 1971, 78.

[3] Cf. B. Boal, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, in: Handbuch der Weltreligionen [The Handbook of World Religions], 243.

[4] H. v. Glasenapp, article on Caodaismus, in: RGG[3], Vol. I, 1611f.; Sergei Blagov, I.c. 16.

Caodaism strives towards the unification of religions based on a belief in the 'Third Amnesty', or the 'Third Era of Salvation'. This third movement follows the First Amnesty (primarily Moses, the Dipankara Buddha[1] and Chinese deities), and the Second Amnesty (the Shakyamuni Buddha, Confucius, Laozi, Jesus Christ and Muhammad). The third and supreme amnesty does not require a human intermediary, as God speaks directly through a medium. The possibility of a Fourth Amnesty is rejected.[2] Caodaism positions itself as the final religion in conjunction with the religions that preceded it, but does not seek to destroy these religions. Caodaism is the fruit, while the other religions are the bud or the flower.[3] It claims to re-establish the essence of previous religions, as the essence has been misinterpreted through superstition and ignorance, by 'bringing the quintessence of all the religions back to their original essence'.[4]

This belief puts Caodaism on the same plateau as the Baha'i Faith, but we cannot ignore the fact that we here see the same characteristics as in the new Japanese religions: a faith originating in a state of trance, the

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[1] 'Lightbearer' a Buddha preceding Siddharta Gautama, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (note editor).
[2] S. Blagov., I.c. 17; cf. B. Boal, in: Handbuch der Weltreligionen [The Handbook of World Religions], I.c. 243.
[3] Cf. G. Lanczkowski, Die neuen Religionen [The New Religions], 79.
[4] S. Blagov, I.c 18.

integration of women into the hierarchical leadership structure, and the female element in the image of God.

Of interest for us is the universalist claim of incorporating the ideas of preceding religions while at the same time overcoming them in a final act of synthesis in relation to preceding religions. The movement states that the 'universalism of Caodaism' with its significant reconciliatory potential 'corresponds to the level of integration processes in the modern world in a larger measure than any other existing religion'.[1]

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[1] Ibid., 17f.

Chapter Four
Universalist religious Communities of Islamic Origin

Section One
The Baha'i Faith: the Continuation of preceding universal Religions

1. Progressive universalist Concepts in Islam as a Catalyst for new religious Movements

Within Islam, there are primarily three concepts that could lead to the emergence of a new religion that can put the message of Muhammad into context: firstly, the idea that the revelation of one God at different times by different prophets, from Abraham to Jesus to Muhammad, occurred progressively; secondly, the idea, especially important in Shia Islam, that a *Mahdi* is expected at the end of time to restore Islam and to establish the Kingdom of God; and thirdly, the tendency inherent to Sufism that puts the exoteric form of Islam in

perspective.

The first two concepts in particular were instrumental for the emergence of the Baha'i faith as a new universal religion in the mid-19th century. The third concept continues to be of major significance to the Sufi Movement (which is addressed in detail below), even though the Baha'i faith was also influenced by Sufism during its nascent period, for instance with regard to the development of a broad-based approach to tolerance.[1]

These concepts, in particular the anticipation of the arrival of *Mahdi* and Sufi spirituality, inspired several other religious movements and communities with universalist implications that were very different to one another.[2] One of these is the Ahmadiyya Movement, whose founder Mirza Gulam Ahmad (± 1835-1908) in 1889 declared that he was the Mahdi. He believed that he was the unification of 'all anticipated saviors of all religions in one person'.[3] This movement, which split in

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[1] Cf. A Handbook of Living Religions, 481f.

[2] Cf. the brief overview, 'Islamic associations and associations derived from Islam', in: O. Eggenberger, Sondergruppen und religiöse Vereinigungen [Special Groups and Religious Associations], Zurich [5]1990, 221-228.

[3] P. Antes, article on the Ahmadiyya movement, in: Hans Müller/ Joachim Valentin/ Friederike Gasper (Ed.), Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen [The Lexicon of Sects, Special Groups and Ideologies], Freiburg 2001, 27; cf. W. Schmucker, Sekten und Sondergruppen [Sects and Special Groups], in: W.

two directions in 1914, was excluded from Islam as a global religion as it was seen heretical.

The movement positions itself as a humanist, liberal and tolerant form of Islam. Its missionaries are highly active in Europe and proclaim its universalist tendencies, which are evident in the founder's claim that the movement meets the expectations of previous religions.

Sufi ideas and meditative practices can be seen in many spiritual movements, and their universalist intentions show that they do not wish to break with traditional religion, nor want to be seen as a religion in itself, 'but rather lead people from all walks of life to a direct experience of God or a great life force', as is by the *Subud Movement*.[1]

This movement is influenced by syncretic tendencies, as are the followers of Meher Baba, for whom Sufism was formative and who came in contact with the Sufism of Inayat Khan in the USA, which we'll address in detail.[2]

Ende/ U. Steinbach (Ed.), Der Islam in der Gegenwart [Islam in the Present Day], Munich [2]1989, 524ff.

[1] Brigitte Holmes-Edinger, article on Subud, in: Harald Baer et al. (Ed.), Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen, Szenen und Weltanschauungen. Orientierungen im religiösen Pluralismus [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups, Scenes and Ideologies. Positions in Religious Pluralism], Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 1247-1270, quote: 1249.

[2] Cf. O. Eggenberger, I.c., 226. Inayat Khan's student Rabia Martin later joined Meher Baba's group, 'Sufism Reoriented', E. de Jong-

2. The historical Origin of the Baha'i Faith

The emergence of the Baha'i faith can be considered to be closely connected with Babism, which was founded by Ali Muhammad Shirazi, or the 'Bab' (which literally means 'gate' or 'door'). He believed he was an agent and messenger for a new prophet who would prove to be the Mahdi, so eagerly awaited by the Shiites. He revealed himself to be the 'gate for the coming Imam' during a secret meeting in the night of 22–23 May 1844. Later, he declared that he himself was the Mahdi, and publicly announced his mission.[1] His teacher was a follower of *Shaykhism*, a Shiite reform movement founded at the end of the 18th century that awaited the imminent arrival of the Mahdi.[2]

Ali Muhammad was born as the son of a merchant on 20 October 1819 in Shiraz, a city in southern Iran. His revelation came at the age of 25. He attracted many followers who were persecuted due to their political radicalism and religious beliefs that deviated from the

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Keesing, Inayat Khan. A Biography, The Hague/London 1974, 287, note 12.

[1] See Manfred Hutter, Handbuch Baha'ī. Geschichte – Theologie – Gegenwartsbezug [The Baha'ī Handbook. History – Theology – Relevance to the Present], Stuttgart 2009, esp. 25ff. Cf. P. Smith, The Babi and Baha'i Religions. From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion, Cambridge 1987, 14f.

[2] Cf. M. Hutter, l.c., 19f.; P. Smith, l.c., 8ff.

norm.[1] The Bab himself was executed in a barrack square in Tabriz in 1850 and during the early years of the movement thousands of martyrs were killed.

In the dispute over the Bab's successor, Mirza Ḥusayn-ʿAli Nuri (born on 12 November 1817 in Tehran) prevailed. Due to his affiliation with Babism, he was exiled to Baghdad in 1852. In the 12 days prior to his departure from Baghdad to Constantinople (due to another exile) from 22 April to 3 May 1863, he declared himself to be 'the one who will reveal God' to his small circle of followers[2].

He called himself *Baha'u'llah*, meaning 'the glory of God'. He was exiled and imprisoned for over forty years. From his different prisons, Baha'u'llah wrote many letters to the intellectual and authority figures of the time, including Tsar Alexander II, Franz Joseph I of Austria, and Pope Pius IX, inviting them to accept his mission.

This fact alone corroborates his claim that his religion is universal. After his death in Acre in the Holy Land on 29 May 1892, his eldest son ʿAbdu'l-Baha (meaning 'servant of Baha') became the leader of the new religion. ʿAbdu'l-Baha was also the chief interpreter of his father's writings.

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[1] The norm being that Muhammad was the last of the Prophets (note editor).

[2] M. Hutter, I.c. 35; cf. U. Schaefer, Der Baha'ī in der modernen Welt. Strukturen eines neuen Glaubens [Baha'ī in the Modern World. The Structures of a New Faith], Hofheim-Langenhain ²1981, 153f.

Starting in 1908, when he gained his freedom ('Abdu'l-Baha was imprisoned together with his father), he traveled many times to Europe – he was in Vienna in 1913[1] – and the United States, and these trips increased awareness of the Baha'i faith and helped to spread it.

In the United States, the first Baha'i groups emerged in 1894, inspired by a convert who arrived in Chicago to spread the word. In the same year, many links were established with new groups, such as the New Thought Movement, the Theosophy Movement, the Vedanta Society and various liberal Christian groups.[2] One year earlier, in 1893 at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, the Baha'i faith was mentioned several times.[3] 'Abdu'l-Baha was succeeded by his grandson Shoghi (Shauqi) Effendi (1897-1957). The problems that arose in the wake of his death regarding his successor ultimately led to the establishment of a leadership committee consisting of nine members in 1963. Based in Haifa and called the Universal House of Justice, the committee is the guiding hand for the quickly

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[1] Cf. 'Abdu'l-Baha in Vienna (18 to 25 April 1913). Commemorative publication of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i in Vienna to mark the 75-year anniversary of the historic visit, edited by the Spiritual Assembly of Baha'i Vienna (Vienna 1988).

[2] Cf. P. Smith, I.c., 100f., 104.

[3] Cf. Shogi Effendi, Gott geht vorüber [God Passes By], Oxford 1954, 291; this also includes the report on the close contact with the Theosophists, 325ff.

growing new religion. From a religious studies perspective, the Baha'i faith now identifies as a world religion.

3. A Religion in a universal Cycle

The followers of the Baha'i faith firmly believe that God spoke to humanity through Baha'u'llah. Their outlook is based on a universal historical theory, postulating that human history ebbs and flows in broad periods, divided into *aeons*. The current universal cycle began with Adam, the first human, and the world religions that exist today are part of this cycle. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Zarathustra, Jesus, and Muhammad are the central figures of this global period.

These religions are elements of a single larger religion, as they all have their origin in the same God, and reflect the same truth in different ways. In other words, there is no major difference between the images of God and therefore between the individual religions. This is encapsulated by Surah 2: 136 of the Qur'an, which states:

> Say, we have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.

The unity of this message is formulated in Surah 54: 50: 'And Our command is but one, like a glance of the eye.' Baha'u'llah addressed these ideas directly: he stated that all of the prophets named have the same task, the same mission, namely to bring the light of God into this world in the time in which they are alive. Today, the Baha'i believe they are spreading their message in a time in which all religions are questionable, as the traditional religions have been eroded. This leads to an unavoidable break with the institutions of religion, as they are no longer able to present themselves as convincing.[1]

The underlying belief in successive messengers of God is a characteristic element of Islam, as the quotes from the Qur'an show. Contrary to Baha'i, orthodox Muslims believe these revelations end with Muhammad. As Surah 33: 40 states, he is the 'last of the prophets'.

Baha'u'llah is also not seen as the last definitive prophet in the history of salvation. Instead, he is seen as the envoy of God for this particular aeon.[2] The proclamation of Baha'i, which started with Bab and his successor Baha'u'llah, through whom the universal manifestation of God was realized, states that the process will take at least a thousand years.

This is the start of the Baha'i cycle, within which another

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[1] Cf. U. Schaefer, 170f.; cf. 24: Reference to Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God.

[2] Cf. Hutter, I.c. 118ff.; U. Schaefer, 193.

indefinite number of future revelations will follow before
the next cycle begins. Together, the prophetic cycle that
started with Adam, and the cycle of fulfilment that started
with Bab and Baha'u'llah constitute the current universal
cycle.[1]

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[1] Cf. the schematic representation of history: D. McEoin, Baha'ism, in: J. R. Hinnells (Ed.), Handbook of Living Religions, London 1988, 475-498, 480.

4. The End of the old Religions and the Announcement of a new One

The doctrine detailing the successive appearance of the prophets is described in the 'Book of Certitude' (*kitab-i-iqan*), whose content was revealed by Baha'u'llah in 1862.[1] The end of an old religion is set out in an interpretation of Surah 75 (the Resurrection), a chapter about the end of the world. In the sentence '[S]un and moon [will] lose their luster and the stars will fall from the sky', Baha'u'llah interprets the sun and moon as the teachings, laws, and commandments of the preceding mission, as the dos and don'ts 'that were enshrined by the preceding religion and that had sheltered the people of that time' and that 'have now lost their luster, meaning they are exhausted and are becoming less and less effective'. The doctrines and laws 'of an earlier mission have been eclipsed and now cease to exist' (Certitude, 36f.).

Baha'u'llah believes that the ecclesiastic figures of earlier missions 'who exist in the time of a subsequent revelation and who hold the reins of the religion of the people in their hands' will not accept the new revelation. Although they, too, are symbolized by the sun, they will therefore be eclipsed, as is stated in the Qur'an 55: 5: 'Verily, the sun and the moon are both condemned to the torment

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[1] Hofheim-Langenhain [3]1978 (cited here as 'Certitude').

of infernal fire' (Certitude, 33f.).

Baha'u'llah offers a key example from history to demonstrate this, namely the Christian failure to obey the message of the Qur'an. The people of the Gospel, he states, did not understand the meaning of the symbolism behind the sun and moon that lost their luster; instead, they remain defiant and stubborn in their rejection of this belief (cf. Certitude, 36).

Baha'u'llah interprets the metaphor of the sun disappearing in a third way through the use of Imam Ali's lamentation, the Prayer of Nudbih, which states: 'Wither are gone the resplendent suns? Whereunto have departed those shining moons and sparkling stars?' (Certitude, 33). In this prayer, the words 'sun', 'moon' and 'stars' refer primarily to the prophets of God. The declaration of a new religion is therefore positive, even if it leads to a dissolution or split. It is a mighty act, if not a divine revelation that has directed human life for a long time and that pervades everything, 'that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be 'cloven asunder' and be abolished at the appearance of one soul' – this fact is more powerful than the 'cleaving of the sky' (Certitude, 38; cf. Surah 82, 1).

5. The Unity of Religions and their Fulfilment

The universalism of the Baha'i faith has been articulated in the course of its emergence. However, its main features can be observed in Baha'u'llah himself, who stood apart from the conservative and militant group that sought to preserve the teachings and laws of the Bab. Influenced by Sufism and the New Testament, Baha'u'llah developed a universal outlook that includes recognition for the holy writings of other religions.[1]

Baha'u'llah emphasizes the essential unity of the message of the prophets, also called the 'custodians of God'. At one point in the Book of Certitude, he compares the prophets to birds, and states:

> Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven by the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness' (Certitude, 104).

To justify this message, he refers to the Qur'an: 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.' (Surah 2: 285) This is why the content of each revelation is one and

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[1] Cf. P. Smith, I.c., 88f.

the same: 'This revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number'. The unity of the cause on one side and the prophets on the other is summarized by the statement: 'Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must be one and the same' (Certitude, 105).

The differences in the teachings are due to the fact that they appeared at different times. This is why they appear to the people of the world – because the culture differs from previous cultures – 'as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Bearers of a new Message' (Certitude, 104). In essence, however, there is only one message issued by the one and only God. In this context, it is possible that a prophet will appear time and again as a manifestation of the holiness of God, a prophet who is able to say: 'I am the return of all the prophets.' (Certitude, 105). For Baha'u'llah, the appearance of an earlier revelation in a later one is so obvious that it requires no further evidence.

The basic idea of the unity of prophetic messages is shared by Baha'u'llah's followers and is connected to the belief that he himself was the manifestation of a divine revelation of critical importance to the current age. This belief enables followers to also consider the relationship with previous revelations. While the 'old' religions are not negated by the revelations, they are seen as belonging to a previous time, as the prophet of this era is

Baha'u'llah. Even so, his message is not entirely new. It is a message that can be found in all religions, namely that people should live their lives based on the divine precepts of God. The uniqueness of God corresponds to the unity of religions, whose origins can be traced back to one and the same God.

For present-day followers of the Baha'i faith, this leads to the insight 'that all high forms of religion are divine in origin and that there are no different or mutually exclusive religions, but rather only a single indivisible divine religion which is renewed according to the requirements of the time in cycles of a millennium.'[1]

The Baha'i community firmly believes in the 'transcendent' or 'transcendental unity of religions'[2] and believes in a progressive revelation.[3] Nevertheless, for the followers the revelation of Baha'u'llah has a major significance and is superior to previous revelations, as it finds its completion in the cycle that started with Adam and therefore encompasses all religions in this cycle.

The relationship to the previous religions is interpreted within the context of evolutionary growth. An oft-quoted statement encapsulates this idea:

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[1] U. Schaefer, I.c. 196f.

[2] F. Vahman, article on the Baha'i Faith, in: Theologische Realenzyklopädie [Encyclopaedia of theology and religious studies], Vol. V, Berlin/New York 1980, 123; U. Schaefer, I.c., 197.

[3] Cf. M. Hutter, I.c., 120.

> In the teaching of Moses we see the Bud; in that of Christ the Flower; in that of Baha'u'llah the Fruit. The flower does not destroy the bud, nor does the fruit destroy the flower.'[1]

The inclusivist character of this religion is also evident in the relatively humble forms of ritual (which have their origins in Islam): during worship, a selection of writings of the major religious traditions is read out.

Every religion sees itself committed to a specific task, and the Baha'i faith is no exception. Its primary aim is to bring about the unity of humankind through religion as the uniting foundation, instead of religion being a base for conflict.[2] In twelve basic tenets, the Baha'i faith expresses a series of principles that are closely linked to modern Western ideals.[3] These principles reveal the present-day relevance for various topics such as world peace, or a global language, and recognize modern truths

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[1] J. E. Esslemont, Baha'u'llah und das Neue Zeitalter, Geneva 1939 (original title: Baha'u'llah and the New Era, London 1923), 189. This comparison can already be found in Suhrawardi's 13th century derwish manual The Awarif ul Ma'arif (Note Editor).

[2] Cf. J. E. Esslemont, I.c., 178ff., 237ff.

[3] Cf. F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], 550; cf. in general the section on *Baha'i ethics as a contributing factor to the development of a global humanity*, in: M. Hutter, I.c., 163-189, cf. also D. MacEoin, Baha'i Faith, in: The Handbook of Living Religions, 486f.

such as the criticism of prejudices; the emphasis on the autonomy of independent research into the truth of religions; the non-contradiction between religion, the separation of religion, and politics; and the principle of equality of people before the law – in particular the equality of women and especially with regard to upbringing and education, as this can be seen as a key prerequisite for equality throughout society. All these aspects demonstrate an intention towards compatibility of ideals.

From a religious studies perspective, the Baha'i faith is an independent religion. It is the most recent in a line of religions of divine revelation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is distinct from these religions – and from those in the East – in its configuration as a religious community. Nevertheless, one central pillar of the Baha'i faith is that there is a core common to all religions, expressed in the revelation of Baha'u'llah in a form appropriate to the current aeon. This ties the Baha'i followers to the preceding religions, and for this reason they read texts of these religions during worship.

The basic conviction of the unity of religions[1] can be observed in this context. As this unity is not established in a selective manner, the Baha'i faith cannot be

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[1] Cf. Stephan A. Towfigh/ Wafa Enayati, Die Baha'i-Religon [The Baha'i Religion], Munich, 5th edition, 2014, 14f.; cf. Vahmann, I.c. 123.

characterized as syncretic in nature.

Instead, it is based on the conviction that the Eternal, the core of a religion, can be distinguished from its social and cultural aspects, and from the visible forms it adopts depending on the era.

In this respect, it is an essence-related perception of the preceding religions, enabling this unifying view, this all-encompassing universalist 'synopsis'. This general perspective makes the Baha'i 'modern', as modern thought tends to perceive religions also in terms of essence.

This essence is usually conveyed as a philosophical abstraction, but is presented in a clear, concrete way in Lessing's parable of the three rings in *Nathan the Wise*, which seeks to demonstrate how the natures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are equal.[1]

The belief in an existential equality between religions connects the Baha'i faith to movements that – while not invoking a new revelation – acknowledge the common basis of all religions. The Sufi Movement is a good example of this.

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[1] Cf. J. Figl, Philosophie der Religionen. Pluralismus und Religionskritik im Kontext europäischen Denkens [The Philosophy of Religions. Pluralism and Criticism of Religion in the Context of European Thought], Paderborn 2012, esp. the chapter: 'Universal-theistische Interpretationen der Religionsvielfalt und Theismuskritik' [Universal theistic interpretations of the plurality of religions and the criticism of theism], 121-140.

Section Two
The universal Unity of Religions -
the Spirituality of the Sufi Movement

1. Sufism in Western Countries

The Significance of the Reception of Sufism in the West

Although it has been largely ignored in academic texts on the new religious circumstances until the end of the 1980s, Sufism has a great significance as a recent religious development. In discussions on so-called 'youth religions', Sufism should have been looked at in much more detail than was actually the case. Khalid Duran summarizes this as follows:

> In the many discussions about youth religions, the Islamic aspect has been completely ignored, despite the wave of conversion in the 1970s and 1980s . . . that can be attributed to this phenomenon.[1]

This low regard may also be due to the perception that people turning to Islam was nothing more than a 'passing

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[1] Cf. D. Khálid, Der Islam in der Diaspora: Europa und Amerika [The Islam Diaspora: Europe and America], in: Werner Ende/ Udo Steinbach, Der Islam in der Gegenwart [Islam in the Present Day], Munich, 2nd edition, 1989, 463-469, citation 463.

fad'.

Sufism was far from a 'passing fad', but it could be that texts on religious studies and Islam paid little attention to Sufism until 1990 because it was labelled a New Age movement.[1] That said, it is precisely because of the reception received by the 'youth religions' that Sufism benefited from much greater public awareness (and not just in the past two decades). The fact that it has a universalist outlook only served to augment its popularity. In addition, this mysticism served as an important bridge between religions for many people in Western cultures within the context of Europe's general increased awareness of Islam, with its spirituality – which served to connect religions – attracting many intellectuals, some of whom also became Muslims.[2]

In addition to this historically far-reaching encounter and the manner in which new religions have been received in recent decades, traditional Sufism was

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[1] Cf. G. Webb, Third-wave Sufism in America and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, in: Jamal Malik/ John Hinnells (Ed.), Sufism in the West, London/New York 2006, 86-102, esp. 86.

[2] Cf. for ex. F. Schuon, Von der inneren Einheit der Religionen [On the Inner Unity of Religions], Interlaken 1981; and in general: M. Rodinson, Europe and the Mystique of Islam, London 1980. An early account documenting this encounter is R. Llull, Das Buch vom Freunde und vom Geliebten [The Book of the Lover and the Beloved], translated and edited by E. Lorenz, Freiburg im Breisgau 1992, cf. esp. 144 (on remembrance of God), I.c. 19ff.

brought by Muslims to Europe and the USA primarily through migration. This is why there are many different Sufi communities in Western countries.[1]

Three Phases of Sufism in the USA and in Europe

Gisela Webb[2] distinguishes three phases in the development of Sufism in the USA. These basic stages can also be broadly applied to Europe, with the development of the Sufi Movement being widely documented here.

The first phase starts around 1900 and is characterized by the interest of American and European citizens in 'Oriental wisdom', which, Webb states, emerged as the result of contact between Europeans and Asians during the colonial period. In this phase, Eastern teachers are exposed to European education and Western culture, and were led to believe they lack spirituality.

Consequently, they feel compelled to bring their own teachings to the West. Webb states that the most well-known teacher of this time is Inayat Khan, who came to the USA in 1910 and married an American woman.

The second wave began in the 1960s and 1970s, when

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[1] Cf. Markus Dressler/ Ron Geaves/ Gritt Klinkhammer (Ed.), Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality, New York 2009.

[2] Cf. G. Webb, Third-wave Sufism in America, I.c. 86-102, esp. 87f.

Sufism – alongside Zen and yoga – attracted large numbers of followers, many of them young. *The Sufi Order of the West*, founded by Inayat Khan's son Pir Vilayat is the most well-known model here.

According to Webb, the third phase of the 1980s and 1990s is primarily characterized by concerns such as peace, communication and globalization. Today, the contributions in a recent publication on Sufism seek to 'investigate the redirection and dynamics of Sufism in the modern era, specifically from the perspective of global cross-cultural exchange'.[1]

Nowadays, all traditional orders (*tariqa*, literally: path) are represented in the USA and Europe, with their members recruited both from Muslims groups who now live or work in Western countries,[2] and from converts who were attracted primarily to Sufism. There were around a dozen Islamic Sufi movements in the 1990s in Germany alone,[3] most of which were Sunni (i.a.

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[1] Jamal Malik/ Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (Ed.), Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World (Studies on Sufism, Vol. 2), Leiden 2019.

[2] A comprehensive overview is provided by Mark Sedgwick in: Western Sufism. From the Abbasids to the New Age, Oxford 2017, esp. in parts III (The Establishment of Sufism in the West, 1910-1933) and IV (The Development of Sufism in the New Age), 135-261.

[3] An earlier, brief overview on Sufism in Germany is provided by Ludwig Schleßmann, Sufismus in Deutschland [Sufism in Germany], in: G. Rischede/ K. Rudolph, Beiträge zur

Naqshbandi, Qadiriyya, Darqawa, Rifa'i, Mevlevi, Burhaniyya), with one Shiite and one Alevi order (e.g. *Ni'matullahiya* and *Bektashi*).

Aside from the traditional Islamic Sufi orders, many authors and movements seek to communicate Sufism to Western people and non-Islamic cultures without the requirement to convert to Islamic beliefs. In the 1980s, Reshad Field,[1] Idries Shah,[2] Irina Tweedie,[3] and Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan were major representatives of various Sufi activities and tendencies. Not taking into account the hidden presence of Sufi orders, at the start of the 1990s the number of European people belonging to Sufi orders was around 10,000.[4] In 2015, there were

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Religion/Umwelt-Forschung II [Contributions on Religion/Environmental Research II] (Geographia Religionum, Vol. 7), Berlin 1989, 143-152, see further bibliographical references on p. 151; Ibid., Sufismus in Deutschland: Deutsche auf dem Weg des mystischen Islam [Sufism in Germany: Germany on the Path of Islamic Mysticism], Vienna et al. 2003; key contributions are also provided by Ina Wunn, Muslimische Gruppierungen in Deutschland: Ein Handbuch. [Muslim Groups in Germany. A Guide.] In collaboration with Hamideh Mohaghegh, Bertram Schmitz, Wolf D. Ahmed Aries, Hilal Al-Fahad et. al., Stuttgart 2007.

[1] I.a. R. Feild, The last Barrier, Harper and Row, 1976.

[2] I.a. I. Shah, The Way of the Sufi Penguin, 1968.

[3] I.a. I. Tweedie, The Chasm of Fire, Interlaken, 1986.

[4] According to Gerdien Jonker, The evolution of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi: Sulaymancis in Germany, in: Jamal Halik/ John Hinnels, Sufism in the West, 7185, 71-85.

just under 10,000 members in Germany alone.[1]

Types of Sufi Orders

As there are many Sufi communities with significant differences in Western countries, Marcia Hermansen proposes that they be differentiated as follows:[2]

The name 'Hybrids' is given to those groups that identify very closely with an Islamic source and content, but which exist in a non-Islamic environment and which combine non-Islamic elements with Sufi elements. Immigrants often play a key role in this.

The name 'Perennials' is given to those Sufi movements which believe there is a single truth underlying all religions. She names Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan and his son Pir Zia Inayat Khan, Frithjof Schuon, and Idries Shah as examples.

Transplants refer to small groups of Muslim migrants hailing from Islamic countries who remain within their

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[1] Based on an estimate of the Religious Studies Media and Information Service (REMID); cf entry on 'Sufism in the West' [German only], in: Wikipedia, : https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufismus#Sufismus_im_Westen (23.05.2019), note 22.

[2] Marcia Hermansen, Literary productions of Western Sufi movements, in: Jamal Halik/ John Hinnels, Sufism in the West, 28-48, esp. 28f., which refers to other typologies for Sufism in the USA, but which also refers in part to European links. Cf. on the typology proposed by Hermansen esp. Julianne Hazen, Sufism in America: The Alami Tariqa of Waterport, New York 2013, 45f.

own community and who do not integrate into the new environment.

While the first and third group continue to base their focus strongly around the convictions of traditional Islam, the second, universalist and perennial movements either distance themselves from the dogmatic, legal concepts or negate them altogether.[1] This means there are two basic approaches of how these Sufi orders relate to Islam.

Community Image in Relation to Islam

As we need firm foundations on which to proceed, it is important to distinguish those groups that profess their support of Islam from those which no longer consider this belief to be essential. For example, many Americans refute 'any 'essential connection of Sufism with the religion of Islam',[2] despite belonging to Sufi movements. One key issue is to determine the extent to which Sufi groups that no longer identify as intrinsically Islamic are still bound to the tenets of traditional Sufism.

In spite of criticism from orthodox Islamic circles, modern Sufis see themselves as heirs to traditional Sufism, especially with regard to their universalist views

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[1] Perennial is used here as a synonym for eternal, pointing to the truth evident in all religions.
[2] G. Webb, Third-wave Sufism in America, I.c. 87.

that go beyond the boundaries of conventional Islam.

This is why it is essential to understand the universal religious ideas of neo-Sufism – as propagated by its most significant representative Inayat Khan – in the historical and substantive context occupied by traditional Sufi orders – without overlooking the existing differences.

To shed light on the differences, it is important first to look briefly at 'Islamic' Sufism as it is understood nowadays, before presenting the focal point of this work, namely the Sufism of Inayat Khan.

2. The Orientation of Traditional Sufi Orders

Today, traditional Sufi orders are restricted to the Islamic community. One needs to be a Muslim in order to become a member of a traditional Sufi order. Idries Shah writes that these orders have 'stabilized their rituals and membership in the present expressly based on Eastern culture and the religion of Islam. Within these orders, only Muslims can be the recipients of Sufism's teachings'.[1]

For this reason, the Islamic articles of faith serve as the basic unshakeable foundations of Sufism[2] and the recognition of Muhammad and the Qur'an is an absolute prerequisite.[3] At the same time, religion as it is usually

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[1] I. Shah, Der glücklichste Mensch. Das große Buch der Sufi-Weisheit [The Happiest Person. The Great Book of Sufi Wisdom], Freiburg im Breisgau. 1986, 104.

[2] Cf. I.c. 250.

[3] However, it should be pointed out the traditional order to which Inayat Khan belonged provides the option of reciting only the first part of the Shahada (the declaration of faith providing 'admission' to Islam), an arrangement highlighted by Shaikh-al-Mashaik Mahmood Khan (1927). As he writes, 'Khwadja Hasan Sani, long leading light of the Nizamiyya (Chistiyya) Order at Nizamuddin, Delhi confirmed that Americans and Europeans seeking initiate admission were only required to repeat the first phrase of the Shahada: 'I testify to the single divinity of God', omitting the second phrase 'and I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of God' as being applicable only to Muslims' (email dated 06.09.2017).

practiced, is considered 'a matter based around external elements'.[1] In this context, reference is made to 'religious vehicle(s)',[2] with the possibility of belonging to multiple orders.[3]

When addressing the Western reception of Sufism, representatives of these orders – who themselves live in the West – emphasize these differences. As an example, Martin Lings points out that 'the majority of Sufis who declare themselves to be followers of Sufism in the Western world and who claim that Sufism is independent of any particular religion and has always existed, are reducing the religion, in a non-academic sense, to a network of domestic channels,' with the revelations inherent to Islam as a tidal wave that leads via these channels all the way back to the source. Sufism, states Ling, acquires its originality in particular through its basis in the Qur'an: 'By relying entirely on a specific revelation, Sufism acquires its full independence from everything outside of that revelation.'[4] The 'universality of Sufism' does not mean that it is 'free from the shackles

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[1] Cf. I. Shah, I.c. 251.
[2] Cf. I.c. 253.
[3] Cf. I.c. 254; cf. also L. Schleßmann, Sufismus in Deutschland [Sufism in Germany], 147.
[4] M. Lings, Was ist Sufistum? [What is Sufism?], Freiburg im Breisgau 1990, 16; cf. also R. W. J. Austin, Preface, in: W. Stoddart, Das Sufitum [Sufism], 1979, 13f.

of religion'.[1]

Instead, it is able to express the originality and universality of Islam.[2] Even though Sufism focuses on the inner meaning of Islam, the fact remains that 'both the teachings and methods of Sufism are based on the Qur'an.'[3]

For a critical look at the syncretic tendencies or the claims of those who strive towards synthesis, we can take as an example Shaikh Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Arabi al-Darqawi, a Sufi at the turn of the 19th century. Al-Darqawi stated that these followers are like someone 'who tries to find water by digging for it a little here and there, dying of thirst in the process.

By contrast, someone who digs in the same place deep enough, who trusts in the Lord and relies on the Lord, will find water, will drink it and will drink and allow others to drink as well'.[4]

The core of Islamic mysticism is currently accepted in full by orthodox Islam, as indicated by statements of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, an important theological center of

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[1] Cf. M. Lings, 17.
[2] Cf. M. Lings, 23.
[3] M. Lings, 37.
[4] Al-Darqawi, Letters of a Sufi-Master, London 1969, 29; cited in M. Lings, Was ist Sufismus? [What is Sufism?], 165. Cf. on the branch of the Moroccan Sufi community Darqawa, which was founded in England in the 1960s/1970s: Sedgwick, I.c. 236ff. and 243f.

Sunni Islam.[1] At the same time, however, orthodox representatives expressly call for solidarity within Islamic law, i.e. the factual affiliation to external Islam. Orthodox Muslims expressly warn against the refutation of Islamic Sufism and the mystical Sufi societies.[2]

In statements such as these, we can see a clear demarcation line for groups that seek to bring about Sufism outside the commitments of Islamic faith and law.

However, these groups have influenced the perception of Sufism in the West, and in some cases have been present in the West for longer than the traditional orders. While Moineddin Chishti, the sheikh who first brought the Chishti Order to India, did not become known to the public until the last few decades of the 20th century, Inayat Khan – who also belonged to this order – had arrived in America as early as 1910 and went to Europe soon afterwards, where he laid the foundations for the Sufi Movement and its off-shoots.

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[1] Cf. R. Caspar, Islamische Mystiker II [Islamic Mystics II] (= CIBEDO texts, no. 19), Frankfurt 1983, 6.

[2] Cf. for ex. Ali Kemal Belviranli, The Principles of Islam, Konya 1983, 3, who opposes those 'who wrongly believe it is possible to separate Islamic Sufism and Islamic Sharia', 3; cf. Ibid. 10.

3. The Life of Inayat Khan (1882-1927)[1]

Legendary aspects of Khan's biography

The Sufi Movement is the result of the work of Inayat Khan[2]. The aims of this movement and its teachings cannot be understood without some knowledge of the life of Inayat Khan. This doesn't mean that we should read his biography exclusively in relation to his work, with the stages of his life in relation to their significance for the message that would emerge later on. Nor should we seek out early indications in the various stages of his life. This can be said for any biography, and especially for a person of religious significance, as their biography is likely to be interpreted on the basis on what they achieved in life and the influence they underwent.

At the same time, however, it cannot be ruled out that Inayat Khan's early biography does not contain any clues pointing to the later emergence of the Sufi Order of the West and Khan's influence. In retrospect, such aspects can be seen as meaningful omens, as indications of that which would follow.

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[1] Khan is a Turkish title, for Inayat Khan used as a surname. He received the honorific Arabic title 'Hazrat', which literally means 'presence'.

[2] Vilayat Inayat Khan, Hazrat Inayat Khan. Biographische Skizze von seinem Sohne [Inayat Khan: a Biographical Sketch by his Son], Zurich 1961 (cited as: Sketch), 78.

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916-2004)[1] reveals a number of these aspects in the biographical sketch he provides of his father. According to his account, 'the family history of Inayat Khan was filled with the wonderful predestination and influence of sages and ascetics near whom the young Inayat Khan grew up and to whom he felt irresistibly drawn'.[2]

He mentions often premonitions and prophetic foreshadowing, e.g. by a wandering Sufi ascetic[3] or a Brahman palm reader in India who predicted that Inayat Khan would 'go West and complete a great quest there'.[4] On top of these visionary elements, a number of noteworthy events arise in (or even prior to) the life of Inayat Khan that have a patently legendary character. His mother, for example, dreamed that 'Christ had come to heal her and she felt as though she was under the protection of the prophets and saints' while expecting

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[1] Inayat Khan is the surname of the children of Inayat Khan (cf. De Jong-Keesing, 294); *Pir* (Persian) means 'senior teacher', and is used as title for the leader of a Sufi order. *Murshid* (Arabic) also means senior teacher and is the highest initiation in Sufism. Students are called *mureed.*

[2] Sketch, 7. Cf. Karin Jironet, The Image of Spiritual Liberty in the Western Sufi Movement Following Hazrat Inayat Khan, Leuven 2002, 17: 'Throughout his Childhood Hazrat Inayat Khan accompanied Maula Bakhsh [...] and to his meetings with Indian sages and mystics.'

[3] Ibid.

[4] l.c. 41.

the birth of her first child, Inayat.[1] He was named in extraordinary circumstances as well: his aunt lay on her deathbed when Inayat Khan was born and said: 'He will be born carrying the ideal for which I will die . . . Name him Inayat after me, meaning divine mercy.'[2] Another event from Inayat Khan's life is reminiscent of the story in the New Testament about the twelve-year-old Jesus at the temple. Inayat, who shared a kinship with the souls of the ascetics and hermits, longed for solitude and at the age of twelve 'left his father's house with the intention of devoting his life to contemplation'. 'However, when the men who had been looking for him told him of the disquiet he had caused in his parents' home, his heart was overwhelmed by compassion for his loved ones to whom he had caused so much suffering, and he returned home.'[3]

According to his biography, Inayat Khan also showed a great openness to other religions from a very early age, uttered ideas demonstrating an exceptional intuition, and proved himself to be 'a little guide among his playmates' by preventing his Muslim companions from throwing stones at Hindu idols,[4] and showing a great interest in Hindu mystics despite being raised as a

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[1] Cf. I.c. 13.
[2] Ibid.
[3] I.c. 18.
[4] I.c. 13f.

Muslim. He also expressed a desire to travel to Europe when he was still a child.[1]

Sufism: Origin, Learning and Encounters

In his bibliographical sketch, Vilayat Inayat Khan refers to a number of autobiographical notes made by his father.[2] Some of these, known as the *Confessions*, are compiled in volume twelve of his works (SM XII 125-163)[3]. From these recollections and other autobiographical notes by Inayat Khan and people close to him (such as the autobiography of his brother Musharaff Moulamia (1895-1967) and the memoirs of Vilayat brother Hidayat (1916-2016)[4] and from extensive

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[1] Cf. Sketch. Ibid.

[2] Cf. I.c. 85: he mentions Hazrat Pir-O-Murshid's 'own autobiographical notes', his 'personal report', his 'diary' and 'journal'.

[3] In the following, the volume and page from Sufi Message (=SM) will be abbreviated in the text and cited in the footnotes. Mahmood Khan critically notes that: 'The 'Confessions' are the literary product of a then well-known British writer, Miriam R. Bloch, deriving much from T'Serclaes's biographical introduction to 'Spiritual Liberty', in turn incorporating confused notions derived from earlier Californian sources' inferences. Musharaff Khan's 'Pages' in its recent German translation as 'Der Zauber Indiens', edited by Karima Sen Gupta (Heilbronn, 2015), now has a vastly corrected version.' (email dated 06.09.2017)

[4] Biographical details are taken primarily from: Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, Elise Guillaume-Schamhart and Munira van Voorst van Beest (Eds.), London and The Hague 1979. This

biographies drawn from his circle of followers, it is possible to compile enough material to document the main stages of development in the life of Inayat Khan in a historically reliable manner.

Hazrat Inayat Khan was born in Baroda, India, on July 5th, 1882 in a period of social reform and a new self-awareness following a failed uprising.[1] The family of his father, Rahmat Khan, came from North-West India and was trained as a singer under the guidance of a Sufi sage. His mother Khadija Bibi was the daughter of Maula Bakhsh, a famous Indian musician. Mauka Bakhsh developed the first Indian form of musical notation and combined the music of the north with the southern Carnatic style. Inayat Khan's family background plays a key role in shaping his strong interest in music. Through

volume describes the two main parts of his life. Also used is the biographical sketch of Inayat Khan by his eldest son Vilayat , as is the book by his brother Musharaff Moulamia Khan, Pages in the Life of a Sufi, The Hague 1982. Reference is also made to the memoirs of his son Hidayat Inayat Khan, Once upon a Time, (Sufi Brotherhood Center Groningen), and the following are used as general resources: S. van Stolk/D. Dunlop, Inayat Khan and his Message of Love, Harmony and Beauty], Rotterdam et al. 1972; Karin Jironet, The Image of Spiritual Liberty, Leuven 2002; Ibid., Sufi Mysticism into the West, Leuven 2009; and Theo van Hoorn, Recollections of Inayat Khan and Western Sufism, 2010. The respective homepages of various groups, esp. Sufipedia, are drawn on for more precise details and the latest developments. https://sufipedia.org/en/kroniek/ (25.05.2019).
[1] Cf. Sketch, 7.

his music and the connections of his grandfather, he came into close contact with the country's aristocratic circles. All sources tell us that Maula Bakhsh had the greatest influence on Inayat Khan as a child, both musically and religiously.

Inayat Khan was part of a family of Sunni Muslims and – as he himself writes – he grew up devoted to the Holy Prophet and loyal to Islam. He never missed one of the five daily obligatory prayers (SM XII 130). Even so, he had doubts about the reality of God. Inayat Khan refers to an experience that left a strong impression on him. One day, he went to his grandfather and said that he no longer wished to pray to a God whom he did not know, as he believed the practice to be irrational. After a brief silence, Maula Bakhsh answered him in a way that reassured him: 'The signs of God can be seen in the world and the world can be seen in you.' As stated in his 'Confessions', these words took root deep in Inayat Khan's soul, and from this moment on his entire life was shaped by the notion of divine imminence (SM XII 131). As part of his spiritual growth, Inayat studied other religions to learn, not to levy criticism against them. He was an admirer and lover of the truth in all its guises (SM XII 132) and as a result, he wrote a dialogue about fate and free will.

His passion for music reached beyond Indian music. His uncle, Allaudin Pathan, had studied at the Royal

Academy of Music in London, had toured several countries throughout Europe and conducted in Baroda a western orchestra. Due to his influence, Inayat Khan also started to wear European clothing.[1]

The death of his grandfather in 1896 had a huge impact on the young Inayat. He was consumed by despair (SM XII 136) and was plagued by questions about life and death[2].

Music became the central pillar of Inayat Khan's life, as music was 'not just a medium through which to achieve human perfection, but was a manifestation of the spirit' (SM XII 136). Inayat Khan believed that as a musician, he had a mission to fulfil. 18 years old, he embarked on this mission, and traveled to the courts of many rajas and maharajas. The Nizam[3] of Hyderabad, Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, was an influential patron. When speaking to the Nizam, Inayat Khan talked about what music meant to him. He said: 'My music is my ability to think, and my ability to think is my ability to feel . . . my music is my

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[1] Cf. I.c. 15f. regarding Allaudin Khan: 'from 1897 onwards he introduced European classical music in new Barodan and Nepali court orchestras, with symphonic Overtures from Gluck to Rossini to Strauss, with ‚Fledermaus' being remembered as ‚Philadelphia' and as special favorite Ivanovici's 'Danube Waves'' (in a letter from Mahmood Khan).

[2] Cf. I.c. 19.

[3] Nizam is the title for a sovereign.

religion' (SM XII 137). He revealed to the Nizam – who, as a mystic, was open to spiritual questions – that sound is the highest source of manifestation and that whoever knows the sound also knows of the secrets of the universe.[1]

In the period between 1907 and 1910, Inayat Khan wrestled with the conflict between his two callings in life, i.e. that of a musician and that of a mystic.[2] An internal struggle led to the following outcome: he would seek to make his living as a musician, but he would do so through lectures that conveyed the spiritual dimension of music.[3] This was also the structure that later would shape his work in the West, at least during the initial phase. People would come and listen to him in his capacity as a musician, while his lectures enabled him to dive into the mystical side by discussing the spiritual dimension of Indian music.

On his journey through India, Inayat Khan visited every mystic he could find. He also went to Nepal, where he met with a number of great spiritual leaders (SM XII 139). The key turning point in his spiritual search was his contact with the Chishti Order. In Ajmer, he visited the grave site of Moinuddin Chishti (approx. 1140–

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[1] Cf. I.c. 24.
[2] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, Köln, 1971, 65.
[3] Cf. Sketch, Wuppertal, 1983, 38.

1236), the great Sufi saint of India. The atmosphere at
the tomb moved Inayat Khan greatly, and when he
recited his night prayer he heard a voice that proved to
be an answer to his entreaties – it was the voice of the
great fakir, who sang that humanity should wake from its
deep sleep, that the night was over and that the sun
would soon rise. This enlightened Inayat Khan as to the
blankness of the world and brought about a great change
within him, ushering in a new chapter of his life (SM II
140). The next day, he met a group of dervishes with their
master at a cemetery. Their chanting left a strong
impression on him. His interest in Sufism continued to
grow stronger, and he was especially drawn to their use
of music as 'food for the soul' (SM XII 147). He imitated
their methods and dedicated several hours to silence
every day. A friend of his interpreted one of Inayat
Khan's dreams in which he saw dervishes singing as a
symbol for his initiation into the Chishti Order of
Sufism. He continued to have experiences with various
Sufi teachers until, after a six-month-long search, he
finally found his master: Seyyed Muhammad Abu
Hashim Madani. When Inayat Khan set eyes on this
teacher, he realized this was the face which had haunted
him continuously during his bouts of silence.[1]

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[1] Cf. Sketch, 26. Later research has shown that the episode at Ajmer
happened *after* his initiation on the Sufi path (note editor).

Madani was born into a prominent family from Medina (hence the name 'Madani') and was – as is indicated by 'Seyyed'- a direct descendant of the Prophet's family. Together with his father, he was a guest at the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and was initiated into the lineage of Chishti Sufis (SM XII 149).[1] By becoming Madani's pupil, Inayat Khan was initiated into the Chishti Order.

In this order, music and poetry play a key role.[2] The path of the Chishti Sufis towards achieving ecstasy involves long nocturnal vigils in which they would sing continuously. One of its basic principles is that God is present in nature, that the leaves on the trees are His language through which He speaks, and that He can never be truly expressed in words. Singing is the primary, though not the only, means to experience the Essential. Initiation itself takes place in nature, within a stone wall on private ground, under a tree, or at the tomb of a saint or holy figure.[3]

Although Inayat Khan was a Chishti, he also studied the ways of other Sufi orders, including the Naqshbandi,

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[1] Cf. I.c. 27.
[2] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 275, note 11. In India, Inayat Khan took poetry lessons. His poetry, aphorisms, and maxims are bundled in his Gayan – Gadan – Nirtan (note editor).
[3] Cf. I.c. 63.

Qadiriyya and Suhrawardiyya.[1]

An intensive spiritual relationship flourished between Madani and Inayat Khan, and the death of his master deeply affected Inayat Khan. In *Confessions*, he wrote that his master had announced his death six months prior to the actual event. He apologized to all of his friends, family, pupils and even his servants, and – sitting upright – lost himself in contemplation of Allah and left his mortal coil (SM XII 150).

For Inayat Khan, the words of Madani, who spoke to him on his deathbed, were of huge significance. The moment that his master blessed him to undertake his mission was unforgettable for Inayat, with Madani stating: 'Go, my child, into the world, harmonize the East and the West with the harmony of thy music; spread the wisdom of Sufism, for thou art gifted by Allah, the most Merciful and Compassionate.' With these words, Madani gave Inayat Khan his *jiazat* (diploma, permission to teach).[2]

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[1] These are three significant, but very different orders: cf. A. Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen [Mystical Dimensions], Köln, 1985, 368ff., 481ff., 514ff.

[2] Abu Hashim Madani spoke those oft quoted but misinterpreted words when, after three years of training. The implication was that he should spread the wisdom of Sufism through the harmony of his music. The 'injunction' so often quoted by Inayat Khan's Western followers does not appear in Inayat Khan's most personal account, the lecture held at Dr. Gruner's request as 'The story of my mystical Life' in June, 1919 (Mahmood Khan, 06.09.2017).

First Stay in the USA (1910-1912)

The decisive turning point in Inayat Khan's quest came on 13 September 1910, when he set sail from Bombay. Inayat Khan himself understood his departure from India as the fulfilment of the duty assigned to him by his murshid (spiritual leader) and his observance of the command of God. His son interpreted his journey to America as 'the start of a global mission'.[1] Inayat Khan saw his duties in the USA as an attempt to establish a balance between his mission (to be a teacher) and his occupation (to be an artist). This path took him to various cities in America as well as several famous universities, where he gave lectures on music and offered performances together with his brothers. In 1910, he had come to America together with his brother Maheboob Khan and his cousin-brother Mohammad Ali Khan. In February 1912, his younger brother, Musharaff Moulamia Khan, joined them.[2]

Inayat Khan believed music to be the fulfilment of his

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[1] I.c. 42; cf. SM XII 151. Back in India, to avoid the impression of being a performer, using his music to earn money, Inayat Khan would deliver a lecture on Indian music and its technical aspects as well as on the spiritual, divine and saintly aspects that had been part of Indian music from the earliest mythological times, after which he would perform his music. (Mahmood Khan, 06. 09. 2017)

[2] Cf. Jironet, Brothers, 7; Sketch, 43f.; cf. also K. Sen Gupta (Ed.), Introduction, in: H. I. Khan, Vom Glück der Harmonie [The Happiness of Harmony], Freiburg/Br. 1979, 16.

mission. Music also brought him into contact with the first of his followers. The musical tour enabled Inayat Khan to gain a foothold in America (cf. SM XII 153). The first person to be initiated was Ada Martin, a woman who attended a lecture by Inayat Khan at the Hindu temple in San Francisco. After a public concert, she thanked him and, like the rest of the attendees, shook his hand.[1] She followed him to Seattle and there was initiated and received the name Rabia, after the famous 8th-century Sufi saint Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya al-Qaysiyya from Basra. Rabia Martin was pivotal in the leadership and organization of the order in 1911 and 1912 (cf. B 126). She had Jewish roots and had already looked for meaning in many religions before meeting Inayat, who offered her the answers she had sought for. The initiation was without a preceding trial period. According to De Jong-Keesing, this was the moment at which Inayat Khan introduced a simplified mysticism, a doctrine of inner progress for laypersons which could be realized in the West within the context of a highly

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[1] Mahmood Khan notes that at a place such as a Hindu temple, Inayat 'naturally would have highlighted these aspects even more.' '[Ada Martin's] interest led to a new – and ultimately permanent – shift of emphasis in his presentation after his period in London from 1914-1920. However, it was Indian classical music and its survival in modern times that continued to be central to his concerns' (email dated 06.09.2017).

materialized world and that could serve as a counterpoint to intellectualism and materialism.[1]

Inayat Khan's brothers Maheboob and Musharaff along with his cousin-brother Mohammed Ali – who all were to lead the Sufi Movement after him – contributed greatly to Inayat Khan's musical activities in America. Together, they formed the core group that would shape the fate of Sufism in the West.[2]

In America, Inayat Khan met his wife, Ora Ray Baker (1892-1949), who became his musical student. Her half-brother, Pierre Arnold Bernard aka 'the Great Oom', was the pioneer of yoga and tantrism in the USA.[3] However, as her legal guardian, he opposed the marriage of his half-sister. Despite many difficulties, Ora eloped and followed Inayat Khan to London.

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 98f.

[2] Cf. I.c. 107.

[3] See Robert Love: The great Oom. Viking, 2010 (note editor).

4. Family, Encounters, and Travels in Europe (1912-1914)

Family

Inayat Khan and his family arrived in London in 1912. His marriage to Ora Ray Baker took place on 20 March 1913 in London, with Ora receiving the Sufi name 'Amina'. From then on, she was addressed by the formal Indian title of 'Amina Begum'.[1] Inayat Khan went to Paris in 1913, where he expected to receive more interest in his music than in London. After a stay in Moscow on invitation, he returned to London in 1914.

On 1 January 1914, Noor-un-Nisa, the eldest daughter of Inayat Khan and Ora Ray Baker, was born in Moscow in a convent close to the Kremlin in Moscow.[2] Later three more children were born in London: Vilayat (19 June 1916), Hidayat (6 August 1917) and Khair-un-Nisa (3 June 1919).[3]

Although Inayat Khan was moving in circles of intellectuals, aristocrats and wealthy individuals, he had

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[1] Cf. I.c. 106f. and 119; Sketch, 46f. 'Ameena (Amina)' means 'trustworthy', while 'Begum' is an honorific given to the spouse of a Sufi master.

[2] See entry 'Noor-un-nisa', in: The Inayati Order, : http://www.pir-zia.org/noor-un-nisa/ (date: 25.05.2019).

[3] Cf. Sketch, 51. Noor-un-Nisa was sentenced as a resistance fighter and imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp in 1944; a plaque commemorating her anti-fascist activities can be found outside the family home in Suresnes (Paris).

very few means himself – as was often the fate of an artist – and sometimes lived in poverty with his wife and his group (B 185).[1]

Encounters and Travels

From 1912 to mid-1914, Inayat Khan encountered many people during his travels and stays in England, France and particularly Russia. He met many famous and prominent individuals. Access to these social circles earned him an invitation from Rabindranath Tagore, who was in England in the summer of 1912, and enabled him to meet Tagore's friends, one of whom was Mahatma Gandhi (B 128).[2] In Paris, he met the composer Debussy and spent a notable evening – dubbed 'the evening of emotion' – with him. According to Pir Vilayat, Debussy ultimately immortalized this evening in his famous *'L'Après-midi d'un Faune'*.[3] In a letter dated 29 April 1913, Debussy referred to Inayat Khan as 'votre remarquable musicien-philosophe'.[4] In Russia, a mureed translated Inayat Khan's work on Sufism titled *The Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* (his first book in English) into

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing 120.
[2] Cf. Sketch, 47.
[3] Cf. I.c. 48. As this piece was composed in 1891-84, this is a hagio-graphic myth (note editor).
[4] According to E. de Jong-Keesing, 121, who uses this title for the chapter 1912 to 1914.

Russian.[1] Later, this book was published in English by the Theosophical Publishing Society (B 137). His biographer, De Jong-Keesing, highlights that this was the first authorized book on Sufism written in a European language.[2]

The stay in Russia (1913/1914) was a great success for Inayat. He met various prominent names of the day, such as Count Ilya Tolstoy, the son of the famous writer Leo Tolstoy. They became friends and worked together on the performance of a piece of music called 'Shiva', which Inayat Khan wrote with 'a Western harmony' (B 137f.). In late June, shortly before the outbreak of World War I (on June 28, 1914), Inayat Khan left Russia with his family as he was to attend a music congress in Paris, at which he was scheduled to play Indian music. During the congress, the delegation from Germany 'was most taken with' his music and invited him to come to Germany, 'but before I made up my mind, the most disastrous war showed itself on the horizon, and we had to pack up and go to England' (B 139). He therefore returned to England with his family.

This signaled the end of another major period in his life.[3]

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[1] Cf. I.c. 125 and 280, note 20.
[2] Cf. I.c. 126.
[3] Cf. I.c. 136. Mahmood Khan writes: 'Until World War I, Inayat Khan had been reasonably well-to-do thanks to the allowances they received from Baroda and their concerts in London. Having

This war also proved to be the end of the fin de siècle culture that Inayat Khan had become familiar with during his travels in Europe – and which was open to Eastern ideas. Looking back at these initial years in the West, Inayat Khan wrote in his biography in 1922:

> [P]erhaps many think that between 1910 und 1915 there was ample time for the Sufi Order to grow and flourish. But it is not so; during the war it was just like wanting to cultivate a desert . . . Therefore, the Sufi order had a difficult time from the beginning of its work until now'. (B 147)

The Establishment of the Sufi Order in Europe (1915-1919)

The First World War led to an enforced suspension of activities, and Inayat Khan had to end his tour of European countries. As a result, he was compelled to

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stopped their allowances in expectation of an imminent return and then having their English contract cancelled caused them real hardship. The establishment of the Sufi Order under the rules of British legal society was intended as a buffer for the unpalatable fact that Inayat Khan found himself dependent on support from his own mureeds and well-wishers. His multiple attempts to return to India in 1917 did not work out, and with an American wife it would have been hard for him to present himself to a disapproving family in Baroda'. (email dated 06. 09. 2017).

work on his own ideas. Up to this point, his tour was the only means to fulfil his mission. His task was to spread the message of universal truth, with the aim of uniting the East and West by propagating the idea of unity – the concept on which Sufism is based (cf. SM XII 153). It was now possible to spread this idea directly, and not only through musical performances. De Jong-Keesing describes the period from 1914 to 1920 as Inayat Khan's journey from musician to murshid[1].

Inayat Khan founded the Sufi Order in London in 1915. The first English pupil was Mary Williams, who came to London to support him. He stated that 'at that time the order was a quite helpless infant'. Another woman, Ms. Goodenough, was pivotal in developing the Order in England. Inayat Khan said of her that she 'stands as a foundation stone for the building of the Order' (B 141). In 1915, Inayat Khan created a *khanqah*[2] in London. In his biography, Inayat Khan refers to the difficulties he encountered in establishing the Order: though it was

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[1] Cf. I.c. 137ff. In actuality, Inayat Khan gave up his music because it wasn't understood as a spiritual path in the West, but as 'alien'(he was the first to introduce Indian classical music in the West) and realized Western students learned through books and lectures (note editor).

[2] Residence of a Sufi teacher. On the significance of the khanqah as a center in traditional Sufism: A. Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen des Islam [The Mystical Dimensions of Islam], Frankfurt 1995, 328f.

founded in 1915, the society was not officially registered until 1917. Many of the details in the statutes emphasize the fact that its members were influenced by Theosophy.[1] The legal entity for his work was called 'The Sufi Order'. For legal reasons, in 1918 a trust was founded and officially confirmed, so 'the Order was legalized and made official' (B 149; certificate of incorporation: B 149).

Inayat Khan established a Sufi publishing group, which published several of his books (e.g. *'The Confessions of Inayat Khan'*, edited by Regina Miriam Bloch) and also the quarterly magazine *'Sufi'*. The ten principal Sufi thoughts and the three aims of Sufism, first published in this magazine in 1918, continue to be a cornerstone of his Sufism today.

Inayat Khan had to deal with a great deal of physical and emotional stress. In July 1919, he was for the first time diagnosed with pneumonia. He also had issues with the English authorities after sending out letters to raise money for Muslim orphans, which led to suspicion and misunderstanding from the government. On top of that, various personal conflicts were so serious that they

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 159f.; 1917: Rules and Regulations of the Sufi Order.

threatened to tear the movement apart.[1]

Inayat Khan was typically self-effacing when addressing the situation: 'Differences among my loving friends threatened our Movement with a break-down, and caused the removal of [our] khanqah to Geneva.' (B 149).

Founding of new Centers (1920-1926)

Fazal Manzil - Site for the Family and Summer Schools

In 1920, Inayat Khan relocated to France, first to the small village of Tremblay and then to Wissous (close to Paris). In 1922, the family moved to a house in Suresnes, a suburb of Paris, which was bought for him in his name by Mrs. P. Egeling, a follower of the movement. Egeling would later become initiated as a murshida and received the name 'Fazal Mai' ('Grace of God'). For the children, this beautiful house with its garden became their new home. Egeling lived with the family and became a grandmother to the children[2]. The house continues to be a spiritual center of the movement and order today. Inayat Khan's eldest son, Pir Vilayat lived at Fazal Manzil in Suresnes until his passing.

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 163, on the conflict with Mary Williams and the Theosophists. Cf. on the tension among the mureeds: Jironet, Liberty, 23.
[2] Cf. Sketch, 55f.

Christened *Fazal Manzil* by Inayat Khan, which means '*House of Blessing*', this house hosted a number of summer schools. After an initial ad-hoc gathering in Wissous in 1921, the first proper summer school was held from mid-June to the end of August 1922.[1] 'The three-month long summer schools began in the Fazal Manzil garden, but then transferred to the spacious grounds across the road, where from 1925 onward a newly-built lecture hall was used'[2].

Organization of the Sufi Movement

Due to a number of difficult experiences (such as the already mentioned major differences in opinion among his followers), Inayat Khan ultimately decided that he needed to reshape his organization. This led to the acknowledgment of three activities (discussed in detail below), essential to Sufism in the West, namely the 'Brotherhood', the 'Esoteric (Inner) School for Initiates' and the 'The Universal Worship Service'. This church-like ceremony was initially set up in 1921 in London, but did not become known to the public until an announcement was made in America in 1923:

> He performed a Universal Worship Service each Sunday, a service he created in 1921 which honors all the major religions by putting their

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[1] Cf. CW 1922 I, Preface XIIf.; cf. CW 1922 II.
[2] Information from Shaik al-Mashaik Mahmood Khan.

scriptures together on the altar and reading from each. It includes lighting candles, reciting prayers, a sermon, and a concluding blessing.

The Universal Worship was not ever publicly announced in Europe, but was advertised in New York in 1923 and again in 1926, presumably because the public there was more open to novelties than in Europe. In 1923 in New York, a Universal Worship Service drew fifty people, possibly the largest congregation up to that time. At one service in 1926, probably January 10th, more than five hundred people' were present.[1]

Sophia Saintsbury-Green, a pupil of Annie Besant, and therefore greatly influenced by Theosophy, played a key role in establishing a 'Church of All', which would later become the 'Universal Worship Service'. Inayat Khan acknowledged her contribution and said: 'She has been the first to help me in founding the Church of All, the religious activity, which was introduced in England by her' (B 152).[2]

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[1] Preface, in: Lectures 1926 II (CM = Complete Works), XIII; Vgl. E. de Jong-Keesing, 146f., and Jironet, Liberty, 23f.

[2] In the biographical sketch of Sophia Saintsbury-Green, it states that the Church of All was founded in London in May 1921. 'Universal worship' was understood 'as an exoteric activity of the Sufi movement'. Saintsbury-Green was ordained as the first 'cheraga' (officiant, light bearer). The Universal worship spread from London to other countries (B 509). Inayat Khan gave lectures for audiences of the Theosophical Society, e.g. in England (B 143),

Next to these three principal pillars of the Sufi Movement, two other activities arose: the Healing Order and Ziraat, which focus on ecological awareness-raising activities.[1] The international headquarters of the Sufi Movement, as it was now known, were officially founded in Geneva in 1923.[2]

Antwerp and Brussels (B 159), as well as at events organized by the Theosophists (cf. B 145). Other followers found the Sufi movement via Theosophy, such as Sirkar van Stolk and Cecil Gibbings; cf. S. van Stolk/ D. Dunlop, 9; cf. C. Gibbings, Gott heilt! [God Heals!], 1987, 48.

When asked, Inayat Khan voiced his criticism on some spiritualist groups and practices, such as clairvoyance and magnetism and believed that 'the Theosophical influence made it more difficult to answer people' (B 189). Shaikh al-Mashaik Mahmood Khan in his email dated 06.09.2017: 'Hazrat long avoided speaking of mysticism more consistently, since among the Theosophical circles of his followers there was no clear distinction from the occultism to which he was opposed. Otherwise, his lectures on religions might have been called 'The unity of mystical Ideals', and prevented an eminent scholar like Professor Carl Ernst from writing [...] that Inayat Khan was the proponent of a universal religion.' He goes on to state: 'In fact, the 'exoteric activities' involved, most prominently 'universal worship' were apanages, whereby Inayat Khan sought to prevent his Theosophical-leaning followers from overwhelming his actual initiatory teachings and his own insights regarding mystical training and its organizational framework. Once they sought to gain access to those central concerns of his as well (in 1925), this, for Inayat, was the end of his endeavors in the West.'

[1] Originally, Ziraat was designed as a secret activity within the Order, modeled after Freemasonry and using agricultural symbols (note editor).

[2] Cf. I.c. 209; Sketch, 58. Cf.: 'In 1923 Inayat Khan revised the organizational structure and called this organization the

A major restructuring process took place in October 1922. Mrs. Goodenough – who previously served as general secretary of the headquarters (cf. B154) – took on the role of secretary of the Esoteric School (*Madar-ul-maham*), and Talawar Dussaq was appointed general secretary (B 166). An international council of the movement convened in 1923, during which a literary committee was founded. This committee would prove decisive in terms of the Movement's international activities. The constitution was also revised and 'our International Movement was incorporated in 1923 for the first time, according to Swiss law' (B 177).

After serving as the organizational basis of the movement in the years prior to the restructuring, the term 'Sufi Order' now was used to for the esoteric school of the Sufi Movement and the Movement became the mother organization. Karin Jironet interprets the restructuring process as follows: 'The Sufi Movement was established in Geneva in October 1923, replacing a former organization called the Sufi Order. The latter was incorporated into the Sufi Movement, becoming one of

'International Headquarters of the Sufi Movement'. From that moment on, the term 'Sufi Order' was used to denominate the inner school (esoteric) activity of the Sufi movement. The 'Order' thus became part of the 'movement''. See entry titled 'Sufi organizations and federations', in: Sufipedia, : https://sufipedia.org/en/soefi-organisaties-en-federatie/.

its five organized activities. As such it was defined as 'The Esoteric School of Inner Culture', known as the Sufi Order within the Sufi Movement.'[1]

Further Travels, Lectures and Talks

The next few years, Inayat Khan established new centers, preserved the Movement's previous central concerns and held lectures and talks.[2] After leaving London in 1920, Inayat Khan traveled to many European countries. He went to Switzerland multiple times (1920, 1922 and 1923), where he toured the major cities of Lausanne, Basel and Zurich along with various other locations. In Geneva, a small group committed to the Movement was formed, and Inayat Khan lectured at the local university. He met Lady Bloomfield, a representative of the Baha'i faith (B 152). The development and expansion of the general secretary position within the Sufi movement was especially important in this city.[3]

In 1921, a mureed organized a round-trip for Inayat Khan in the Netherlands. He gave lectures in various societies, including the Theosophical Society, and their members showed interest in his lectures. He was

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[1] Jironet, Spiritual Liberty, 62 with note 2: Refer to the 'Constitution and Articles of Incorporation of the international headquarters of the Sufi movement'.
[2] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 166ff.
[3] Cf. CM lectures 1922 II, Preface XIIIf.

supported by of Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken, a person of influence who later became the national representative of the Movement for the Netherlands (B 159). In 1921, he was also invited to Belgium and he spoke for the Theosophical Society in Antwerp and Brussels. There an enthusiastic group committed to the Movement was founded. (B 159f.)

Inayat Khan went on a private tour of Germany in 1921, stopping at Berlin, Frankfurt, Weimar, Jena and Munich. The trip was rife with difficulties, as it was poorly organized by a professor (not named by Inayat Khan) 'who was probably acting as a tool of some party opposed to my Movement' or who wished to use him as a 'means of his personal propaganda' (B 166).

Nevertheless, he did manage to have a number of meaningful encounters in these cities. In Weimar, he was warmly received by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, the sister of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: 'In Förster-Nietzsche, the murshid found a kindred spirit,' wrote his son Vilayat.[1] Furthermore, the philosopher Rudolf Christoph Eucken was one of the attendees at a talk in Jena.[2]

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[1] Sketch, 56; cf. also B 160.
[2] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 183. In his biography, he also mentions Hermann von Keyserling, another philosopher who showed a great interest in Oriental thinking and was interested in the fusion of

In 1923, Inayat Khan returned to the USA. This stay was well organized by his first pupil, Rabia Martin (now a Murshida) in San Francisco. When they met again, he called her 'the mother of the Sufi Movement in the United States' (B 209). He initiated hundreds of pupils across all social classes, above all in California.[1] Some of them are mentioned by name in Inayat Khan's biography (cf. B 172f.).

After returning from America, he traveled extensively to countries throughout Europe, initially to the major Swiss cities, before moving on to Italy in spring 1924. There, he met Maria Montessori, with whom he felt a close connection. In Rome, he was impressed by the splendor of the Vatican, the power of the organization and the rituals involved in worship. At the end of a solemn mass – during which he entered a state of ecstasy – he said: 'How wonderful is the might of the living Christ.'[2] With Cardinal Gasparri, the former state secretary of the Vatican, Inayat Khan talked about the concept of wisdom, and his reflections were well received.[3] Inayat Khan's biography also mentions a meeting with the

Eastern and Western thought. Keyserling founded his own School of Wisdom in Darmstadt (B 160, cf. 567).

[1] Cf. I.c. 192ff.

[2] Account by Mahmood Khan. A different version of Inayat Khan's exclamation is set out in the report in the Sketch, 62: 'How wonderful is the might of the church'.

[3] Cf. Sketch, 62,

Pope.[1] During a trip to Scandinavia, Inayat Khan had the chance to listen to a talk by Nathan Söderblom, the Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala and a prominent religious scholar, known for his well-documented desire for the ecumenical unification of the Christian. For Inayat Khan, this was only the first step. In his journal, he noted that Söderblom was also supportive of the next step. He recognized the similarities with – as well as the differences to – Söderblom, stating that they were both seeking the same outcome, but that Söderblom was doing so with Christianity as his preferred vehicle.[2]

The many journeys and tribulations took their toll on Inayat Khan's health. Traveling through England in April 1925, he fell ill. He believed that his illness might be healed in India.

His wife expressed concern when he told her of his intention, and his brother Maheboob convinced him to go to America again rather than to India. He arrived there at the end of 1925 and remained in the USA until early summer 1926.[3] Other reasons for wanting to return to India may have been his financial dependence on wealthy mureeds, and the belief that he had fulfilled his mission to spread the Sufi message in the West.[4]

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[1] Cf. Sketch, 62,
[2] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 211.
[3] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 216ff.
[4] Cf. Jirnet, Brothers, 23f.

Laying the Foundation for the 'Universel'
and Return to India (1926-1927)

13 September 1926 proved to be a decisive day in the life of Inayat Khan and the history of the Sufi Movement. Prior to his departure to India (a decision he had made in the meantime), he wanted to lay the foundation for a temple that he called 'The Universel'.

At the time, the Grand Mosque of Paris was under construction[1], and Inayat Khan decided he would have the Moroccan artists and craftsmen working on it to come to him and ensure that his Sufi temple – to be built in the Sufi Garden owned by the *Societé Anonyme Soufi* – would be an authentic Oriental building. The Universel was intended to be a home for the various forms of spiritual life. This included universal worship, meditation, music, dance and dramatic performances[2].

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[1] This mosque was inaugurated by Ahmed al-Alawi (1869-1934), a Sufi sheikh in 1926 who gave the first community prayer in the newly built Grand Mosque of Paris and who was 'perhaps the most supreme representative of Sufism of his time' (L. Schleßmann, Sufismus in Deutschland [Sufism in Germany], 1989, 144). Its Order is also said to be of significance to Europe: it was part of the Ba 'Alawiyya order, which found its start in France before spreading to other European countries and continuing through to the present day. (see article titled 'Ahmad al-Alawi' on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_al-Alawi (25.05.2019).

[2] Cf. S. van Stolk/D. Dunlop, Inayat Khan und seine Botschaft [Inayat Khan and His Message], 94f. Mahmood Khan has the following to say: 'Inayat hoped for the construction of a Moghul-style 'khanqah' as a meditative and social center for his ever-more widely

The temple was to serve as an ecumenical meeting place for all religions and a symbol of the unity of the world. At the ceremony – which was recorded on film[1]– Inayat Khan named his son Vilayat as head of a new activity, the *Confraternity*, despite him being just ten years old at the time. The ceremony was described as follows by Vilayat:

> A ceremony to mark the groundbreaking of the first temple had been ordered by the murshid down to the last detail. Starting at the hall, the procession moved with great solemnity: the cherags wearing their black robes carried candles; they were preceded by incense bearers and followed by those in yellow robes. The murshid looked as though he was being consumed by an inner fire, yet was as calm as an evening sky. A circle had been drawn in the grass – doubtless by

attended summer schools. The failure to garner much support for this from his rich upper-class mureeds disappointed him greatly. The ceremony on 13 September 1926 thus added insult to injury. The word 'temple' in France is generally used for all religious buildings (notably Protestant), but not Catholic churches; 'Universel' suggests that Theosophical ritualization rather than meditative mysticism and the aid of music flowing from aesthetic to contemplative perception was what really moved his utterly enthusiastic, largely uncomprehending adherents.' (email dated 06.09.2017).

[1] 'Dedication of the Universel, 1926', accessed on the homepage of Sufi Ruhaniat UK under the entry titled 'Hazrat Inayat Khan', https://ruhaniat.org.uk/ruhaniat-international/hazrat-inayat-khan/ (25.05.2019).

a well-meaning mureed – to indicate where the master should stand. Some would never forget the murshid's expression of surprise and his submission as he bowed his head and slowly stepped into the circle – given his familiarity with the psychological and material influence of symbolism. We knew that the die had been cast. There he stood, a cosmic figure. He had a list of all preceding murshids of the Movement . . . placed under a stone and asked the Begum (his wife) to add an engraved silver tray to it. Engraved onto the tray was a script commemorating the construction of the Universel with the aims and ten basic ideas of the order; afterwards, each national representative added a coin from their country to a cement urn under the stone – an omen for the universal character of the Universel temple, which was to be known as the 'temple of all religions".[1]

28 September 1926, Inayat Khan left for India from Venice, heading first to Karachi before making his onward journey via Lahore to Delhi. He visited various holy sites in India and gave two lectures at the University

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[1] Sketch, 71f. Shajera (literally 'tree') is understood to be a visual representation of Silsila, the 'chain' of lore in the traditions of the order.

of Delhi, though only a single attendee became a pupil after his appearances there.[1] In Sikandra, he visited Akbar's tomb, the Mughal emperor who had made a great effort to reconcile the followers of religions, especially Muslims and Hindus. Inayat Khan's last stop was the tomb of Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, the most important site for the Chishti Order. He fell ill in January of the following year, but was able to travel to Baroda, his home city, on 20 January. He went to the home of Maula Bakhsh, which had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair.[2] He returned to Delhi immediately afterwards, where he became gravely ill. Inayat Khan died in Delhi of pneumonia on 5 February 1927 at just 44 years of age. His family had remained behind in Europe, and it was not until a year later that they could pay their respects at his tomb.[3]

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 258ff.

[2] Cf. l.c. 266ff.

[3] Cf. l.c. 296; cf. also the description at the tomb of his father in 'Meditation on the dargah of Hazrat Inayat Khan': Vilayat Inayat Khan, Der Ruf des Derwisch [The Call of the Dervish], Essen 1982, 201-215.

5. Successors of Inayat Khan

The succession of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan for the leadership of the institutions of the Sufi Movement and Sufi Order founded by him cannot be reproduced here in its entirety. This can be found in a detailed, well-researched study by Karin Jironet titled: *'Sufi Mysticism in the West: The Life and Leadership of Hazrat Inayat Khan's Brothers 1927-1967'*[1]. This work is the primary source for the brief overview provided here through to the 1960s.

Maheboob Khan (1927-1948)

Following the unexpected death of Inayat, his brother, Maheboob Khan (1887-1948), who was five years his junior, took over the Sufi Movement during the Summer School in July and August 1927. He served as head of the Sufi Movement until 1948. He took on the title of Shaikh-ul-Mashaik rather than Pir-o-Murshid, as he did not feel equal to his deceased brother.[2]

Of the difficulties and differences in his more than twenty-year term (until 1948), only three are mentioned, and these ultimately led to conflicts and divisions in various areas. One issue was that Rabia Martin (1871-1947), the first person in the West to be initiated by Inayat Khan and his first murshida, believed that she

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[1] Leuven 2009.
[2] Jironet, Brothers, 40f.

would succeed Inayat Khan as the leader of the Sufi Movement. Following Inayat Khan's death, she traveled from America to the Summer School in Suresnes in 1927, and addressed the assembled companions of Inayat – people she had never seen before – as 'my mureeds'. Her claim and her conduct were considered to be baseless and were rejected. She returned to California and continued her Sufi work, independently from Europe.

For family-related reasons, Inayat Khan's wife Ora Ray Baker turned away from the organizational side of the Sufi Movement after his death. By French law, Maheboob was appointed a tutor for the children, but he was only able to do so for a brief time, as Ora rejected this rule imposed on her. As a result, the widow withdrew from the mureeds and all activities of the Sufi Movement and ended contact between her children and their uncle. As a result, their father's brother could no longer provide them with spiritual guidance.[1]

A third problem was the expectation and the claim from Vilayat, who believed he would one day take over the Movement. He had the support of a group of mureeds, including the former secretary of Inayat Khan, Van Stolk. This group opposed Maheboob, leading to a situation that – as summarized by his son Mahmood Khan – the

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[1] I.c. 65.

headquarters in Geneva perceived as follows:

> Vilayat suffered from 'crown prince' delusion [and] chose to side with the opposition. [This move] tarnishes Vilayat's reputation and store of goodwill.[1]

When Mohammed Ali Khan became the head of the Movement after Maheboob died unexpectedly at the age of 61 in July 1948, Vilayat founded his own organization, although he stayed connected to the Movement.

Mohammed Ali Khan (1948-1958)

Immediately after Maheboob's death, Ali Khan was recognized as the new leader of the Movement. A cousin-brother of Inayat Khan's father, he had joined Inayat Khan on his journeys and in his musical performances in the West from the very start. Van Stolk and Vilayat accepted the appointment, but Vilayat nevertheless opted to leave the Movement, writing in a letter on 16 September 1948 that it was he who should follow in the footsteps of his father as the head of the Movement. At the same time, he requested more spiritual training.[2] The tension between Ali Khan and Vilayat increased rather

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[1] Interview 28 August 2001, cited in Jironet, Sufi Mysticism into the West, 68.
[2] I.c. 74.

than diminished. For a number of reasons, it escalated in the mid-1950s. Part of the tension was, in Vilayat's view, Ali Khan's decision to establish a temple in Katwijk, the Netherlands, instead of in Suresnes, as was intended by his father (and who had a groundbreaking ceremony held at this site).[1]

In August 1956, Vilayat issued a declaration to all the mureeds and withdrew his recognition that he had given to Ali Khan in 1948, explaining solemnly that he would take over the position according to the practice of Sufis in the East – a position his father had consigned to him within the succession of the lineage of Sufis (Silsila) – as esoteric head of the Sufi Order, given that it was his father who had founded this order in the West in 1910. He referred to himself as Pir-Zade (meaning 'son' of a Pir-o-Murshid'), a title given to him by his father. He declared any other individual claim to be the head of the Sufi Order founded by his father as illegal.[2]

He referred to the groundbreaking ceremony of 1927, at

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[1] The state expropriation of a large plot of land (for residential construction) played a major role in this. A conflict between the Board of the Société Anonyme Soufie, a French organization founded in the 1920s which organized the annual summer schools and managed the house and land in Suresnes as a shareholder company (with Sirkar van Stolk as chairperson), and the Genevan headquarters led by Ali Khan precented a timely response to the threat of expropriation. Cf. Jironet, I.c. 63ff. and 114ff., titled 'The Suresnes Affair, part 1 and part 2'.
[2] I.c. 118

which Inayat Khan had laid a document detailing the genealogy of the chain of initiation under a stone.[1] Ali Khan and the international headquarters in Geneva rejected this move by Vilayat and declared it to be illegal.[2] This development paved the way for two organizations that would continue the mission of Inayat Khan.

Ali Khan died in 1958. In his testament he stated that he wanted Mahmood Khan (1927), the son of Maheboob – so Ali Khan's nephew – to take over as leader of the Sufi Movement once he had completed his studies. Respecting seniority, Mahmood did not take on the role immediately, instead leaving it to his uncle Musharaff Khan.[3] Karin Jironet notes the following: 'Mahmood was happy to let the leadership devolve by seniority to Musharaff Khan'.[4]

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[1] However, this document only states that Inayat Khan was the most recent successor, and Vilayat was not mentioned. This was determined as the result of an excavation of the site. Cf. Jironet, l.c. 121.

[2] I.c. 127.

[3] Mahmood Khan Youskine informed me of this in his email dated 6 September 2017. As he writes, '[Mahmood], however, the youngest adult of the line, refused to take precedence over his uncle Musharaff Khan and his elder cousin Pirzade Vilayat. From the earliest time, he was always regarded as Shaikh-ul-Mashaik Maheboob Khan's eventual successor, which was confirmed by Maheboob on several private occasions'; cf. De Jong-Keesing's account, 128.

[4] I.c. Jironet, Brothers, 129.; cf. Pir Zia Inayat Khan, A Pearl in Wine: Essays in the Life, Music and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan, New Lebanon 2001, 489.

Musharaff Moulamia Khan (1958-1967)

Musharaff was the youngest brother (b. 1895) of Inayat Khan. He is remembered for his efforts to unite the dissident centers in the Netherlands. His tomb is close to that of Ali Khan in the Oud Eik en Duinen cemetery in The Hague.[1] His death prompted a generational change within the leadership of the Sufi Movement.

Fazal Inayat Khan (1967-1982)

Fazal (1942-1990) served as head of the Sufi Movement for 15 years. In 1966, he was 'invited to take over the flourishing independent center started by Van Tuyll in The Hague'.[2] He was the son of Hidayat, the second son of Inayat Khan, so Inayat Khan's grandson, and by Musharaff's will was to be his successor, contravening the earlier testament of Ali Khan, who had nominated Mahmood Khan as his successor.

Fazal later allowed Mahmood to bear the title of Shaikh-ul-Mashaik and serve as head of the family, which led to the end of the matter regarding the succession.[3] During

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[1] I.c. 169.

[2] This is confirmed in an email from Mahmood Khan.

[3] Jironet, Liberty, 216f.; Cf. Sufipedia: 'From 1967 onward, the title Shaikh-ul-Mashaik (Patriarch of the Seniors) is no longer linked to the Sufi Order, but is the title given to the head of the family dynasty of 'Khans' and 'Mashaiks'. Mahmood Maheboob khan Youskine is the first and current bearer of that title in this form.'

his time as leader a temple was built in the Netherlands. The Universel Murad Hassil in Katwijk opened on 5 July 1970.

Fazal also introduced new practices, primarily of a psychological nature, which were subject to criticism and were not at all in keeping with the views of many older members of the Sufi Movement. Ultimately, Fazal issued a declaration in 1982 – 100 years after the birth of Inayat – establishing an overall leadership that would represent the various activities of the Movement and which would, as he saw it, allow the various initiatory branches (*tariqas*) that could be traced back to Inayat Khan to exist together in the same *silsila*. An obituary for Fazal, who died unexpectedly at the age of 48, states:

> He gave up everything when he was called on to lead the Sufi Movement. He dedicated himself in full to this difficult task and was willing to take a step back when he saw a way to achieve greater unity in the work of the Movement'.[1]

These lines clearly allude to the harmonization of the 'Sufi Movement' and the 'Sufi Order' that has existed since the start of the 1980s, as personified in particular

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https://sufipedia.org/en/soefi-organisaties-en-federatie (25.05.2019).
[1] Cf. the brief obituary in: Sifat 19 (1990), no. 3, 36.

by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan[1]. Despite this reconciliatory development and cooperation, the Sufi Order nevertheless continued to exist as a separate organization from the Sufi Movement.

Joint Leadership (1982-1987)

The leadership council intended to bring about the consolidation of all initiatory lines. The council consisted of: Karimbakhsh Witteveen as General Representative, Hidayat Khan, Shahzadi de Koningh-Khan,[2] Vilayat Inayat Khan, and Mahmood Khan.[3]

This council led the Movement for ten years. One of its main priorities was to bring about the gradual consolidation of the Sufi Order International with the International Sufi Movement and establish them as two branches with a degree of independence within a unified Sufi Movement under the overall leadership of Pir Vilayat. However, Vilayat believed this was a difficult task, as the Movement and the Sufi Order International had different structures and he left after one year. Fazal also left and formed his own order, the *Sufi Way.*

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[1] Cf. O. Eggenberger, Kirchen, Sondergruppen und religiöse Vereinigungen [Churches, Special Groups and Religious Associations], Zurich[5] 1990, 210.

[2] The widow of Musharaff Khan (note editor).

[3] Jironet, Liberty, 219f.; cf. Jironet, Brothers, 169, note 97. Jironet wrongly adds Sharif Graham to this group (note editor).

After ten years of joint leadership, the decision was made to revert to the original leadership structure with a single person at its head. Hidayat was appointed to this position. He had served as Pir-o-Murshid and joint general representative of the International Sufi Message (as it was then known) since 1988.

Hidayat Inayat Khan (1987-2014)

From 1987, Hidayat was the sole leader of the Sufi Movement. He worked hard to establish ties with Sufis from other branches, especially those who were committed to developing the message of Inayat Khan.

This resulted in the founding of 'The Federation of the Sufi Message', whose stated aim was to restore unity. The Federation led to a cooperation with the Sufi Ruhaniat Society, founded by Inayat Khan's American student Murshid Samuel L. Lewis.

In 2009, Hidayat reorganized the organizational structure and established the *Pir-o-Murshid Council*.[1] It became possible for more than one person to exercise the role of general representative and Murshid Hidayat Inayat-Khan served with Murshid Karimbakhsh Witteveen as the general representatives.

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[1] Entry titled 'Pir-o-Murshid Council', in: sufimovement.us www.sufimovement.us/about_pomcouncil.htm (25.05.2019); 'Murshid Hidayat Inayat-Khan', www.sufimovement.us/audio_1.php (25.05.2019).

On 5 July 2016, Murshid Hidayat stepped down as co-general representative. He died three months later, on 12 September, at the age of 100.

Nawab Pasnak and Nuria Sabato (2014-present)

Pir Nawab Pasnak became joint general representative starting in 2014, while Murshida Stefanie Nuria Sabato, who had been a member of the Pir-o-Murshid Council since 2009, took on the role of joint general representative (i.e. president and head).

Nuria remained in this position until 2018 when the Movement opted for a single leadership under Nawab. She studied the world religions in great detail and made pilgrimages, during which she met Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama.[1]

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[1] 'Murshida Stephanie Nuria Sabato', www.sufimovement.us/audio_2.php (25.05.2019).

6. The 'Sufi Order of the West'[1]

Emergence and Organization

Official letters and announcements by the 'Sufi Order' all contain the following text: 'Founded in 1910 by Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan'. Inayat Khan's arrival in America in 1910 is stated as the inception of the order with Inayat Khan as the initiator of those traditions that the Order cites as its foundations. One of its aims is to 'spread the message of unity and awaken the awareness of the Divine in all things and all beings', continuing with 'as was taught by Hazrat Inayat Khan, whose teachings are continued by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan',[2] thus encapsulating the continued development of the ideals of the Order. In its literature, the Sufi Order International (SOI) states that Inayat Khan at during the ceremony for the Universe, announced that his then ten-year-old son Vilayat would be his successor.[3]

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[1] Cf. the informative 1977 account of M. Mildenberger, Dem Einen entgegen. Sufis im Westen [Towards the One. Sufis in the West]; Ibid., Die religiöse Revolte [The Religious Revolt], Frankfurt 1981, 121ff.; and for a more general account cf. H. Baer, Neue Wege zur Transzendenz? [New Paths to Transcendence?], Hamm (around 1987), 29ff.

[2] Cf. the brochure titled 'Sufi-Orden. Ein interreligiöser Weg zu spirituellem Wachstum' [Sufi orders. An Inter-religious Path to Spiritual Growth], Frankfurt am Main [1990], 5 (cited below as SO).

[3] Cf. SO 10. As research has shown and eyewitnesses declared, Vilayat was initiated as head of the Confraternity, not as successor (note editor).

Following the death of Vilayat's father, the Sufi Movement was led by Vilayat's uncles until the above-mentioned succession issues[1] arose. In 1956, Pir Vilayat issued a Declaration stating that he was the rightful successor to his father as the head of the movement. Later, in 1968, Vilayat took the step to found a separate organization, called Sufi Order International (SOI). Vilayat dedicated himself entirely to developing this order and its various branches. Vilayat located the headquarters of the SOI in Suresnes (Paris), from where the coordination with various national branches was organized. Suresnes also served as Vilayat's residence. With his newsletter called 'Keeping in Touch', he maintained a strong bond with his pupils (mureeds) and interested parties.[2]

The SOI has branches in many countries, most of all in North America, Japan, India and Australia. In Europe, the order has a relatively strong presence in Germany, and is active in Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Spain, and Greece. Pir Vilayat led the SOI until his death in 2004. After his

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[1] Mahmood Khan states: 'these difficulties were not so much the cultural ones between the various family members, but rather the shift among the leading followers from the 'leisured' classes to the 'career' classes'. (email dated 06.09.2017).

[2] More than 60 issues were published up to 1991, with 158 being issued in total.

passing, his eldest son Pir Zia Inayat Khan serves as its head. With a background in oriental studies and religious studies, he lives a life of spiritual practice. He is a spiritual teacher with several books attesting to his dedication. He has been the president of the Sufi Order in North America since 2000.[1] In 2002, Pir Zia founded the Suluk Academy, a school for contemplative studies. Its curriculum and programs focus on providing an introduction to Sufi spirituality. The academy is well attended by many mureeds from various branches of Sufism in the United States and Europe.

In 2014, efforts were made to integrate the SOI with the Sufi Movement, but the differences proved to be too great, so the attempt was not successful. However, there were positive advances on many levels and joint activities by all main strands of the Inayati Sufi tradition, such as a series of jointly held events under the umbrella of the Federation (see above), and shared celebrations for the *urs*, the day of remembrance of the death of Inayat Khan at his *dargah* (tomb) in Delhi. Shaikh-al-Mashaik Mahmood's assessment is important here. He states that with the differences arising 'largely on practical technical grounds, with the Movement conventionally European and the SOI predominantly American in method and

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[1] https://inayatiorder.org/pir-zia-inayat-khan/ (25.05.2019); cf. Pir Zia Inayat Khan, A Pearl in Wine, 470.

style, it was decided in 1986 to proceed together as friends and collaborators but organizationally distinct.'[1]

In 2016, Pir Zia renamed the order the *Inayati Order* and soon after opted for the name *Inayatiyya*. Hereby, he ensured the name of his order would refer back to the founder. This is conventional for Eastern Sufi orders. For example, the founder of the Suhrawardiyya Order was the Sufi Abu al-Najib *Suhrawardi*, while the founder of the Qadiriyya Order was Abdul Qadir Jilani. In 2018, the step was taken to add Noor-un- to the lineage (*silsila*) of the Inayatiyya. She is the first woman in this branch of Sufism.

<div align="center">

Noor-un-Nisa
a holy Woman in the Lineage of the Inayatiyya

</div>

Noor-un-Nisa (1914) was the eldest child of Inayat Khan and Ora Ray Baker. As described above, the two sons had key leadership positions within the movement and were therefore part of to the silsila.

In 2018, more than 70 years after she was executed in the concentration camp at Dachau, Noor-un-Nisa was added to the silsila of the Inayatiyya. From a historical perspective, this is a hugely significant development. Up to this point, only men had been named within the tradition of the Chishti Order – an order to which all

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[1] Shaikh-al-Mashaikh Mahmood Khan (email to J. Figl on 06.09.2017).

orders that came forth through Inayat Khan belong. The silsila is a chain of initiators that goes all the way back to 'Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad and through him to the Prophet himself.

In 2018, Pir Zia, the leader of the Inayati Order, made an official statement to add Noor-un-Nisa to the silsila on 5 February (the date of death of his grandfather Inayat Khan). For the occasion, Pir Zia quoted from the play *Aede of the Ocean and Land* – written by Noor as an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* and recently rediscovered – and it 'became clearer [to him] than ever that it is time for our order to truly consider her as a genuine bearer or tradition. I gained enormous inspiration from her writings and even more from her life, which was a true Jataka tale.'[1] In the Jatakas – stories about the previous births of the Buddha – many of the tales revolve around death, martyrs and sacrificing oneself for others. The parallel between these tales and Noor's life is clear, as her short life, especially in its final years, was marked by persecution, and after her imprisonment by the Nazis, torture and death.

When Inayat Khan's father died unexpectedly in India in 1926, Noor-un-Nisa was just 12 years old. The children often had to go without Inayat, as he often was

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[1] Sifat, special issue on Pirzadi-Shahida Noor un-Nisa Inayat Khan, Vol. 46. Issue 2, September 2018, 62.

occupied with service to his mureeds and traveled extensively. However, Noor was able to learn much about his mission when he held classes for children in the garden. These later served as the inspiration behind the 'Twenty Jataka Tales' – a collection of traditional Indian children's stories that she retold as a young woman. The tales were published in a column in *Le Figaro littéraire*. She even considered producing a newspaper for children called 'The New Age', in which her brother Vilayat saw 'an almost prophetic anticipation of the term [New Age] that would later become an essential aspect of the modern era'.[1]

Musical education was an important part of the children's upbringing. All four played an instrument and they would often compose and perform together. On top of her musical and literary aspirations, Noor – being the eldest child – had to look after her younger siblings, for her mother was confined to bed for eleven years due to illness. She was a 'little mother' for her brothers and sister.

A great threat to the family appeared when Hitler's path of destruction resulted in the conquest of neighboring countries. The news of concentration camps made matters even worse. When the German army marched

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[1] Vilayat Khan, Recollections of My Sister Noor-un-nisa, Sifat, I.c. 8.

into France in 1940, the members of the family – with the exception of Hidayat, whose wife was pregnant – decided to flee to England. In an essay about the 'Flight from St. Nazaire', where she had waited for the next ferry, Noor reveals how she felt about the bleak situation:

> Oh God, it was worse than death. Twenty generations passed by like a flash of lightning: Charlemagne, Joan of Arc, Ferdinand Foch . . . how a person's entire life flashes before them when they face death.[1]

The members of the family decided that they had to fight against this murderous regime, despite being firm believers in the principle of non-violence as practiced by Gandhi. Claire, the younger sister, served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the mother worked as a nurse, and Vilayat trained as an officer to serve on a minesweeping vessel in the Royal Navy. He took part in the Allied invasion of Normandy near the end of the war. Noor, who had already worked with the Red Cross in France, enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and trained as a radio operator. At some point, she was recruited and accepted to join the resistance in France as part of the Special Operations Executive, a British Second World War organization. She was

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[1] Noor-un-nisa I. K., On the Flight to England, in: Sifat, I.c. 21.

especially suited to this position as she had been trained as a radio operator spoke French fluently.

She adopted the code name Madeleine and started working as an agent in June 1943. Betrayed by a friend, she was arrested by the Gestapo later that year, interrogated for a month, subjected to torture and then transferred to the town of Pforzheim. After spending nearly a year there, she was deported to Dachau. On 13 September 1944, she and three other female SOE agents, were forced to kneel on the ground in front of the crematorium and then shot in the back of the neck. Her last word is reported as: 'liberté'. The bodies of the executed women were cremated.

A plaque to these resistance fighters against National Socialism was put in place at Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. On the date of her death, a yearly official commemorative service honoring Noor-un-Nisa is held. In 1996, Pir Vilayat conducted there for the first time Bach's Mass in B minor.[1] In 2015, Hidayat Inayat Khan attended the ceremony with his wife Aziza and delivered a speech.[2] The service took place in the on-site

[1] Pir Vilayat said that he listened to Bach's Mass daily to console him after finding our about his sister's death (note editor).
[2] Cf. Angelika Eisenmannn, Erinnerungsarbeit in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau am Beispiel Noor-un-nissa Inayat Khans [Remembrance of Noor-un-Nissa Inayat Khan at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site], Sifat, I.c. 36-40

Carmelite Convent together with representatives of the faith. Thus, a Sufi community commemorated 'a Sufi saint in a Catholic convent', which is seen not only by Sufis as a symbol of 'universal spirituality', but by Catholics as well.[1]

Federation of the Sufi Message (1998–present)

Sufi organizations that follow Inayat Khan and are committed to his message meet and exchange views and visions under the umbrella of the Federation. As of 2019, they include *International Sufi Movement*, *Inayatiyya*, *Sufi Ruhaniat International*, *Sufi Contact*, and *Sufi Way*. The Ruhaniat was the first organization to join the federation in 1998.

Its history stretches back to the earliest period of Sufism in the West, as in 1919, the Jewish American Samuel L. Lewis (1896-1971) met Murshida Rabia Martin in California.

After studying Zen with teachers from Japan (in particular Nyogen Senzaki, who had a zendo, or meditation hall, in Los Angeles),[2] he met Inayat Khan in

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[1] Cf. Tanja Latihifa Mancinelli, Commemoration for Noor-un-Nissa Inayat Khan at the former Dachau concentration camp, in: Sifat, I.c. 41-43, esp. 42.

[2] Cf. Wali Ali Meyer, A Sunrise in the West: Hazrat Inayat Khan's legacy in California, in: A Pearl in Wine. Edited by Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan, New Lebanon 2001, 395-436, esp. 404ff.

1923 and was initiated by him. As the European mureeds rejected her leadership following Inayat Khan's death, Rabia Martin formed her own group in California and sought no further contact with the Sufi Movement. She later became a follower of the Indian guru Meher Baba.

Prior to her death, Martin named Ivy Duce as her successor, passing by her long-term colleague and aid Samuel Lewis. Ivy Duce was a murshida of Inayat Khan's Sufi order in America.

In 1948, she traveled to India and her contact with Meher Baba led him to come to America in 1952. His ideas about Sufism were different to those represented by the organization, newly dubbed 'Sufism Reoriented'. Meher Baba feared that the Sufism propagated in the Western world was not the original, pure version.

He also believed that the symbol of the crescent moon and star inside a heart adorned with wings would be seen as a 'Mohammedan symbol', and Meher Baba recommended using a '1' in its place. Musharaff Khan objected strongly to this change during Baba's visit to the headquarters in San Francisco.[1] In the 1950s and 1960s, Samuel Lewis visited different Asia countries and was initiated as murshid in the Chishti Order (hence his Sufi

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[1] See entry titled 'Reorienting Sufism', in: Sufism Reoriented, : http://www.sufismreoriented.org/reorientingsufism_test.html (Stand: 25.05.2019); cf. Meyer, 418.

name Sufi Ahmed Murad Chishti), the original order to which also Inayat Khan belonged.[1] He was also a teacher of various spiritual traditions (Hindu, Zen Buddhism, esoteric Christianity, Kabbala).

In the 1960s, he had a vision of being appointed the 'spiritual leader of the hippies'. As a result, he introduced the *Dances of Universal Peace* to provide a house of prayer for all peoples. These dances, which take sacred phrases from all the world's religions, have since spread worldwide.'[2]

In 1970, his Sufi order was formally established as the *Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society* (SIRS). In 2002, it was renamed *Sufi Ruhaniat International* (SRI).[3] Samuel Lewis appointed Moineddin Jablonski as his successor. He led the group from 1971 until his death in 2001. Jablonski's successor was Pir Shabda Kahn, who is the current

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[1] Cf. Meyer, 422f.

[2] Cf. following footnote.

[3] Cf. entry titled 'Samuel L. Lewis' in Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_L._Lewis (25.05.2019); cf. entry titled 'Sufi Ruhaniat International' in Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufi_Ruhaniat_International (25.05.2019): 'In 1915, at the age of 18, Samuel Lewis went to the World's Fair in San Francisco. There he became acquainted with Theosophy, which teaches 'All religions are right: they differ on the outside when taken exoterically; they agree on the inside if taken esoterically. All religions are from God. There are seven planes of existence: the lower ones experienced in life after life [and] the higher ones only by sages and the illumined.'

spiritual director of the Sufi Ruhaniat. Pir Shabda was initiated as a shaikh by Vilayat Khan in 1977 and as a murshid by Hidayat Khan in 1997.

Below, we'll offer a short description of other members of the Federation. As described above, Fazal led the Sufi Movement from 1967, during which time the Movement adopted new approaches and updated its practices to reflect contemporary society. Fazal stepped down in 1982 and founded the *Sufi Way* in 1985.[1] The Sufi Way positions itself as the direct continuation of the 'Inner School' founded by Inayat Khan in 1921. Following Fazal's death in 1990 at the age of 48, he was followed by the first female leader of the order, *Pir-o-Murshida Sitara Brutnell*. When she died in 2004, *Pir-o-Murshid Elias Amidon* took over as leader. He continues to serve in this position today.

In the 1960s, another faction was formed as a split from the Movement or the SOI. Called '*Soefi Contact*', the organization was officially founded in 1974. From the start, its home base has been in Haarlem.[2] Sufi Contact was headed by Gawery Voûte from 1974–1999, and since then has been overseen by a board, now chaired by J.K. Troelstra.

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[1] Cf. Open Path/ Sufi Way, https://www.sufiway.org/about-us/our-lineage (25.05.2019).

[2] Sufipedia, https://sufipedia.org/en/soefi-organisaties-en-feder-atie/ (date 25.05.2019).

The *Fraternity of Light* was founded by *Sufi Shirdil Amin Richard Macko* in 1978. Macko was initiated by Pir Vilayat as a spiritual teacher within the Sufi Order in 1974. A vision the following year of a 'spirituality in everyday life' led Macko to withdraw from active participation in the Sufi Order and put on various seminars and retreats focusing on the topic of everyday spirituality, with the underlying idea being that 'it's all God – nothing else exists'.

His approach is heavily based around monotheistic Indian traditions (such as raja yoga) and Islamic traditions, principally the message spread by Inayat Khan. He founded the Universal Church of the Prophets in the state of Ohio (USA) in 1980,[1] clearly demonstrating the common ground that this movement shares with the traditions of Western Sufism as propagated by Inayat Khan. This branch has the same underlying spiritual goals as those of Sufi Order International. The current spiritual director of the Sufi Way is Pir Moinuddin Christopher Clarke.[2]

In addition to the Sufi organizations mentioned here, there are (especially in the Netherlands) other groups

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[1] Entry titled 'Founder', in: Fraternity of Light, : https://fraternityoflight.org/founder (date 25.05.2019).
[2] Entry titled 'Fraternity of Light', in: The Federation of the Sufi Message, : http://federationsufimessage.org/fraternity-of-light/ (25.05.2019).

that adhere to the message of Inayat Khan and which were separate to the Sufi Movement for some time before being accepted back into the fold.

One of these groups was founded by Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken (Sheikh Sirdar) and his wife Saida Willebeek LeMair, who in 1929 recognized the appointment of Maheboob Khan as the leader of the Movement for externally focused activities, but not as head of the Esoteric School. The baron founded an independent organization with as home base the Anna Paulownastraat in The Hague.

It was the second Sufi center in the city, next to the Movement's own base. Van Tuyll offered all the activities relevant to the Esoteric School. Following his death in 1958, his wife took over until 1966.[1]

The group has had ties to the Sufi Movement since the 1960s, leading to a complete unification in 2007 and the consolidation of the two centers in The Hague into a single one after decades of separate existence.

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[1] Cf. Jironet, Liberty 278, Brothers,63

7. The published Works of Inayat Khan

From the start of the movement, Inayat Kha n's followers believed it important to preserve his words. His talks to his students were recorded in shorthand and published initially in books and brochures, in articles in various periodicals, and especially in journals published by the movement during the inter-war period. As stated above, one self-published work titled 'Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty' appeared for the first time in 1913.[1]

Starting 1960, a comprehensive edition of his writing was published with the title 'The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan' in twelve volumes in London (Barrie and Rockliff, Barrie Books Ltd.), overseen by the international headquarters of the Sufi movement. With a text volume (Vol. XIII) and an index (1990), the Sufi Message is a collection of fourteen volumes in total. In addition, a series of individual works and collections of aphorisms were published, primarily in English but also in other languages.

Starting in 1982, the 'Complete Works of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan' were published. These editions publish his lectures and speeches in chronological order from 1913 to 1926. Prior to this in 1979, an independent volume

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[1] Cf. I. v. Wedemeyer, Preface, in: H. I. Khan, Perlen aus dem un-sichtbaren Ozean I [Pearls from the Ocean Unseen I], 12; this se-lection is cited in abbreviated form as P I.

in the series was published that contains Inayat Khan's autobiography, photos and information about his companions and pupils. A second edition was published in 1989.

The Complete Works are based on the archives in Suresnes, Paris. The Nekbakht Foundation manages these archive and functions as publisher for the Complete Works. This organization is independent of any Sufi organization and was created to serve all the Inayati organizations as well as academics and mureeds.[1]

> A large number of lectures having been recorded in a shorthand that is no longer in use, hence calling for the re-training of collaborators, alongside laborious comparison of extant versions. This explains the delays and unsystematic publication of data as part of an enterprise that today may be regarded as the most important work in Inayat's Sufism . . . The chronological 'Complete Works' have been planned as a tool for advanced study and research purposes rather than for a general readership. Hence, the original idea of a Pallandt Edition format was abandoned in favor of fewer massive volumes, with each containing half a year (with three volumes for 1926). These cover the

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[1] Information from Shaikh al-Mashaik Mahmood Inayat Khan via email.

'classical' Suresnes period. From 1913 to 1921 far fewer, albeit still significant, materials remain, so the likelihood is that some 15 volumes may be expected in all.'[1]

With these Complete Works, an excellent critical edition is available, offering a precise overview of the history of Sufism in the West based on the archives – Inayat Khan's notebook, and the stenographic records of up to 20 mureeds. It also documents the variations in comparison to earlier editions.

As this edition has not yet been published in full, the current study – which addresses the entire life's work of Inayat Khan – refers to the 'Sufi Message', as it contains the most comprehensive edition of the assertions and writings of the great Sufi master in the West so far, as well as to the available volumes in the 'Complete Works'. 'The Sufi Message' is, as explained, not a critical edition in the strictest sense, nor are the texts ordered chronologically, but thematically. For example, volume I serves as an introduction to Sufism or as a portrayal of the mystical concept and understanding of Sufism according to Inayat Khan (SM I 8). Volume II contains his teachings on sound and music; volume III addresses

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[1] Communication from MK (Mahmood Khan).
See www.nekbakhtfoundation.org for on overview of all published volumes.

human relationships (upbringing, love, character building, ethics); volume IV focuses on the health and psychophysical interrelations between the body and spirit (balance); volume VI is relatively cohesive, looking at 'The Alchemy of Happiness'; volume IX focuses on 'The Unity of Religious Ideals'.

The other volumes are more collections of various texts from different years. Overall, this edition can be seen as an attempt to provide interested persons with a relatively complete overview of Inayat Khan's writings, lectures and literary estate. Corrections to the first editions of some works are expressly made if, for example, they appeared under the name of one of his collaborators.[1] This allows for a proper, well-founded discussion of his ideas and intentions from the perspective of religious studies and religious philosophy.

As so much has been published, the Sufi teachings are not kept strictly secret – as Inayat Khan himself wished for at one point (SM I 51). Of course, there is a dimension to conveying Sufi spirituality that cannot be made available to everyone in the same way. It is, as it were, 'secret' due to the nature of the matter itself, and can only be experienced by the mureed (student) initiated by the murshid (teacher) (SM I 50f.).

The question is if there is a uniformity, an overarching

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[1] Cf. for ex. SM V 7, Preface.

idea to the various texts with their varying topics. A certain chronological cohesiveness is evident in the work of Inayat Khan from 1910 to 1926, though it is also possible to see how his thoughts developed and how he sought to formulate them over the years.

In terms of content, there are indeed many issues at hand, but there is no denying that they all have one underlying concern: the proclamation of a form of religiosity based on Sufism, a spiritual path that encapsulates the essential aspects, or 'inner essence', of religion. Inayat Khan used many different terms and forms of imagery to explain. A key name is 'religion of the heart'. The focus is on opening one's heart to God, so that human beings can realize God in His innermost form. This is why the emblem of the movement and of the Sufi Order is a heart with wings, with a star and a crescent moon at its center. This underlying idea of an 'inner religion' that is both behind and beyond all (external) religions should be emphasized here in particular.

8. A dual Concept of Religion

If we want to understand Inayat Khan's statements about the type of Sufism he taught and the relationship to traditional religions, we need to consider the distinction between two basic meanings in his concept of religion. One meaning of 'religion' is that it encompasses religions in the conventional sense, e.g. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism etc., while the second meaning aims towards a new, inner meaning of the term which – in relation to the religions stated in all their diversity – encompasses the dimension of a single, comprehensive religion that is ultimately always the same.

It is important to consider this differentiation when answering the question as to whether Sufism is a religion, as the answer can only be understood if the concept is considered from two different perspectives. An important text on this subject states:

> Is Sufism a religion? . . . The religion of the Sufis is not separate from the religions of the world. The people have fought in vain against one another due to the names and ways of their saviors, and they have named their religions after their saviors instead of uniting under the banner of the truth that is taught. This truth can be found in all religions . . . even if Sufism cannot be classified as a religion as such. It contains a

religion, but it is not a religion in itself. If a person wishes to learn of religion through Sufism, then Sufism is religion. However, it goes beyond the confines of religion – it is about the light, the nourishment of every soul, that elevates a mortal to the immortal plain. (P I 64f.)

Sufism is therefore both religion and not religion. It is a religion in the sense that it can lead to the experience of religiosity in religions, and as it can be found in all religions. However, it is also not religion in the conventional sense, as it eclipses the boundaries of religion (SM I 53; I 13). The idea that it transcends concrete religions is perhaps the most essential one, as it summarizes the path and the message of Inayat Khan. Of course, this does not contradict the thesis that this 'beyond' the religions can be found 'in' the religions as their essence and center – thus making it the essential religion.

For studying Inayat Khan, it is important to distinguish between the elements of his dual concept of religion: on the one hand, it means those religions (plural) in the conventional sense whose historical form is known to us, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, et cetera. On the other hand it is the religion of the heart (SM IX 19) or the inner religion. The latter form of religiosity characterizes his work as a

whole, his organizational work and his personal beliefs. What characterizes the religions that are known to us? How do they distinguish themselves? What qualities do they have? This has to be determined first, before we can look at the other form of religion, even though Inayat Khan's perspective on traditional religions is decisively mystical and spiritual in nature. For him, the major religions only differ in terms of form. The essential truth is derived from this form, and though this essential truth is a single one, there are varying aspects to it (SM V 15). This difference is reflected in the diversity of religions. Inayat Khan uses an image to demonstrate this. He states that the religions differ from one another in form as water. While the element is always the same and has no fixed shape, it can take on any form when poured into a jug or a vessel. Its name can also change: it can be a river, a lake, a stream, a torrent or a pond.

In various texts,[1] Inayat Khan distinguishes between five aspects of religion in the conventional sense, with the first four concerning the external form and the fifth its internal meaning. The latter should be seen as separate from the first four. These aspects are as follows:

The first aspect refers to dogmas, statutes and teachings, i.e. the dimension of a religion set down in writing. The

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[1] Cf. esp. SM IX 21ff.; H. I. Khan, Das Erwachen des menschlichen Geistes [The Awakening of the Human Spirit], Essen 1982, 100ff.

second to the church and its form of service. There are always many differences to this aspect, and Inayat Khan states that they depend on the temperament, intentions, traditions, customs, and beliefs of a people, inherited from their ancestors. Here, he is against uniformity, as standardization is not an interesting way to live. For instance, not all houses are built in the same style.

The third aspect is the religious ideal. This is something that cannot be discussed and for which there is no agreement. It cannot be compared or rendered conceivable. It would be a waste of time if representatives of a religion were to discuss it or seek to prove that one is better than the rest, because this is a matter of the heart. The religious ideal is an individual, personal relationship.

The fourth aspect is characterized by the God-ideal. In previous times, every church, every community, had its own God. In fact, it was believed there was a special God for every person on earth.

The fifth aspect refers to the vital essence of the soul. This vital essence is in a one's heart, and when it is no longer there, one 'dies'. Life can be found in religion, and this religion is the true religion: 'It is the religion that was the religion of the past and that will be the religion of the future'. (SM IX 24) It is, in other words, the religion of the Sufis.

The traditional religions have a dimension that is essen-

tial for the religiosity of Sufism and also for the traditional religions themselves. This enables an inner connection between mystic piety and orthodox understanding of the religious tradition. It paves the way for the continuation of a traditional understanding of faith, as that essential element is assumed to be a dimension of human beings per se, not just in religions, but in all extra-religious and non-religious belief systems, thus enabling the boundaries of all religions to be transcended.

Unity in the Plurality of Religions

A key summary of Inayat Khan's observations on religion can be found in the writings in volume IX of the 'Sufi Message', and bears the revealing title of 'The Unity of Religious Ideals'. The first sentence of the foreword could serve as the motto for all of Inayat Khan's statements about religion: 'All religions are essentially one.' (SM IX 5) The first lecture seeks to clarify the concept of unity by demonstrating how it differs from the concept of uniformity. He states that much confusion arises when these two terms are seen as synonymous. By making this distinction, Inayat Khan shows how he differentiates between the inner core of a religion and its external appearance. Unity means the inner nature of every soul and refers to the goal we strive for in life. For Inayat Khan, uniformity serves to achieve

this goal. It is the means with which to fulfil this purpose. However, these means often obscure the goal. As an example, Inayat Khan highlights that unity in its original sense, which has facilitated the spiritual progress of people in all religions, has gradually developed into a form of community or nationality, leading to religious differences and endless wars (SM IX 11f.). According to Inayat Khan this shows the childish character of human nature. He rejects the notion of a 'holy war', which for him is 'a most curious' idea (SM IX 21).

The basic notion that the Divine can be found in all religions, serves as the basis for interpreting the unity of religions and their message. For Inayat Khan, this 'message of unity' is also the 'central truth' in the holy writings of the Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Hindus, and Buddhists. But as people are chained to the external form of these writings, they forget the internal meaning. Anyone who can recognize this 'inner voice' would also be able to see 'that all these writings contain words spoken by one and the same voice' (SM IX 12). As an example of this unity in all religions, he looks beyond the Qur'an to the Vedanta, which expresses the unity of everything, and to the Bible, which states that we exist within God, that He is that in which we live and move and have our being. This unity is explored in more detail in the history of revelation.

The Unity of Revelations

Inayat Khan's understanding of revelation corresponds to his universalistic understanding of religion. We cannot overlook the characteristic Muslim roots here, particularly the view that since Adam there have been many divine revelations of God, such as to Abraham, Jesus and finally to Mohammed. The revelation is a 'gradual' process (P I 41).

Inayat Khan doesn't accept the Islamic belief that this revelation is complete and that Mohammed is the Seal of the Prophets in its literal sense, but he does state that 'Muhammad delivered the final message' (P I 41) by revealing with great clarity that there is nothing but God. In this regard, he also refers to the 'final message' (P I 42) and how the need for further prophets ended with Mohammed (SM I 33).

Again, the Islamic roots are clear here, as the Qur'an assumes a chain of revelatory figures from Adam to the time of Muhammad (SM I 34), but these roots are put in perspective by the overall intentions of Neo-Sufism, with 'Islam' interpreted as 'peace' in a spiritual sense[1] – a peace that leads to the 'perfection of the ideal of God' asserted by Muhammad (P I 42; 68).

According to Inayat Khan, Muhammad has a special

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[1] Both Arabic words *salam* (peace) and *islam* are derived from same root *slm*, meaning surrendering (note editor).

significance in the history of revelations, although this doesn't mean he is the definitive or exclusive source of revelation. His relevance is visible in comparison with other prophets, who, in Inayat Khan's view, have all proclaimed one and the same revelation.

According to him, the outer form of the revelation of God has changed over time and was proclaimed in different ways, sometimes calmly and discretely, sometimes in a loud voice. In each case, however, it always came forth from an inner knowledge of life and a divine blessing.

For Inayat Khan, this continuous revelation can be found in all specific religions and within humanity as a whole, although it is often hidden. This way, he defends himself against those who close their eyes to this inner truth and who, by adhering to the old forms, paralyze the message and reject the current tide through which this revelation is disseminated (SM IX 16).

Inayat Khan sees the universality in the individual messages. Regardless of the period in which they were spread, these messages were always an attempt to be a single message for all people, not for a certain section of humanity. The organized churches, Inayat Khan states, did not appear until later (SM IX 18).

Based on the notion that all founders of religions and prophets declared only one single message, this organically leads to the mystical view that there is only

one teacher, namely God, who has made Himself heard through the various messengers that have appeared in the history of humanity. There have been countless prophets since the creation of the world, appearing under different names and in different guises and God was present in all of them – God, the master of eternity (P I 19).

Inayat Khan expresses this conviction in various ways. The great teachers each were there for a limited number of people at a certain time and did not think their message was complete, but were open for the next teacher, whose arrival they prophesized. Inayat Khan assumes that every cycle of history has its own prophets and that there have been countless masters since the dawn of time.[1] The diversity of the messengers does not indicate different messages, but rather shows that it was necessary to correct the way in which the message before it had been degraded and, according to the general level of awareness of the era in question,

> to revive the same truth taught by the previous masters but which had disappeared from memory. It was not their own personal message that they brought; it was a divine message' (P I 20).

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[1] Cf. SM I 31; cf. a similar understanding of revelation within the framework of cycles in the Baha'i Faith.

While there were many messengers, they all carried the same underlying message, that of the one true God: 'in truth [there is] only one religion and one master, and that is the one God' (P I 20). It is the same spirit of God that manifests itself in everyone. He speaks through various people across time and in different bodily forms, and these masters are one in spirit. This spiritual dimension is found in Krishna and in Jesus, so one shouldn't hold the one in higher regard than the other (SM I 31).

The Image and the Realization of God

Just as the messages of the individual religions refers to a single common message, the different ways that God is represented are understood in relation to the one true reality of the absolute. However, the issue of God is not an 'idea' that is detached from humanity. It is the reality of God in the sense that this reality is a building block for the realization of humanity. Indeed, Inayat Khan believes the primary concern is to provide guidance for the realization of God, for the 'actualization' of God in our daily lives.[1] Although the focus is not on emphasizing specific statements about the reality of God, there is certainly a very clear idea of what God is: the innermost essence of humanity and being, without becoming weighed down by empirical facts. We have to harmonize

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 148; 231.

our innermost being with God in such a way that 'He is able to see, hear and think through us' and that 'our existence is a ray of His light' (SM IX 13). Humanity's task is to 'realize the nature of God' (SM IX 14). From this starting point, it is natural to seek out God in all things. The individual concepts of God are related to this ultimate reality in and above everything else.

Inayat Khan makes no final judgement with regard to the variability of names and terms. He can recognize them all within their limits: both the personal image of God and the impersonal; both the Hindu belief that there is no existence except that which is provided by the Divine (Advaita); and the personal God of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims (SM IX 89ff.; 257).

Inayat Khan believes that both the pantheistic and the monotheistic concepts of God are important. Indeed, it is essential that these two opposing ideas exist (SM IX 276). Ultimately, he not only recognizes the general differences between the ideas of the Divine in Eastern and Western religions, but he tolerates any concept of God, including the insight that every individual creates their own image of God in life (SM IX 24). For Inayat Khan, a particularly suitable name for God is the 'Only Being' or the 'One' (SM IX 89; 276). 'The God of the Sufis is the only being

that exists' (P I 23).[1]

Inayat Khan sums up this universal outlook succinctly in an explanation of the first of the ten Sufi ideals ('there is One God, the Eternal, the Only Being; none exists save God'). Therefore, the God of the Sufis is the God of every faith and the God of all people.[2] Names make no difference to Him. Whether He is called Allah, God, Dieu, Brahma, or Bhagwan, Inayat Khan believes Him to be the one God who goes 'beyond the limitations of a name'.

Inayat Khan sees his God in the sun, in fire, in images venerated by different sects, yet he recognizes God is beyond all forms (SM I 13). He sees God as the parent of the entire world, not merely of a single religious community or sect (SM IX 17). Inayat Khan even goes so far as to say that he also includes the atheists and non-believers whose open-mindedness he admires at times more than some of the believers in the West in their ivory towers:[3]

> Some people believe in one God, others believe in

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[1] This is Ibn 'Arabi's mystical interpretation of the first part of the Islamic creed. For him *la ilaha illa'llah* (there is no god but God), means 'only God exists', which brings him very close to the monism of Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara (note editor).
[2] Cf. P I 23: 'There is no God of a particular people who would not also be God of [Sufism] [...].'
[3] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 148.

several Gods and yet others do not believe in the existence of a God at all. In all of these beliefs, however, the mystic recognizes the same truth because he can look at it from different points of view. (P I46)

For enlightened souls, differences in words used by different religions and philosophies are 'of no relevance' (P I 46). Ultimately, these ideas have only a preparatory function for the task of being human: to serve as a gateway to experience the reality of God, an experience which can be found in the heart. In this mystical journey, the path takes one from images of God to the realization of God as He actually exists (SM IX 24).

Sufism – a Religion beyond Religions

Inayat Khan's Sufism can be interpreted from his views on revelation from the various masters through history, and from the Absolute in the various images of God. The focus is ultimately on the single overarching revelation that can be found behind the historical prophets. Sufism provides a religious perspective that allows one to experience the Divine beyond the restrictive forms of historical religions. Viewed thus, Sufism is the final, immaterial goal of all religions and seeks to realize their essence. As such, it is the essence of all religions. At the same time, it is beyond the boundaries of any specific

religion and in this sense is not a religion at all:

> Sufism is not a religion, as it transcends the limitations of the different religions in the world (P I 22).

It cannot be called a religion as such, as it is free from principles, distinctions and differences (SM IX 256). In this sense, a Sufi is a free thinker (SM I 16). Sufism is 'neither a religion nor a philosophy, neither theism nor atheism; it exists between the two and bridges the gap' (SM V 22).

The concept of 'religion' and any fixed idea for self-designation can therefore be dispensed with, as anyone seeking the absolute truth is a Sufi, whether they identify themselves as such or not. Sufism can be described as 'a change of one's spiritual horizon in life' (P I 22), or as a state of mind corresponding to a certain view or perspective on life.[1]

If Sufis have a religion, then 'their religion is love' (P I 23), and in exploring this intention they seek to reconcile and unify the religions. Church, temple or Ka'ba, Qur'an, or Bible: the Sufi can tolerate all of these and more, as his religion consists of love alone. This is how Inayat Khan describes Sufism through Abul Ala (SM V 18; I 17) – a description almost identical to that

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[1] Cf. I.c 300; SM IX 278.

of Ibn Arabi.[1]

It is not a question of a belief limited by dogmas, but of the ability to believe in people in terms of the ultimate goal. It is no coincidence that Inayat Khan starts the first lecture about religion at the beginning of the ninth volume of his collected works with a citation from the Prophet Muhammad, stating that every human being is born a believer.[2] This emphasizes the notion that the originality of pure faith surpasses the individual religious beliefs derived from this pure faith. The derived faith is secondary and is the result of a limited education and restrictive culture.

Looking at the distinction between the two forms, it can be said that human beings would not have learned

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[1] Ibn Arabi spoke of a religiosity that transcends religions in the following famous verses: '*My heart can take on any form: A meadow for gazelles, a cloister for monks, for the idols sacred ground, Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim, the tables of the Torah, the scrolls of the Qur'an: My creed is love, wherever its caravan turns along the way.*'
Ibn Arabi, The Tarjuman al-ashwaq, A Collection of Mystical Odes, repr. London 1978, edited and translated by R. A. Nicholson, London 1911, no. 11, lines 13-15; cited in A. Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen [Mystical Dimensions], 384.

[2] The *Hadith* (oral tradition) of the Prophet handed down outside the Qur'an and interpreted by the great mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (Das Elixier der Glückseligkeit [The Alchemy of Happiness], Cologne³ 1984, 55) states: 'Every infant is born according to the fitrah, then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian', with the fitrah taken to mean the true religion (Islam); cf. the translation titled 'Die unveränderliche Religion' [The Immutable Religion], in: É. Dermenghem, Mohammed, Reinbek (Hamburg) 1980, 115.

language without a basic, underlying belief (SM IX 15).

This trust in the concrete forms of appropriation, this basic faith in an adherence to any specific beliefs seems to be Inayat Khan's central concern, and is what characterizes his understanding of religion and the individual religions.

With this in mind, it is clear that Inayat Khan does not seek to establish a new religion. Instead, as he states, he wishes only to follow the religion that always was and always will be (SM IX 270). He refers to the words of Jesus, who stated that he did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.[1] Inayat Khan has no intention of imposing a new law, but seeks to fulfil the one that has always been here. For these reasons, the distinction between an emergent religion, a past one and a present one applies only to those who divide the truth – the one truth – into many (SM IX 21).

If a new religion is ever to appear, it will be the religion of the heart, the one and only religion that is vital and that always existed (SM IX 25). A future world religion is the same that has existed since the dawn of humankind. According to Inayat Khan, this religion was expressed primarily without words through limited, generic terms, so it comes as little surprise when he states that he believes music to be the shortest route to God when

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[1] Mt. 5:17.

referring to a future world religion.[1]

Inayat Khan did not intend to spread an entirely new message, and he saw his intentions different from the missionary movements of Hindu origin, such as the Vedanta Society.[2]

For Inayat Khan, Sufism is the continuation of the same ancient religion that has always been there, in all teachings and in all writings. The aim of the Sufi Movement is to unify them all. This goal provides the Movement with a theoretical and practical framework. From an organizational perspective, this can be seen as Inayat Khan's life's work.

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[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 150f.

[2] Cf. I.c. 150f.; however, the similarities shared with such movements are greater than the differences; his son also refers to the 'mission' of his father (see above); cf. in this context also R. F. von Scholtz-Wiesner, Introduction, in: Hazrat Inayat Khan, Sufi-Weisheiten [The Wisdom of Sufism], 24.

9. Principles and Objects of the Movement

For his Sufism, Inayat Khan mentions three objects, and he sets out the principles of the Movement as 'Ten Sufi Thoughts' as a summary of all essential matters that shape the inner life of a human being. The words changed between 1915 and 1918, but the content of the Ten Sufi Thoughts and the Three Objects has not changed since then. The choice of words reflects the period in which they were written.[1] The Aims of the Sufi Movement are printed in Appendix 1 of all volumes of the Sufi Message.

The first volume of the works of Inayat Khan (SM I 13-22) offers an interpretation of the Sufi Thoughts. The thoughts and purposes are specifically set out in the ninth volume, titled 'The Unity of Religious Ideals' (267f.).

The programmatic formulation of these thoughts and purposes serves as a nucleus for Inayat Khan's works and the identity of his Movement as a whole. Thus, before looking at the organizational structure and external appearance, it is important to reproduce the thoughts and purposes in full here. They are both a summary of the religious and philosophical ideas of Inayat Khan (as set out in the preceding section) and an explanation of his theology.

[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 147.

The Three Objects of Inayat Khan's Sufism

1. To realize and spread the knowledge of Unity, the religion of love and wisdom, so that the bias of faiths and beliefs may of itself fall away, the human heart may overflow with love, and all hatred caused by distinctions and differences may be rooted out.

2. To discover the light and power latent in man, the secret of all religion, the power of mysticism, and the essence of philosophy, without interfering with customs or beliefs.

3. To help to bring the world's two opposite poles, East and West, close together by the interchange of thought and idea; that the universal brotherhood may form of itself, and may meet with man beyond the narrow national and racial boundaries.

The Ten Sufi Thoughts

1. There is one God, the Eternal, the Only Being; none exists save God.

2. There is One Master, the Guiding Spirit of all Souls, Who constantly leads followers towards the light.

3. There is One Holy Book , the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.

4. There is One Religion, the unswerving progress in the right direction towards the ideal, which fulfils the life's purpose of every soul.

5. There is One Law, the law of reciprocity, which can be observed by a selfless conscience together with a sense of awakened justice.

6. There is One Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the human brotherhood and sisterhood, which unites the children of earth indiscriminately in the Parenthood of God.

7. There is One Moral, the love which springs forth from self-denial, and blooms in deeds of beneficence.

8. There is One Object of Praise, the beauty which uplifts the heart of its worshippers through all aspects from the seen to the unseen.

9. There is One Truth, the true knowledge of our being, within and without, which is the essence of all wisdom.

10. There is One Path, the annihilation of the false ego in the real, which raises the mortal to immortality, and in which resides all perfection.

The Establishment of key Activities

Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan came to America in 1910.[1]

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[1] Pir-o-Murshid is an honorific title for the head of a Sufi order.

During his travels in 1911 and 1912, he attracted ever greater numbers of followers. The foundations for his Sufi order were laid in England around 1915. This was not without its difficulties. As biographer De Jong-Keesing notes in astonishment, in 1916-1917 the members of the committee 'believed themselves to be so important that their annual festivities honored the founding of their society in London, but did not include Inayat Khan's initial work in the West'.[1] The differences in opinion between the committee members and the Sufi master are a demonstration of his dictum that there are no pupils in the West, only teachers.[2] The Sufi Movement was officially founded in Geneva in 1923.

According to the Genevan bylaws, Inayat Khan sought to bring about the dissemination of Sufi ideas in the West primarily through three special activities: the Inner School for initiates, the Brotherhood, and the Church of All, later called the Universal Worship Service. These activities continue to play a major role in the Movement today[3].

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[1] E. de Jong-Keesing, 148.

[2] cited l.c. 147.

[3] C. Gibbings refers explicitly to a fourth branch of the activities of the Sufi movement that he believes were especially valuable: the task of healing (cf. Ibid., God heals, 91). This is due to the fact that Inayat Khan himself established a special Sufi group for long-distance healing through prayer and meditation (cf. S. v. Stolk/ D.

De Jong-Keesing names the *Inner School* of simplified mysticism as 'the most important activity of his work in the West'. The inner school provides through initiation an introduction in various basic practices. Students can take classes, or complete a twelve-year course.[1] In this Esoteric School, students receive personal guidance from a guide.

The details of this inner school are taught on a step-by-step basis. According to Inayat Khan, the first step is to come to terms with oneself (SM IX 271). Inayat Khan names the following conditions for initiation into the Sufi Order: a willingness to consent to his teachings and goals; an inclination to no longer regard the differences between the individual beliefs as important, and to regard all heralds of revelation as the embodiment of the single divine spirit; and the abstention from following a different spiritual path (SM I 48).

The second activity, the Brotherhood – or Kinship as we would say nowadays – is adapted to the Western mode of thought. Originally, it was an open forum for readings and introductions on various subjects under the auspices of the order or Inayat Khan's Movement.

The third activity is the *Universal Worship* or the *Church*

Dunlop, Inayat Khan und seine Botschaft [Inayat Khan and His Message], Heilbronn 1967, 91).
[1] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, 153.

of All. Its first service was held in England, 1921. Its ceremonies are based on prayer meetings in which the attendees are addressed. One such meeting was held during the war. The ritual was developed primarily in cooperation with Sophia Saintsbury-Green. It was put to the test in Wissous, France, and the Netherlands (though services were held in UK from 1921/22 onwards).[1] Its structure is discussed in more detail below.

The Universal Worship Service

The Universal Worship Service is also called the Church of All, as it comprises all different paths of divine worship and all different churches and is also open to everyone.

For the service, an altar is covered with a yellow cloth decorated with flowers. At the center is a candle that symbolizes the light of God. On both sides are the writings of the main religions from which the texts are read in the following order: the holy writings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. These are followed by the 'Abrahamic' religions, Judaism (Torah), Christianity (Gospels) and Islam (Qur'an).[2] Candles on the altar behind the holy books represent the various

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[1] Cf. I.c. 176f.

[2] There was a notion to include Taoism, but it seems that due to the premature death of Inayat Khan this could no longer be done: cf. R. F. von Scholtz, Einheit im Geiste, III, 35. 9, 272.

religions.

For Inayat Khan, the candles show the similarity between and the respect for the different religions. They show that there is one light and many candles (SM IX 272). All religions are symbolically represented, demonstrating the inner unity and the outer differences.

On the altar is a seventh candle 'for all the masters known and unknown to the world that have held aloft the light of truth to combat amidst the darkness of human ignorance.[1] Inayat Khan's Gayan ('The Music of Silence') lies before this candle.

The officiants of the ceremonies in the Universal Worship Service are called *cherag*. The Farsi word 'cherag' means 'bringer of light'.

The Sufism of Inayat Khan does not have a priesthood in the conventional sense. The ordained cherags are officiants, only there to lead the worship services, address the assembly and respond to everyday concerns.

Inayat Khan emphasizes:

> [T]here is no difference between man and woman. The worthy soul is ordained; this indicates to the world that in all places – in church, at school, in parliament, at court – it is men and women who bring about evolution'. At the same time, 'every

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[1] Cf. R. F. von Scholtz, Einheit im Geiste, I, 14.

Sufi is a priest, a person who prays, a teacher and a pupil of every soul that they encounter in the world' (SM IX 272).[1]

From Inayat Khan's perspective, worship within the Sufi Movement is spiritual in nature, a sign of a deeper, underlying unity between religions. Thus, the Universal Worship Service does not lead to any other church, but is a ritual that allows all churches to be consolidated. Even so, Sufis do not have to belong to the Church of All. Regardless of which church they attend, they are followers of the Sufi path.

People in Western cultural spheres tend to be Christian Sufis and solemnize the Universal Worship Service. As R. F. von Scholtz-Wiesner writes:

[Inayat Khan] introduced this worship service in which we, as Christians, meet in harmony with believers of other religions'.[2]

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[1] The 'feminine' aspects are also taken into account with regard to the understanding of God, though these aspects are linked to a traditional understanding of the role of women (cf. SM V 35); this mystical interpretation, however, clearly treats as relative the repressive perception of gender relationships: cf. esp. SM V 33ff regarding masculine and feminine aspects of God. One feminist work influenced by Inayat Khan is by L. Malin, Die schönen Kräfte. Eine Arbeit über Heilen in verschiedenen Dimensionen [The Beautiful Forces. A Study of the Different Dimensions of Healing], Frankfurt. [11]1991, 24ff. et al.
[2] Cf. R. F. von Scholtz-Wiesner, I, 31.

As stated above, to follow the Sufi path means having a certain perspective or world view, that does not depend on external aspects, as would a cult. Likewise, it is not necessary to attend a specific church (SM IX 278).

Given that the actual realization of God – who is formless – is expressed in so many different forms in worship, the Sufis have a formless approach (SM IX 272). The form serves only a preparatory and didactic role, for without form or a name, we would not be able to learn. But one needs to realize that the form is a mere suggestion. Only what lies behind the form truly counts. The focus is on the truth behind all religions. As a result, all followers of the Sufi path are free to choose whether they accept a form or not (including in how they go about worship).

Membership

The Inayati Sufi orders position themselves as groups of people from different religions. It is not necessary for followers to leave their religion of origin. On the contrary, they should seek to understand it from a deeper perspective (SM IX 262). People are free to follow their own church, and there is no need to believe in a certain dogma. In religious matters, freedom of thought is guaranteed (SM IX 271). At the same time, one should refrain from criticizing or being openly hostile to any

existing church.[1]

The members of the different Sufi orders come from all groups and from different denominations, and even members of the clergy belong to it. A well-known example is the Anglican priest Cecil Gibbings (1893-1977), who found a teacher in Inayat Khan but who continued to fulfil his ministerial duties in his church.[2] The idea behind this connection between Christianity and Sufism is a form of 'Christian Sufism', as R. F. von Scholtz states.[3]

Zen Buddhists (such as Paul Reps) are also members,[4] as are people from an Islamic background. Dogmatic atheists who proclaim God is dead also can experience the reality of the Divine in this community. For them, the death of God was taken to mean the death of an authoritarian God within an old religion.[5]

The Expansion of the Sufi Movement

As intended by Inayat Khan when he founded the organization, the Sufi Movement is a hierarchical organization. He justifies this concept by saying that the Sufi Movement is a spiritual movement, and inspiration

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[1] Cf. I.c. 11.
[2] Cf. C. Gibbings, Divine Healing. East-West Publications, 1976.
[3] Cf. R. F. von Scholtz-Wiesner, I, 10.
[4] Cf. P. Reps, Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, Tuttle Publishing, 1957.
[5] Cf. E. de Jong-Keesing, I.c. 271.

comes from above, from those who have reached a higher level of realization and openness to divine inspiration. For this reason, the hierarchical structure is expressed especially in the Inner School, which focuses above all on expanding one's spiritual boundaries.[1] This can be seen as coming from the traditional concept of the guru, leading to a hierarchical structure in which authority is based on a superior degree of religious and spiritual perfection.

Today, Inayati Sufi orders can be found in virtually all countries in Europe, and – since the fall of the Iron Curtain – also in the former Eastern Bloc. The German Sufi Movement was founded in 1925. It quickly attracted followers, not least thanks to multiple visits by Inayat Khan to Berlin, Munich and Dresden. Even so, this only resulted in the founding of short-lived centers. The Movement was eventually banned under the National Socialist regime, and had to stop all official work due to the fact that it 'was not in keeping with the Party's program and granted the Jews equal rights'. Despite this, the Sufis continued their activities in secret.

After the Second World War, Inayat Khan's son Vilayat and his grandson Fazal were the two main figures

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[1] Cf. for a more detailed justification of this idea S. van Stolk/D. Dunlop, Memories of a sufi sage, Inayat Khan, East-West Publications, 1967, esp. chapter VIII, the spiritual Hierarchy.

credited with reviving the Sufism of Inayat Khan. The Sufi Movement had its rights formally re-established in 1983.[1]

Followers of Inayat Khan can be found on every continent. The Sufi temples serve as religious bases for the Movement. There are three of them, located in Katwijk (Netherlands), in Cape Town (South Africa), and in Suresnes (Paris, France). There, Inayat Khan laid the foundation stone in 1926 prior to his departure to India. The actual building was inaugurated on July 5 1990 (July 5 is Inayat Khan's birthday) by his son Vilayat in the presence of representatives of the major world religions. Inayat Khan's tomb (*dargah*) in New Delhi, a place of pilgrimage for his followers, is a center for all Inayati orders. The death of the founder (5 February), his birthday (5 July) and his departure from Baroda to the West (13 September) are important days of remembrance for pupils of all Inayati lineages.

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[1] Cited in: Entry titled 'Sufi movement', in: Sufi-Bewegung Deutschland [Sufi Movement Germany]. http://www.sufi-bewegung.de/SufiBewegungDeutschland.html (25.05.2019).

10. The five Activities in the Inayatiyya[1]

The Sufism of Inayat Khan knows five activities. The most important already have been outlined above: the Esoteric School, the Universal Worship Service, and Brotherhood (Kinship). As said above, Inayat Khan also initiated a fourth branch, the healing activities.

A genuinely novel aspect of the Inayatiyya is the addition of a specifically ecological branch (Ziraat),[2] which seeks to respond to the growing awareness of the environment from a global perspective. Although this is a current issue, the idea for it can be seen in the contemplations of Inayat Khan, who used the term 'planetary awareness' in talks with his students in the 1920s.

A few mureeds sought to keep this branch alive, but it had been all but forgotten by the 1950s. In 1980, his son Vilayat revived Ziraat as an open organization. Due to the lack of sufficient data (Ziraat was a secret activity), he was only able to define the basic structure of Ziraat and a few of the ceremonial aspects involved. The new Ziraat branch in Western Sufism consists of nature rituals

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[1] All orders through Inayat Khan have the same five activities, often called 'rays' (note editor).
[2] Cf. SO 30. As footnoted before, originally, Ziraat was designed as a secret activity within the Order, modeled after Freemasonry and using agricultural symbols. Ziraat as an activity for promoting ecology is therefore an obvious, but new approach.

(celebrating the seasons, the solstices, the spring and autumn equinoxes, meditation in nature, recourse to ceremonies held in autochthonous religions, e.g. those of the Native Americans).

Positioning the Healing Order as an independent 'ray' is also a relatively new development. This activity takes current needs into consideration, e.g. by observing alternative medical practices, spiritual psychology and alternative healing knowledge based on esoteric traditions (in particular those of classic Sufi traditions). The aim is to help the sick through divine healing and to supplement the 'self-healing energies of sick people'.[1]

The Universal Worship Service establishes also the framework for other special ceremonies, such as the blessing of children, weddings, veneration of the dead, and the ordination of cherags.[2]

The kinship activities (originally called brotherhood activities) support charity initiatives, such as the Hope Project in India (milk for children, medical care, school services and social work).

The Esoteric School is designed for the spiritual education of the mureeds. A special focus is on meditation and retreat, with classic Sufi practices playing

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[1] Cf. SO 28.
[2] Cf. I.c. 26f. This already was the case with Inayat Khan (note editor).

a key role. The spiritual and divine ceremonies are linked to prayers by Inayat Khan.

The following invocation is of central importance for the Universal Worship Service and for all other Sufi activities for all Inayati orders:

Toward the One,
the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,
the Only Being, united with all the Illuminated Souls,
who form the Embodiment of the Master,
the Spirit of Guidance.[1]

Inter-religious Spirituality

The spirituality of the Inayatiyya is strongly characterized by Vilayat Inayat Khan, who drew on the ideas of his father while adding to them. The basic idea, however, remains the same: to achieve a mystical experience of unity.[2] Pir Vilayat understood how to go about this in a contemporary manner and in close connection with current religious and spiritual trend. He was actively involved in many international symposia which – often under the influence of the New Age – aimed towards a merging of modern scientific thinking and spiritual tradition. This spirituality forms the basis for the universal religiosity practiced within his Order.

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[1] The Invocation is often recited in the home language.
[2] Cf. Ibid., The Call of the Dervish, Santa Fe, Omega 1981.

The Inayatiyya positions itself as 'an inter-religious path to spiritual growth', with the deliberate incorporation of many different religious traditions. The main interest is not on the religious paths as such, but on their contribution to spiritual growth. Thus, the key concern is spirituality, a spirituality that integrates individual religious traditions, and integrates them into a unity that transcends the individual elements.

11. New Features of the Neo-Sufism of Inayat Khan

As shown above, Inayat Khan's Sufism is not intended just for Muslims, but is for followers of all religions, and does not require them to leave the original religious community to which they belong. This constitutes an important turning point within Islam, as the exclusive adherence to the Qur'an and the dogmatic teachings and laws stipulated within (the *sharia*) are, generally speaking, no longer compulsory for this form of Sufism.

They apply only on a personal level, if followers are Muslim. The issue here is whether Sufism still has an extensive affiliation to Islam, since this religion – similar to other religions – knows a number of external aspects a Muslim has to adhere to, such as dogma, moral rules, religious authorities. The relationship to the central articles of faith and the law shows the essential difference with Neo-Sufi views, which are not bound by these requirements.

The possibility of following the Sufi path without recognizing the basic teachings and rules of Islam separates the Sufism of Inayat Khan from inner-Islamic mysticism. Through this new approach, Inayati Sufism is not an Islamic form of piety, but can be seen as a contemplation of life since the dawn of humanity, which occurs in all religions. In Neo-Sufism, the original Sufi

mysticism based on the Qur'an becomes accessible possibility for everyone, regardless of creed or faith.

One can ask why these changes have occurred in conjunction with inner-Islamic views. This question is answered in the next (and final) chapter of this work. It covers the spiritual background of the European Western tradition of culture in which Neo-Sufism flourished at the start of the 20th century, and its new form is interpreted in relation to the other new religious tendencies of the modern age (already covered in Part I) that likewise strive for an 'inner' unification of the religions.

Part Two

New religious Universalism
beyond the Alternatives
of secular modern
and traditional Religiosity

Systematic overall Interpretation

After presenting the phenomenon of universalist religiosity in a general overview (Part 1) and going into more detail on a single specific form (the Sufi Movement), Part 2 will focus on a systematic religious and historical overall interpretation of this complex phenomenon in recent religious history.

Three dimensions will be explored as part of this interpretation. We'll first chart the overall phenomenon in itself, setting out the key characteristics and, based on this, a comprehensive understanding of the universalist new religions addressed (Chapter 5). As these new religions have an ambivalent relationship with contemporary culture and with the traditional religions, the two following chapters will focus on their relationship to modern social environments (Chapter 6), identifying their ties to the religions from which they emerged (Chapter 7).

The ambivalence towards new religions results from the fact that these movements are characterized by modern intentions while having aspects that are openly critical of modern thinking, as will be shown in detail. The new religions conflict with the major world religions as they claim to understand the essence of the religions that preceded them (and implicitly say to continue them), yet clearly consider these 'traditional' religions to be outdated in terms of structure and thinking. New religions reflect modern cultural developments, so are 'new', but

their religiosity separates them from the secular world. Their religious approach connects them to traditional religions, but their new and sometimes recently established revelations separate them. Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship between new religions and the modern era, while chapter 7 looks at their relationship with traditional religions. We will address several perspectives that are relevant when dealing with new religious movements with as focal point the consequences they may have on major world religions. The guiding idea is that the universal claim embodied by new religious movements is a critical challenge for the conventional religions.

A suitable interpretation can only be made based on an objective description and evaluation of this phenomenon, based on fact. This is often felt as provocative. Therefore an interpretation such as this study has to be comprehensive.

For our systematic considerations, we need to take into account that this phenomenon has a relatively brief timespan (starting in the 19th century) in comparison to traditional religions. On top of that, their timespan is not yet complete, as the movements discussed here and their forms of piety are still in the process of ongoing development, the outcome of which cannot be predicted.

That said, religious scholars do have the opportunity to observe these religions as they are created and evolve. At the same time, the manner in which they have developed

up to now – along with the current level of theoretical or theological explication of how a religion perceives itself – allows for a relatively sound verdict regarding the characteristics of these movements that can be established as fact.

Due to the ongoing rebirth and transformation of these movements, this can only be an intermediate verdict. This holds for any incomplete process, and, to a certain extent, also for statements about religions that were founded in ancient times and that continue to exist today, as they too are in a state of perpetual change.

In view of these major changes in religion, we can offer little more than an interim diagnosis. However, as it reveals basic common tendencies and characteristics, this diagnosis may make it possible to orient oneself within the constant process of religious change in the present.

Regarding the systematic clarifications, it is important to take Inayat Khan's Neo-Sufism into account. This will be done in conjunction with the other new religions and movements presented in Part 1.

The focus on comparing religions offers a relatively broad horizon. This may guarantee a more precise overall impression of the characteristic elements of universal religiosity than would be possible when evaluating one single movement. A more holistic approach enables us to see more connections and common structures.

Chapter 5
The Characteristics of universal new Religions and Movements

E. Benz's question if 'there is a common bond or even an inner unity that connects the new religions to one another' is certainly justified.[1] However, his answer that new religions are 'not consistent in any way' due to being 'formed based on very different intellectual, cultural and social requirements and different religious levels of consciousness'[2] is not entirely satisfactory. Despite these divergences, the fact that they originated in the same historical era (since the 19th century) and consistently focus on maintaining a distance from traditional religions suggests they share common ground. We make no attempt here to develop characteristics for all types of new

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[1] E. Benz, Neue Religionen [New Religions], 1971, 162.
[2] I.c., 163.

religious movements, but solely to those movements that expressly strive toward a universalist or mystic, esoteric religiosity in the manner asserted in this work.

In spite of the differences in the interpretation of a universal religion by the various new religious movements, one can find consistent, common structures that transcend the differences. The systematic categorization of these general characteristics of neo-religious communities already carried out – most of all in Japan– can serve as a useful guide.[1]

Although we restrict ourselves to universalist tendencies, for two reasons, we can assume that the hallmarks identified below can contribute to a heuristic understanding of other new movements that do not focus on a universal form of religiosity. For not only do the universalist groups have certain traits that relate to other neo-religious groups, the majority of neo-religious movements are also characterized by syncretism and eclecticism: they are shaped by a tendency towards a selective

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[1] Cf. H. Dumoulin, Neue Religionen [New Religions], in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1410-1412; P. Gerlitz, Gott erwacht in Japan [God Awakens in Japan], 153-162; cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, Religious and Spiritual Groups, [2]1988, 14-16: General characteristics that are likewise based on the criteria of Japanese religions (cf. 17 note 11), namely H. Thoman, The New Religions of Japan, Rutland/Tokyo 1963.

interpretation of traditional religions, thereby leading to a different form of 'universality'.[1]

It hardly needs stating that the focus here is not on rendering those essential features in an abstract way that leads us away from historically concrete manifestations, but on explicating them, based on the facts presented in the first four chapters of Part 1.

While in previous analyses, expressions of universalist religiosity were presented both diachronically and in parallel, these expressions can now, to some extent, be established synchronously, synoptically and therefore systematically. Rather than diminishing the potential historical insights, this type of systematic hermeneutics in religious studies adds to the conversation.[2]

The following characterization is carried out against the backdrop of a definition of religion that objectively also applies to universalist neo-religious movements and new religions.[3] The fundamental defining characteristic for a 'religion' is the experience of a transcendental reality, so encountering the reality of the Divine. This aspect of

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[1] Cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, 15, point 6.

[2] Cf. J. Figl, Introduction, in: ibid. (editor), Handbuch Religionswissenschaft [The Handbook of Religious Studies], Innsbruck/Göttingen 2003, esp. 41-43: Systematic religious studies.

[3] Cf. J. Figl, Universalistische neureligiöse Bewegungen [Universalist New Religious Movements] in: M. Kessler, W. Pannenberg, H.J. Pottmeyer, Fides quaerens intellectum, Tübingen/Basel 1992,63-74. (1992) 63ff.

transcendental experience (see under 1) applies to all aspects of religious life and sets religious phenomena apart from their non-religious counterparts. A religion can further be characterized by three other aspects. First of all, the issue of doctrinal interpretation, which revolves around the religious convictions of the religion in question (see under 2). Next, we'll discuss the institutional, community aspect regarding the formation, founding and guidance of the religious community (see under 3).

Just as important is the dimension of ritual and ethical practice, which focuses on how life is shaped through one's religious beliefs (see under 4).

After setting out these four aspects – the basic concept of transcendental experience and the three aspects that help to substantiate this – we will look at the characteristics of neo-religious communities. In a final point (see under 5), we will attempt to establish a comprehensive set of religious characteristics, based on the previous findings.

1. Transcendental Experience – Encountering the Reality of the Divine

In newly formed movements, the elementary religious experience that comes from encountering the reality of the Absolute and the Transcendental is often accompanied by extraordinary forms of experience, which plays a key role in the founding of such movements.

One primary characteristic shared by virtually all neo-religious movements is the facilitation of extraordinary experiences that transcend ordinary consciousness as well as the usual regimented types of religious experience, whether in the form of a mystical or an ecstatic experience.

These extraordinary experiences are the driving force behind the emergence of many modern religious communities, as they explain how the new movements see the related traditional religions, and as they play a role in the universal approach described previously.

In those movements that do not lead to the formation of a new religion – such as the Sufi path of Inayat Khan – the concept of universal religion is based primarily on the mystical experience of (ecstatic) unity with a divine reality, through which the boundaries of any specific religion are transcended. Medial skills (e.g. healing) also play a key role.

Trance – Ecstasy – Vision

The importance of trance-like states – in conjunction with visions – as the catalyst for a new religion can most clearly be seen in various new Japanese religions. They were fundamental to Tenrikyo and to the syncretic new institutions belonging to Omoto. Ecstatic contact with deities and spirits, the composition of messages from various oracles and the revaluation of healers all play a key role here. As we saw, the founder of *Seicho no Ie* expressly invokes the vision of enlightenment.

For Caodaism, spiritistic-medium experiences led to the creation of a new religion that united and transcended all other religions. An occult-based dimension of experience characterizes the movements found in the Far East and their counterparts in the West, such as the Theosophical, spiritistic movements that show these traits most clearly.

Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of one of the most important universal religious movements from Indian origin and generally considered as the religious master of the modern era, spent most of his time in a state of extraordinary, persistent ecstasy – a state that normally only lasts for a brief period. Some interpretations of this phenomenon even talk about 'a modern re-emergence of shamanism' and, according to the literature, a fundamental element of all neo-religious movements in this

'new' shamanism.[1] As we saw, visionary experiences served as the catalyst for the founders and the identity of Babism and the Baha'i faith. Bab viewed himself as the Mahdi, and Baha'u'llah talked about 'the Promised One religion of all religions'. Inayat Khan's biography, too, contains a series of visions (usually experienced in dreams).

Mystical Spirituality

It is important to note that this kind of religious experiences also play an important role in modern religions and movements. This includes mysticism in general, and especially Islamic mysticism. Many archaic elements in Sufism are reminiscent of shamanic practices and, in some cases, can be traced back to them. Examples include dance and rhythmic movements, two phenomena most strikingly reminiscent of a more elemental form of religious experience.

The mystical direction of the Inayati orders is not in sync with the rational mindset of the modern era. For instance, divine truth is experienced as a reality and Neo-

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[1] R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, 12 and 14: a founder having had an ecstatic experience is seen as the first characteristic of new religious movements. Cf. esp. the interpretation of H. Zinser, Ekstase und Entfremdung. Zur Analyse neuerer ekstatischer Kultveranstaltungen, in: Religionswissenschaft, Ed. H. Zinser, Berlin 1988, 274ff.

Sufism values the pathways of religious experience that transcend the rational.

On top of that, Inayati mysticism is deeply rooted in a tradition strongly influenced by Hinduism and the concept of non-duality.

The task of human beings is to realize God, and to incorporate the reality of the Divine into their present reality. Although this tendency can also be observed in older mystical traditions within Islam (especially in the writings of al-Hallaj),[1] in modern times it obtained a specific 'function', namely to bridge the gap between the religious and secular horizons of experience through an all-encompassing experience of the Divine. Neo-religious movements often show a tendency towards monistic and impersonal ontology, which they refer to as 'endless intelligence', an 'eternal principle' and so on.[2]

The two main aspects stated – visionary and ecstatic experiences leading to the foundation of a religion and mystical, holistic experiences – are, in essence, related to the development of a universal religiosity. Ecstasy, trance, spiritism, vision, and mysticism transcend religions and cultures. They are revealed only to especially gifted

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[1] Cf. A. Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen [Mystical Dimensions], 100ff.

[2] Cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, 15; cf. especially the concept of Theosophy, see above.

individuals, but are not restricted to any particular cultural form.

The ecstatic or mystical experience of the founder or initiator of a new form of religiosity 'revitalizes', to a certain extent, the anthropological possibility that has – at least in the Western world – recently been pushed to the background, or was considered a relic of a bygone era.

However – whether consciously or unconsciously – these religious experiences are established in the communities discussed here precisely because they are in conflict with modern culture. They can be seen as attempts to break down our apparent closed and consolidated modern world view and to open up for a transcendental experience. These transcendental experiences are often perceived in close connection with the visionary experiences of the founder, resulting in an experience that is contemporary but has a claim to universal significance. The religious 'primordial experience' is therefore not timeless. It is embedded within the relevant historical and cultural situation and partly determined by it. This is demonstrated by very specific images of God and concepts about the path to the Absolute, which is often facilitated by 'intermediate beings', a hierarchy of spirits and the like.

The consequence of the defensive attitude towards modern rationalism is that the historically determined characteristics of a universally intended religiosity are undeniable and exist at different levels. To a certain extent,

this demonstrates that this new form of religiosity is built on two columns. The ecstatic origin or mystical embrace of the transcendental experience also shapes the individual features of new religions. These are discussed in the following section.

2. The core Content of the new Doctrine

'Religion from the Beginning'

The sources of the doctrines on which new religions are based are conveyed in the form of new, charismatic or ecstatic revelatory experiences. As is the case in virtually all major Japanese new religions and in the Baha'i faith, these revelations lead to the creation of new religious foundations. At the same time, the revelations of preceding religions and their founders claim to be as they originally were intended. This is done by interpreting the traditional scriptures in a specific and selective way. As in Theosophy, the spiritual masters and the spiritual hierarchy are unknown to the world at large.

In many cases, however, universalist religious communities are based on the conviction that they bring forth the original religion that has been around since the dawn of humanity. When looked at from a historical perspective, the dissemination of the same religious teachings means that religious views one expresses, are inherently connected to the 'original' religion – making it eternal. The concept of an 'eternal religion' (*sanatana dharma*)[1] is the basis for Neo-Hindu, universal religious beliefs. Generally speaking, it is just as important for neo-Sufi

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[1] E.g. in Sri Radhakrishna, cf. above.

movements and it is the building block of Inayat Khan's views discussed earlier in this work.

The Indian Sufi master does not seek to bring about a 'new' religion, but to bring forth the religion that has been in existence since the dawn of humankind. The tendency to refer to an origin that is ultimately universal in nature can be seen as a general characteristic of new religious movements.[1]

The Simplicity of the Teachings

The tendency towards a general religion that has allegedly always existed goes hand in hand with an aversion to the highly complex, differentiated teaching systems that are characteristic of religions whose doctrines have been developed over an extended period. The content and, more importantly, the form and presentation of the modern teachings differ greatly from those of the world religions. Several reasons can be offered to account for this difference:

1) The brief period since the religion was founded, meaning it does not have a teaching system developed over the course of centuries. A system of theories that bear the

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[1] The belief that wisdom has been acquired from afar and can be revived in a spontaneous ritual is indicative of many meditative techniques used, and demonstrates the close connection between the limited doctrinal design and its ecstatic, mystical origin: cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, 14.

traces of interpretation and adaptation of many previous generations, as well as the scholarship of the specialists and interpreters who have been trained for this purpose, is intrinsically complex and can be difficult to understand when viewed from a modern perspective, since this system also documents the problems and solutions of previous generations.

2) Aside from the historical aspect, it is important to consider the content of the teachings associated with a universal religiosity: universal statements, declarations of unity, of togetherness, of how differences are relative, etc. Even when looking at the structure alone, much of this content can be simplified and generalized. Differences between various doctrines are traced back to contemporary circumstances, with the various founders of religions being perceived as manifestations of the one God, and different ideas of God as aspects of the all-encompassing, indescribable Divine. This offers a harmonizing view, associated with the intention to refer to the 'essence' of the religions and to recognize the unity within them.

3) A third reason for the simplicity inherent to these statements is due to the originality of the religious experience to be described – it is direct, holistic, and both encompasses and transcends emotion and reason. In comparison to this, a priori rational reflection is less significant, and a complex theological system of theories and explanation is not as important. Discourse on actual

religious experiences is simple, spontaneous and immediate. As a whole, this leads to teachings that are easy to understand, as they are stripped back to their essential meaning.

It should be noted here that no religious community can remain in its nascent 'charismatic' stage forever. As demonstrated already, all communities turn to organization and systematization. This is also the case for the new religions and associated movements. They gradually develop a theology which – despite its simplicity – sometimes has narrower boundaries than the basic teachings of conventional religions did when imparting their grand theological ideas.[1] At the same time, however, the initial impetus is often still very much there in modern religions, and not just because of their comparatively brief existence.

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[1] Cf. P. Gerlitz, Gott erwacht in Japan [God Awakens in Japan], Freiburg/Br. 1977, 156; G. Kehrer (Ed.), Entstehen einer neuen Religion. Am Beispiel der Vereinigungskirche [The Emergence of a New Religion: the Example of the Unification Church], Munich 1981, passim.

3. Direction and Organization

*Women as Founders of Religions and the Acknowledgement
of their spiritual and cultural Competence*

When selecting a person from the ranks of the believers to serve as its leader, it is essential to decide on selection criteria and, ultimately, to determine how this position will be recognized. The responsibilities of a leader revolve around organizational matters, but the individual spiritual and ritual matters (which needn't be separate from one another) must also be taken into consideration.

Besides rare exceptions and only in the periphery, it is an indisputable fact that through the history of the traditional religions, the organizational, legal, theological, and often ritual responsibilities that come with being the head of a religion, have almost exclusively been borne by men. On top of that, all 'major' religions in existence today are based on male founding figures. The full scope and problematic character of this situation has only been acknowledged and widely questioned in the past few decades.

In view of patriarchal dominance in the field of religion – which has shaped all so-called 'advanced civilizations' since ancient times – it is particularly interesting to investigate whether the structures in the new religions and movements have shifted significantly in favor of women, so in the interests of legitimate equality.

A number of feminist studies to date have established that in neo-religious movements very little has been done to change the traditional social role of women. Theologically speaking, the characteristics of feminine inferiority and subordination are often reinforced, and contemporary movements display masculine authority.

At best, the more egalitarian groups have a female guiding figure (as a guru) only when combined with a patriarchal ideology and corresponding structures.[1]

This generally highly skeptical evaluation of the contribution made by new religions to improve the situation of women applies to a number of groups. However, it cannot be applied as a blanket verdict to all of the universalist communities discussed in this work. Instead, they try to be egalitarian, i.e. that they combine the elevation of women to a new status with traditional, overwhelmingly patriarchal structures.

Even though this relationship would need to be examined on a case-by-case basis in order to draw a conclusion, when we consider religious history since the emergence of the world religions, we can ascertain some general facts regarding the new religions and the status of women that represent a new state of affairs.

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[1] Cf. J. L. Jacobs, Gender and Power in New Religious Movements, in: Religion 21 (1991) 345ff.

The key challenge is to identify those religions founded by women. There have been several female founders of Japanese new religions since their emergence in the first half of the 19th century. These were charismatic women who received messages while in contact with spirits and deities that ultimately led to the founding of new religious communities.

Furthermore, it is a woman who founded the so-called 'dance religion' in the aftermath of the Second World War. These are just a few of the most prevalent examples.[1]

The novel aspect of this becomes especially clear when compared to the founding figures of the traditional religions. However, when looking at the new Japanese religions, we need to take into account that the legitimation of women as founders of religions is not derived (at least not directly or explicitly) from modern ideas on equality. It is based on the experience of archaic ecstasy.

Ecstasy is not a gender-specific phenomenon, nor is it harnessed for dominance or subordination in religion. Instead, as a charismatic experience, it justifies the religious significance of women. This significance can be so great that it leads to the founding of a new religion.

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[1] See Part I. For the development of Japanese new religions in particular in the context of Shinto, cf. S. Ono, Shinto. The Kami Way, Rutland/Tokyo [22]1991, 40ff.

The new appraisal and self-assessment of women as religious founding figures is also evident in the early history of Theosophy (Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Katherine Tingley),[1] as well as in the fact that there are women in the role of 'gurus', such as Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, who saw herself as a primal force and a seer as promised in the Vedas.[2]

It is also important to point out the (admittedly exceptional) new religious communities in India in which women assume the role of a guru and become the head of an *ashram*. They expressly perform rituals that are usually reserved exclusively for male Hindus.[3] The legal and

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[1] In this context, reference should be made to new Hindu reform communities in which women constitute the core group, as in the case of the Brahma Kumaris (Daughters of Brahma) movement; cf. the article by R. Hummel, Brahma Kumaris, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen,Szenen und Weltanschauungen [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups, Scenes and Views], Freiburg/Breisgaus 2005, 156-158.

[2] Cf. S. Kakar, Schamanen, Heilige, Ärzte. Psychotherapie und traditionelle indische Heilkunst [Shamans, Saints, Healers. Psychotherapy and Traditional Indian Medicine], Munich 1984, 199ff.

[3] Cf. B. Heller, Heilige Mutter und Gottesbraut. Frauenemanzipation im modernen Hinduismus [Holy Mothers and Divine Brides. The Emancipation in Modern Hinduism], Vienna 1999; ibid., article on women in religious studies, in: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart [Religion Past and Present] Vol. 3, 4., completely revised edition, Tübingen 2000, 258, and her contribution titled 'Gender and Religion', in: Figl, Johann (Ed.): Handbuch Religionswissenschaft [The Handbook of Religious

social improvement of women (e.g. through schooling and occupational training) can generally be seen as the explicit aim of Neo-Hindu reform movements from Chandra Sen to Sai Baba.

In universal religious movements based on Islam, men are the recipients of visions that they believe to be confirmation of their mission, e.g. the promised Mahdi (Bab) or prophet (Baha'u'llah). Nevertheless, an intellectual woman by the name of Zarrin-Taji played a key role in the history of Babism. She drew attention for her emancipatory views and courage, and is considered to be 'the first women's rights activist in the Middle East'.[1]

Within the context of how the teachings were disseminated in the West, the ongoing development of sharia law – and therefore legislation that subordinates women to men – was halted with the emphatic assertion of equality between women and men in society.[2]

As we noted before, from the very outset, the founder of the Sufi tradition in the West, Inayat Khan, fought for equality between women and men in all areas. Women

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Studies]. Innsbruck-Göttingen 2003, 758–769, esp. 761ff., as well as the related literature specified within.

[1] F. Vahman, Bahaismus [The Baha'i Faith], 116;
[2] Cf. also Stephan A. Towfigh/Wafa Enayati, Die Baha'i-Religion. Ein Überblick [The Baha'i Religion. An Overview], Reinbek/Munich, 5th edition 2014, 19. Cf. Handbuch Bahà'i [The Baha'i Handbook], Stuttgart 2009, 168f.

can take on the role of *cherags* (religious officiates) in worship services and take on other leadership functions in all Inayati orders.[1]

With regard to the position of women from a religious perspective, there were two complementing lines of thinking – both of which strove for equality – in the Neo-Sufism propagated by Inayat Khan. One was the appraisal of women as partners, a view already advanced in traditional Sufism. In this context, Annemarie Schimmel is correct when she refers to a 'female element in Sufism' that put women on the same level as men and existed alongside him in a correlative relationship.[2] Even though Inayat Khan's brothers and sons took on key leadership roles, for them women were equal to men. Here, the explicit Sufi influences are augmented by modern ideas on equality. This is a logical consequence of a universal religiosity, for if one takes universality seriously, it cannot allow the subordination of people for reasons of gender. The immense importance of women in the religious groups founded by Inayat Khan is evident above all from the fact that he only gave women the highest spiritual

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[1] Cf. for a general background: Sara Kuehn/ Lukas Pokorny, On Inayati Female Visions in Austria: Female Leadership in the Western Sufi Tradition, in: Hans Gerald Hödl/ Lukas Pokorny (Ed.), Religion in Austria, Volume 4, Vienna 2018, 53–114.

[2] A. Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen [Mystical Dimensions], 603ff.

initiation. Equally significant is the already mentioned fact that Noor-un-Nisa, Inayat Khan's eldest daughter, was recently added to the silsila of the Inayatiyya.

Equality between men and women is evident in several religious institutions where the female dimension plays a major role. This includes addresses to and from God that lead to a male-female image of God, such as a 'parent God' or 'father-mother God'.[1]

The Inayatiyya and the Ruhaniat adapted the prayers of Inayat Khan, and God is addressed both as the Father and the Mother. In his Prayer for Peace, 'Lord' is replaced by 'Send us Thy peace, O Lord / our Father and Mother.' The spiritual interpretation of the Lord's Prayer by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of The Church of Christ, scientist, and a relative of Inayat Khan's wife Ora Ray Baker, is given as follows: 'Our Father-Mother God, all-harmonious.'[2] Thinking in terms of unity (as is the case in Theosophy, for example) is a closer reflection of the feminine psyche than the analytically distinctive norm of Western tradition.[3]

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[1] Cf. for ex. Tong-Il (Unification Church); Caodaism; cf. also Tenrikyo; cf. C. A. Becker, Healing in 19th Century 'New Religions', in: Religion 20 (1990) 213.

[2] See entry titled 'What we do', in: Christian Science in Berlin, : https://www.christlichewissenschaft.org/christliche-wissenschaft/grundlagen/ (6 July 2019).

[3] Cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, Religious Groups, ²1988, 65.

In summary, two aspects should be taken in consideration when looking at the reappraisal of women in religion. Firstly, the ecstatic experience or the mystical, spiritual religiosity – and, in rare cases, the role as a guru – that can, in principle, be made available to men and women. Secondly, the modern idea of equality that dovetails with the concept of universalism. When these two ideas are explored together, they contribute not only to various matters of a sociological nature (which we cannot address here), but also to the establishment of a new position for women in neo-religious universal communities.[1]

Although the emancipatory stance of many universalist religious communities cannot be denied, a critical eye should nevertheless be cast on the tendency to work in the opposite direction or reinforce traditional models within their leadership structures. In some Japanese new religions such as Tenrikyo, for example, men continue to be in charge when it comes to organizational matters.[2]

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[1] Cf. for ex. also Müller, Ramakrishna-Bewegung [The Ramakrishna Movement], 157f., which cites Western thinkers and the Advaita school as the reason for the emancipation of women.

[2] Cf. above p 116. The problem of leadership is different in communities where women constitute the core group; it is also interesting to note that in ashrams in which unmarried women are permanent members, they are autonomous, while ashrams containing married members tend to adopt traditional gender roles: cf. H. Ralston, Religious Movements (H. Ralston, Religious Movements and the Status of Women, in: Social compass 38 (1991) 49.

For a comprehensive overview, each individual movement needs to be looked at, which is too large a scope for the present work. Yet these brief comparative notes do allow us to draw the conclusion that in new religious movements women are seen as equal to men in spiritual, charismatic and ritual terms – with spiritual positions usually open to both genders – and in some cases are even superior to them (as founders of religions, as is particularly the case in Japan).

The Correlation between the Group Structure and the individualistic spiritual Mentality of the Seeker

One fundamental characteristic of new religious movements that touches on all aspects of their existence, is the strong group identity that they convey to their followers. New religious movements are particularly distinct from traditional religions in their understanding of belief. Belief is not primarily a socially recognized truth passed down from generation to generation, but a conviction that calls for personal commitment (all the way to changing one's religion). The religiosity is based on an individual decision.

New religious groups – or 'cults' as they are called in the field of sociology of religion in the US – have a 'tendency towards a religion of a highly private and personal

character'.[1] Though this often applies only to a movement's first generation in its fullest sense, as their children grow up within the new religion after it has been established, this attitude nevertheless continues to shape the community.

The importance of the community and the communal experience in ritual, ethical, and social practice should not be underestimated. It makes sense to speak of community religions, as these new movements develop as part of a community within clear parameters. This aspect penetrates all areas of new religions and neo-religious movements.

In many neo-religious groups, the group structure revolves around a leader or a guru. As said, it is rare for women to occupy this role. This leader is responsible for the deliverance of spiritual traditions, which are passed on to 'initiates'.

The initiation of new members results in a distinction between the 'initiated' and 'other' members or interested persons – this is, in any case, the mode of thinking embodied by the concept of a religious path.[2]

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[1] G. K. Nelson, Der Drang zum Spirituellen [The Desire toward the Spiritual], Olten, 1991, 73.

[2] Within Sufism, an exception is the Sufi Way, where no distinction is made between initiates and non-initiates. For this reason, initiates are asked not to talk about their initiation (note editor).

The focus on a single person in the spiritual process has often been referred to as 'guruism' by outsiders, and is criticized, as personal development is placed in the hands of an unquestionable authority.

For followers of a neo-religious movement, however, a personal guide and leader is important, as the spiritual path is a way of life that can only be passed on a living person, and not primarily through scripture, books, or teachings.

The 'guru principle' can be misinterpreted as authoritarian. The vital importance of spiritual masters and their authority is based on non-parity, on a relationship of dependence between adults. Interested persons can turn to the master who speaks to them spiritually.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that this trust may be abused in isolated cases. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the decision to 'follow the leader' is ideally an entirely voluntary one: it is the individual who makes the decision.

This relates to the individualistic characteristic of followers of neo-religious groups which, in recent times, has even 'come close to the ideal type of private religious 'seeker',[1] especially with regard to occult movements. In

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[1] Cf. H. Knoblauch, The transformation of religion into religiosity, in: Th. Luckmann, Die unsichtbare Religion [The Invisible Religion], Frankfurt/Main 1991, 32.

this respect, 'a typical occult seeker may have been a Rosicrucian, who then becomes a member of Mankind United and then a Theosophist, before ultimately switching between four or five smaller cults'.[1]

Usually it is an individual who converts to a new religious group, not a family as a whole. This conversion needn't be in contradiction to the modern understanding of individuality.

For the choice of a spiritual leader can be seen as an individual choice for an individual representant of a special religious tradition. Seen thus, this form of religiosity is strongly influenced by individualism, corresponding to a group-oriented community experience and vice versa.

The development of sacred Centers and centralized Structures

New religions and neo-religious movements often have a sacred center or temple – the heartland that is presented as the new religion's 'Mecca'.[2] This type of center is typical for the majority of Japanese new religions. It is also part of the Baha'i faith with its temples around the world, and of the Sufi Movement with the *Dargah* in New

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[1] T. Buckner, The Flying Saucerious: An Open Doer Cult, in: M. Truzzi (Ed.), Sociology of Everyday Life, Englewood Cliffs 1968, cited in H. Knoblauch, (see previous note) 32.

[2] Cf. H. Dumoulin, article on religion, in: Japan-Handbuch [The Japan Handbook], 1411; also R.F. Ellwood/H.B. Partin, Religious and Spiritual Groups, 16.

Delhi, *Fazal Manzil* (the house of Inayat Khan) in Suresnes, and the *Universel Murad Hassil* in Katwijk (Netherlands).

A key characteristic of new religions and various neo-religious movements is the development of an organizational structure that manifests itself in different ways.

A movement or community originally initiated by a charismatic founder crystallizes around an institutionalized group. As studies of individual examples – primarily aspects of Japanese new religions – show, this structure is clearly evident among many neo-religious movements.[1]

The Inayatiyya is organized in a different way. It is not necessary to renounce the religious community to which one originally belonged – given that a Sufi practitioner can be part of any religious community.

It is nevertheless an organizational necessity for people who want to follow the Sufi path to be 'member' of a 'movement' of some kind.

This is also shown externally in the development of a new organizational structure distinct from traditional religions, which its followers consider to be the 'outer form' of the soul of wisdom.[2]

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[1] Cf. esp. above p. 112.prophae

[2] Cf. for ex. the text on the cover page of the 'Sifat' booklets published in the 1970s when its subheading was still 'The SUFI Movement periodical'.

Multiple Affiliations and/or a Change of Faith

Also in other aspects new religious movements lead to different organizational structures. Their uniqueness becomes especially evident in comparison with someone's original religion or with major religious traditions in general.

For this perspective, we can differentiate between two types of groups, based on how they define themselves: movements that demand their followers to leave their previous religion and expressly join the new religion, and movements that do not require this. The latter category consists mainly of universalist movements.

Even if new movements have their roots in one of the major world religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam, they have since moved away from these religions and express a general religious spirituality that forms the basis for the new community.

The intention is not to nullify ties to the religion of origin. A Christian can remain a Christian, a Muslim a Muslim, a Buddhist a Buddhist, as the new religion claims to provide followers with stronger spiritual foundations to stand on.

The different Sufi orders are a good example of how this type of relationship to a religion of origin works in practice. However, despite a religion's stance to permit multiple affiliations, it is not uncommon for a follower to

have a primary, virtually exclusive affiliation to the new group.[1] This becomes most evident when new rituals become so institutionalized that they make comparable ceremonies practiced within the original religion redundant. Examples are a naming ceremony, a wedding or a burial. Therefore, active membership within a neo-religious movement that has a determining influence on one's life can often be regarded as a change of religion, even when that movement claims to be universalist. This charge was expressly levied against the Ramakrishna movement.[2]

Dynamic Changes to Schisms

One trait of neo-religious movements is their dynamism. This goes hand in hand with another key quality, namely their open-ended nature. All new religious movements can be seen as 'open-ended'. Over the course of one to two decades, various individual movements may emerge, while others disappear or occupy a fringe existence at most.[3] In addition, the way in which a movement perceives itself can change within a single generation.

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[1] Cf. Reinhold Bernhardt/Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Ed.), Multiple religiöse Identität. Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen [Multiple Religious Identity. Drawing from Various Religious Traditions], Zurich 2008.

[2] H.-P. Müller, Ramakrishna-Bewegung [The Ramakrishna Movement], Gütersloh 1986, 231, 23ff., esp. 31 and 35f.

[3] Cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, VI.

This open ended character rejects the overall image propagated by the old religions, which in their definitive statements are seen as closed and dogmatic.

However, a pluralistic approach to defining concepts and ideas can lead to splits, resulting in the formation of new groups or the development of sub-movements that ultimately break free of the original founding figure.

4. A way of Life and Ethos inspired by Religion

The Connection between Religion and daily Life

As they were founded by people who were firmly rooted in everyday life and were confronted with worldly worries and problems, the Japanese new religions have a close connection to the profan aspects of life. This was not always immediately the case for the major world religions, where the ideal of perfection was far removed from the context of everyday needs.

New religiosity in its universalist guise no longer sees the need to pursue a particular way of life that eschews the practical obligations of everyday life, in order to experience religiosity to the fullest. At the same time, there are also some movements that seek to realize the ideal of celibacy ideal within a modern framework. Neo-Hindu groups such as the Ramakrishna Order are a prime example of this.

By contrast, for movements derived primarily from Islam, vocation and family are religious matters. Particularly in Neo-Sufism, this 'mundane' aspect comes to the fore. This is largely due to basic Islamic teachings, which reject a celibate way of life. This is also echoed in the teachings of the Baha'i faith: Baha'u'llah asked his monks to withdraw from the world, while he strongly

recommended followers to marry.[1] Following the example of Islam, which rejects the idea of priesthood, the Baha'i faith also knows no spiritual status such as priesthood. That said, the role of a prayer leader and a preacher and, on another level, the position of the scholar and theologian are not terribly different in terms of the status they enjoy. In fact, they are structurally similar. This historical religious background led to the development of a special class separated from the other followers in their approach to life.[2]

This is not the case in the Sufi orders through Inayat Khan. The cherags – both women and men – have special responsibilities in terms of worship and spiritual welfare, but otherwise do their usual jobs. Even the Movement's founder, Inayat Khan, had to use his talents as a musician to earn a living on his arrival in the West before dedicating himself solely to his 'mission'.

Salvation on Earth and spiritual Healing

While modern religious communities are based on transcendent spiritual experiences, this transcendence does not revolve around the idea of the hereafter in the sense

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[1] Cf. F. Ficicchia, Der Baha'ismus [The Baha'i faith], 257; J. E. Esslemont, Baha'u'llah und das Neue Zeitalter [Baha'u'llah and the Modern Age], 1939, 265f.

[2] In Islam, this class is called the *ulama* (note editor).

of a neglect of, or even contempt for, one's earthly reality. The close bond between religious experience and mundane well-being is clearly expressed in the fact that people have long sought alternative ways of healing and recovery. In this sense, overcoming illness is a spiritual practice. As a result, religious healing was extremely important in new religions, both with regard to their emergence and later development.[1]

This basic trait can be identified throughout neo-religious movements and has been highlighted often for Japanese new religions. This clear secular identity is striking among new religions. The focus is not only on 'eternal salvation' so that one may reach the 'promised land' after death, but also on satisfying earthly needs. In this sense, new religions are firmly rooted in this mundane reality.

Leading a happy, fulfilling life on earth takes center stage. This makes the issue of health and avoiding suffering a key concern.[2]

Healing plays a large role within the different Sufi orders, especially in recent times: they have their own 'Healing Order', with links to the renewed interest in mystical traditions relating to esoteric healing.

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[1] Cf. C. B. Becker, Religious Healing in 19th Century 'New Religions': The Cases of Tenrikyo and Christian Science, in: Religion 20 (1990) 199ff.

[2] Cf. U. Tworuschka, 235; cf. Th. Immoos, 176.

This is also a key focal point in traditional Sufism.[1] At the same time, the desire to focus on secular or mundane matters is consistent with the holistic Sufi approach to religiousness. In the life of mystical human beings who follow this religion, religious experience and mundane existence cannot be separated. The two are so closely related that they are seen as varying degrees of meditative experience rather than as two significantly different spheres of existence.

This approach to life gives rise to the motif of unity or the 'realization of God' on earth. With this in mind, the religion's focus on the mundane should not be perceived primarily in the contrast between the sacred religious and the prophane world, because such a contrast does not allow for a profound spiritual experience.

The basic experience of the relationship between human activity and the Divine can lead to a spiritual re-evaluation of day-to-day life in the modern sense and an appreciation of its importance.

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[1] Cf. Hakim Moineddin Chishti: The Book of Sufi Healing. Inner Traditions International, 1991.

5. Overall religious Characteristics

A new Type of universal Religion

Though under debate, traditional phenomenology of religion makes the distinction between popular and universal religion. Key exponents of religious phenomenology use the term 'universal religion' to refer to the major world religions. Under this definition of universal religion, 'the denationalization of religious matters occurs',[1] leading to the creation of a religion that is accessible to all peoples. In contrast, specific religions 'belong' to a specific population, tribe or clan.

By this definition, a world religion directs its messages to all people, hence 'world religion' – and is widespread on a global scale.[2] While most new religious movements claim that their messages are directed at all people, this claim is usually used explicitly to distinguish the new movement from traditional religions, which are criticized

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[1] G. Mensching, article on universalism and particularism from a historical religious perspective, in: RGG[3], Vol. VI, 1160; Ibid., Die Religion [The Religion], 58ff.; Ibid., Die Weltreligonen [The World Religions], Wiesbaden 1981, esp. 288ff., cf. also M. Pye, Nationale und Internationale Identität in einer japanischen Religion [National and International Identity in a Japanese Religion] in: in: Religionswissenschaft, ed. H. Zinser, Berlin 1988, 246.

[2] Cf. Manfred Hutter, Die Weltreligionen [The World Religions], Munich 2005, 9ff., H. v. Glasenapp, Die fünf Weltreligonen [The Five World Religions], Munich 6th Edition, 1997.

for having lost their original goal of universality by adapting to a specific culture.

New religious communities perceive their universal identity in a new way: they are guided by the belief that they must integrate the core concerns of multiple religions, as shown, for example, by the – often selective – reception of their sacred texts.

By contrast, in a traditional universal or world religion, only a single religion is considered. Another factor that should also be taken into account is the entirely different origins and conditions in which these new religions arose in comparison to the major world religions. This results in differences, which are reflected in the doctrine, in the type of leadership and community structure, and in the teachings.

In order to get a clear picture of the differences, we need to establish the overall characteristics of neo-religious movements, so the idiosyncratic aspect of their 'universalism' becomes clear in contrast to that of the world religions. One method is provided by G. Lanczkowski, who defines the term 'universal religion' as 'to bring about a single universal religion that addresses all of humankind through the synthesis of existing religions'.[1] At the same

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[1] G. Lanczkowski, Begegnung und Wandel der Religionen [Encounter and Transformation of Religions], Cologne 1971, 109; cf. Meiers Kleines Lexikon, Religionen [Meier's Concise Lexicon of

time, he believes 'a universal religion has not yet been established'.[1] The term 'universal religion' is an umbrella for various efforts and approaches. It corresponds, for example, to F. Heiler's assertion that they are 'attempts to achieve a synthesis of religions and a new religion of humanity'.[2]

A prerequisite is that these new movements actively pursue a 'universal' religiosity both in theory and in practice. Universality should not be perceived primarily as something that can be achieved in the distant future, but needs to be seen as a current experience. This is usually expressed in the conviction that external differences between religions should not be treated as significant. A universal spirituality is seen as the fulfilment and perfection of all current religions, or as a movement that seeks to encompass the 'essence' of all religions in a mystical manner.

A new Type of Syncretism?

The communities addressed here, strive to achieve unity between various religions via a spiritual, esoteric

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Religions], edited and revised by G. Lanczkowski, article on universal religion, Mannheim 1987, 431.

[1] G. Lanczkowski, Begegnung und Wandel [Encounter and Transformation], Köln 1971, 110.

[2] Cf. F. Heiler, Die Religionen der Menschheit [The Religions of Humanity], [4]1982, 549-555; the Sufi society is mentioned here, cf. 550; see also the 1st edition of the work from 1959.

interpretation, and don't aim for an external, exoteric unity. Inner meaning is the actual basis and center of religions, and the unity of religions can be recognized from this center.

This understanding differs from syncretism in a traditional sense. From a religious studies perspective, syncretism in a narrower sense is understood to mean the intermingling of those religions that have shaped Hellenistic culture since Alexander the Great's Indian campaign. In a broader sense, various processes in the history of religion can be deemed syncretic in nature.[1]

From a systematic point of view, syncretism at an elemental level (i.e. regarding the combination of elements from different religions) can, as Ulrich Berner states, be distinguished from a syncretism at system level (combination of different religious systems).[2]

However, the syncretism of universalist movements is neither merely a synthesis of a few elements (articles of faith, types of ritual, etc.) nor a syncretism at system level, as a unified religion is not established.[3]

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[1] Cf. for ex. C. Colpe, Syncretism, in: The Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 14, 218ff.
[2] Cf. U. Berner, Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffs [Studies on the Use of the Term Syncretism], Wiesbaden 1982.
[3] Cf. U. Berner, Die Frage nach der Einheit der Religionen und das Synkretismus-Problem [The Issue of Unity of Religions and the

In the context of this terminology, it is best described as a syncretism on a meta-system level, leading to the emergence of a new system beyond the existing system, so in this case to a new form of religion.[1] However, even this designation still links the new religion to the old one too closely and doesn't do justice to the 'newness'. The universalist character cannot be derived from earlier religions.

As has been repeatedly demonstrated by universal religions, in their identity their phenomenological character is distinct from the major world religions. They establish their own type of religion with specific traits that apply exclusively to them, when considered in their entirety rather than individually. This type of religion has emerged in the modern era, primarily since the 19th century.

The Revival of Gnosis?

Whenever there are movements in cultural history that point to the novelty and originality of their ideas, the question is whether this is actually the case, or whether it is just a matter of reviving or restaging ideas that have been around for a long time. This need to seek out analogies to and forerunners of new concepts, can also be

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Problem of Syncretism], in: J. Lott (Ed.), Sachkunde Religion II [An Expert Guide on Religion II], Stuttgart 1985, 244ff., esp. 250.
[1] Cf. also U. Berner, Untersuchungen [Studies], I.c., 97.

seen in academic research interests, as it results in a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

A comparison with similar, relatively well-known and well-documented movements in the past can provide information on the nature and character of phenomena that are seemingly entirely new.

Gnosis has served as a prime forerunner in the process of comparing new religious movements. In the context of the New Age, some are even described as 'new gnosis'.[1] R. Bergeron characterizes this aspect as follows:

> The new gnostic groups themselves claim a special statute in the history of religions alongside the established religions.
>
> They often reject the label 'religion'. Instead, they see themselves as the very core of religion, or better yet as the original and timeless, universal religion, whereas the established religions essentially are merely the decayed outer appearance.
>
> These new gnostic groups are spreading a message of universalism under the guise of openness and tolerance.[2]

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[1] Cf. Carl-Friedrich Geyer, article on gnosis, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups], 487-495, esp. 494.

[2] R. Bergeron, Zu einer theologischen Interpretation [On a Theological Interpretation] in : Concilium 19 (1983), 78.

It would be more apt to speak of 'gnostic elements' in new religious movements, with 'gnosis' here not used in a discriminatory sense.[1] In the Liberal Catholic Church founded by Charles Webster Leadbeater, for example, followers took a distinctly gnostic view of Christianity, with Christ being a divine entity among human beings.[2] Overall, many interpretations focusing on these groups indicate that there is a historical parallel to gnosis.[3] From a broader perspective, in terms of their intellectual history, Gnosticism and the new religious movements can be classed within the same lineage. Since the start of the Western intellectual history, one can distinguish two perceptions of reality, namely the perception of the majority that prevailed in Christianity, and an alternative that – starting with Plato and Neoplatonism – goes all the way from Gnosticism and hermetic, mystical traditions to alternative religious movements in the modern era.[4]

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[1] Cf. C.-F. Geyer, I.c.,493.

[2] Cf. above p. 49.

[3] Cf. the fundamental works of H. Jonas, Die mythologische Gnosis [Mythological Gnosis], Göttingen 1964; K. Rudolph, Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion [Gnosis. The Essence and History of a Religion from Late Antiquity], Göttingen, 2nd edition, 1980.

[4] Cf. R. S. Ellwood/H. B. Partin, Religious Groups, 21988, 30ff. Cf. also P. Koslowski (Ed.), Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie [Gnosis and Mysticism in the History of Philosophy], Zurich 1988; he asserts 'that the term 'Theosophy' is used specifically within the context of the tradition of wisdom and should be

The thesis regarding the typological and intellectual historical relationship between gnostic and neo-religious movements may only be satisfactorily clarified by conducting a detailed historical study of the individual traits and phenomena as a whole. But generally speaking, we can suppose (at least with regard to the esoteric universalist groups addressed here), that they have comparable intentions and, in some cases, similar characteristics.

Still generalizing, 'the basis of all those attempts which proclaim the unity of all religions' is gnostic in nature.[1] The guiding factor is the concept of a unity of religions and philosophies, even if this is achieved in a dualistic way by excluding a material, external, 'evil' principle, as is the case in the criticism of the dogmatic legal 'rigid' form adopted by traditional religions.

The motive to interpret the preceding religions as inclusivist is probably the most striking in a religion described as gnostic: Manicheism. This religion identifies itself 'as the fulfilment of the major religions of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, indeed as the supreme

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clearly distinguished from the religious syncretism of the 'Theosophical Society' of the 19th century' (ibid., Die Postmodernität der Weisheitstradition [Post-modernity in the Tradition of Wisdom], in: W. Oelmüller, Philosophie und Weisheit [Philosophy and Wisdom], Paderborn 1989, 97 note 1). However, this legitimate difference does not necessarily mean that the two rich seams of tradition are not related.

[1] C. Colpe, article on gnosis, in: RGG³, Vol. II, 1649.

embodiment of all faiths preceding it'.[1] We can compare this with the anthropological idea that there is a core of being, a 'self', within a human being – a light, inner life, mystical core, that is distinct from the general psycho-physical existence and that needs to be released. The graduated structure of the cosmos and the path to God, characteristic of gnosis, underpins many of the movements addressed here (especially those with a Theosophical or Sufi background).

However, it is also important to highlight major differences with basic gnostic views. The gnostic anti-cosmic stance that condemns the world and material existence is not a typical feature of neo-religious movements in general, especially not for groups derived from Islam. Modern alternative religions focus on the earthly reality and differ from ancient philosophical and strongly ascetic Christian traditions.

Therefore, even if gnosis and new religions do share some phenomenologically similar concepts, the new religions have taken the specifically modern circumstances into account. Their concepts are not entirely new in the

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[1] H.-J. Klimkeit, article on Manichæism, in: Lexikon der Religionen [The Lexicon of Religions], 386; cf. M. Hutter, Manis, Vom Umgang mit anderen Religionen [Mani's Approach to Other Religions](1991) 289ff. in Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 43 (1991) 289-304.

history of religion, but by their modern context, they are discussed in a new way.

It is more a hypothesis than a fact to conclude that – based on the observation of individual characteristics – the universalist neo-religious movements as a whole constitute a revival of a religiosity practiced in gnosis (and Manicheism). So we cannot say that these movements were suppressed for centuries by 'closed' religious systems and cultures, and gained new ground in the form of 'neo-gnosis'.

What can be stated with some certainty however, is that the social and intellectual historical developments of the modern age have led to religious ideas that have not appeared in their current form at any point in the preceding centuries. Under new conditions – particularly in critical transition phases – phenomena can be virulent and become acutely visible, something that also occurred in previous periods of upheaval.

Structural Ambivalence:
ecstatic Forms of Experience and post-secular Aspects

As demonstrated above, a fundamental aspect in the creation of a new religiosity lies in the importance of ecstatic experiences. This basic existential experience is more general and more comprehensive, yet less codified and

defined than the foundations of belief on which the major religions are built.

At the same time, it is possible to detect the modern identity of various individual traits of new religious movements or religions in how they are structured and how their existence is made possible. Their 'pre-modern' anthropological foundation of religious universality is supplemented by their modern basis. While the former is based on experience that existed prior to the emergence of the world religions, the latter are based on an concept of humanity that emerged after the social domination of the major world religions. This cultural perception is derived largely from the process of secularization, and has historically developed first and foremost as a counterpoint to Christianity, making it critical of pre-modern views, especially in the social, ethical, and religious spheres. Based on these explicitly modern intentions, it is possible to explain why various traits of universalist religions in some aspects deviate significantly from traditional world religions.

In summary, we can say that original forms of religious experience – which sometimes have led to the founding of new religions – and the changes to how religion is perceived our modern culture, are the two main elementary reasons behind the development of new religious movements. They define one another rather than being in conflict with each other.

Chapter 6
The Ambivalence of new Religiosity in Contrast to Modernity

The realization of a universal religiosity as described, is a phenomenon of the modern age, in particular since the mid-19th century. A question is whether and to what extent the period and the prevailing cultural standards in which a religious movement arise, have an impact on the movement.

This question has no straightforward answer. On the one hand, there are major tendencies within the new religiosity that point to a pre-modern identity. Some elements are in opposition to a modern world view, in particular trance states, ecstasy, and mysticism. On the other hand, this form of religiosity is evidently shaped by modernity in many aspects. This applies in particular to the communities addressed in this work.

As a result, the characteristics of new forms of religiosity stated here therefore show two faces, a regression to pre-

modern experiences, and a modern context, including theories of contemporary ideas on self-consciousness, such as individualism, equality, and religious freedom. These general characteristics show that in a phenomenological sense neo-religious movements have a striking structure.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider what kind of intellectual historical background facilitates this structure or has laid its foundations. To answer this question, it is important to consider both the modern and the pre-modern era.

Following the dichotomy of the modern age, the focus shall be on (1.) those tendencies of the modern era that paved the way for an intellectual environment in which a new, particularly universalist religiosity could develop, and with which historical parallels can be drawn.

This is followed by (2.) the tendencies of new religions that are critical of the modern era. The next step (3.) is to determine the degree in which heterogeneous tendencies relate to an underlying feature of the modern age, namely the aspect of secularization.

1. The intellectual historical Foundations of universalist Religiosity since the Start of the modern Era

*Religious Universalism since the Renaissance
and the Enlightenment*

As Wilhelm Dilthey states in his *World View and Analysis of Humanity since the Renaissance and Reformation*, the history of ideas in Europe shows a distinct form of religious universalism since the start of the modern age (i.e. since the 15th century).[1] In his work, he refers to a 'religious, universalist theism', which he clarifies as:

> [T]he conviction that the Divine has been operating through various religions and philosophies and still continues to do so. This is shown in the moral and religious consciousness of every human being. This theory has as its premise the concept of a divinity that has a universal effect on nature as well as on the consciousness of all human beings.[2]

This religious universalist theism can be observed, for example, in the work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

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[1] W. Dilthey, Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit der Renaissance und Reformation [World View and Analysis of Humanity since the Renaissance and Reformation], Göttingen, 9.1970, 45ff.
[2] I.c. 45.

and Marsilio Ficino. This theism is usually associated with a pantheistic or a panentheistic view, often based on Platonism, Stoicism, and Christian mysticism. According to Dilthey, some Italian humanists even concluded that this 'religious, universalist theism is a new religion, distinct from Christianity'.[1]

Dilthey believes that this religious, universal theism 'emerged victorious throughout Europe at the start of the 16th century' and continued to have an impact in the 17th century. A key representative of this school of thought is the French humanist Jean Bodin, who was influenced by Pico.

A key document of this new school of thought is Bodin's *Heptaplomeres* (*Colloquium of the Seven regarding the hidden Secrets of the sublime Things*), which was published in 1593.[2] In it, representatives of the different denominations and religions (a Catholic, a Lutheran, a Reform Jew, representatives of natural religions and representatives of indifferentism) discuss the value of religions.

One of these is of particular interest here, as it proclaims to represent an 'original' religion. This original or natural religion is contained within the 'positive' religions

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[1] I.c. 47.

[2] It was first published in full in the mid-19th century; cf. Karl Vorländer, Philosophie der Renaissance [The Philosophy of the Renaissance], Reinbek, 1975, 104f., which cites the Edition by L. Noack (Schwerin 1857). Cf. Dilthey,148f.

and can elicit a beatific state, but has been corrupted by theological musings.[1] Both paganism and Judaism point to an ancient wisdom and primeval revelation. To some extent, this original religion exists in opposition to the positive religions and serves as their critical benchmark. This representative of a 'paganistic' form of development highlights the ability of this religion to put faiths in perspective and expresses its religious universal identity as follows:

> But I enter the temple of the Christians, the Ishmaelites and the Jews, wherever it may be, as well as that of the Lutherans and the Zwinglians, so as not to offend anyone who calls themselves an atheist or appear to be disturbing the public peace.[2]

Even for atheists – who are tolerated in this text – the aim is to preserve the public peace. Achieving this is one of the main concerns of a syncretic religious philosophy. The guiding principle is a longing for peace, or the belief that all religions should be united. Unity and tolerance are 'deeply rooted based on the notion of kinship between all religions. They are all daughters of the same

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[1] Cf. I.c., 149.
[2] Heptaplomeres, Ed. Guhrauer, 40f., cited in Wilhelm Dilthey, I.c. 148.

mother, the natural religion'.[1] Bodin's own position can therefore be seen through this representative of the 'natural religion'.[2] These considerations also appear in the theories of the Baron Herbert of Cherbury and in the famous ring parable of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*.

Baron Herbert of Cherbury (1581-1648) believed that reason has the capacity to assert religious moral truths. The aspect of revelation is secondary to this.[3] Based on this epistemological position, he reaches the conclusion that 'a general belief in religion in the sense of Stoicism, independent of any specific positive religion' is what is important. He is a firm believer in 'the teaching of the universal religion of reason'.[4]

Parallels to universal religious Concepts, especially as taught by Inayat Khan

The philosophical concepts of the Renaissance and early Enlightenment, show a connection that leads to 'natural religion', or to a religion of reason which is considered to be the original and the first religion, and is preceding the positive religions. This move towards the origin and – based on this – to the conviction of the 'kinship'

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[1] W. Dilthey, I.c. 150.
[2] Cf. K. Vorländer, Philosophie der Renaissance [Philosophy of the Renaissance], 104.
[3] Cf. I.c., 248.
[4] Cf. I.c., 254 and 256f.

between religions can also be seen in new universal religious groups. They also refer to a primeval human religion and the 'unity' of religions. In this sense, we can understand the conciliatory concept of tolerance and peace between religions.

When seeking to identify a reason for this development, Wilhelm Dilthey provides a possible answer. He states that the emergence of a 'natural religion' is a critical response to a denominational conflict. In his opinion, he has proven that

> the increasing sense of not being able to accept conflicts between denominations led to a joint outlook in which peace could be found. With irresistible power, the idea arose of a truth containing the core of all religions. This led to the emergence of the concept of natural religion'.[1]

Critique on religious wars and denominational conflicts served as the driving factor behind the work *'De pace fidei'* by Nicholas of Cusa. Baron Herbert of Cherbury, too, wished to establish the basis of a true *catholic* (literally 'all-encompassing') or universal church through five basic principles of ethical religious conduct.[2] These five principles ('common notions') underpinning his concept of

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[1] Cf. I.c., 247.
[2] De veritate 283, cited in Dilthey, I.c., 253.

religion are (1) the recognition of the reality of God; (2) the obligation of divine worship, which leads to virtue and piety (3), and the willingness to repent and make amends when acting ill (4), and finally (5) the conviction of divine retribution in the hereafter as reward and punishment.

The five aspects of religion cited by Inayat Khan in his overview of religion are in accordance with these five common notions of Baron Herbert of Cherbury.[1] The pacifist intentions of this Sufi master,[2] who came to the West at the dawn of the 20th century, offer a striking parallel to the pioneering religious concepts of peace in Europe in the early modern age.[3]

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[1] Cf. J. Figl, Einheit der Religionen. Konzepte europäischer Religionsphilosophie und des Sufismus (im Westen) [The Unity of Religions. Concepts of a European Religious Philosophy and Sufism (in the West)], in: Erdal Toprakyaran, et al., Dem Einen entgegen. Christliche und islamische Mystik in historischer Perspektive [Toward the One. A Historical Perspective of Christian and Islamic Mysticism], Münster 2018, 219-235, esp. 227ff.

[2] Cf. J. Figl, Einheit der Religionen [The Unity of Religions], l.c. 224f.

[3] Cf. J. Figl, Pazifistische Intentionen neureligiöser Bewegungen. Motive des ,Universalen Sufismus' *angesichts beider* Weltkriege [Pacifist Intentions of New Religious Movements. Ideas of 'Universal Sufism' Against the Backdrop of both World Wars, in I. Klissenbauer et al., Menschenrechte un Gerechtigkeit als bleibende Aufgaben, Göttingen 2020, 225-238.

From an areligious to an alternative religious Image of God

A further stage in the development of European intellectual history in relation to religion is the transition from philosophical religious theory to a generally critical or atheistic philosophy of religion.

In the process of addressing Christian origin, different developments ultimately resulted in the negation of humanity's religious dimension. The atheistic approach to the philosophy of religion became the new paradigm and religion was interpreted as an illusionary human concept. This process started with the French Enlightenment (the Encyclopedists, the materialism school of thought) and led to the atheistic concepts that emerged in the 19th century and the start of the 20th century.[1]

In this move toward a clear criticism of religion, the atheistic criticism vehemently opposed the monotheistic perception of God, leading to the declaration that the Christian God was dead.

This grave polemic issue obviously had an effect on the culture as a whole. Critique on religion became a rejection of Christianity. As a result, it was difficult for Christianity to express aspects of its own tradition. This development is important for understanding neo-religious movements, especially those with monistic tendencies.

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[1] Cf. J. Figl, Article on atheism, in: Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen [The Lexicon of New Religious Groups], 2005, 93-96.

After all, this kind of issues did not exist for religious traditions that have no monotheistic image of God, but rather embrace a monistic understanding of the Divine. So non-theistic religions were not affected by European atheism in the same way as the Christian tradition.

Alternative religious movements often profess an impersonal character of the Divine, which for many Western followers is compatible with how they perceive themselves. When Islam is the root of a new religious movement, its mystical components are adopted, as these components do not exclude the possibility that the word of God is impersonal. Another aspect of a personal God is the image of a 'father god'. More recent developments within Inayatiyya and the Ruhaniat addressed earlier in this work, show that the patriarchal and gendered idea of God is replaced by a God who is both the father and the mother. This approach is established primarily due to the desire to challenge a patriarchal understanding of God.[1]

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[1] Changes in the prayers and other words of Inayat Khan were made by these Sufi orders to meet the demands of this era, as expressed by the LBGTQ+ movement. Nowadays, for many people the dominant male perspective and a dualistic man-woman world view is too exclusive (note editor).

2. Intentions critical of the modern Era

Religiosity in a non-religious Environment

The above only relates to specific aspects of understanding of the Divine, and does not necessarily incorporate a religious dimension. In contrast with radical modern criticism of religion, these movements still strive for human identification with the Divine. For neo-religious movements, identification as religious experience is central. While new religious movements – within the parameters described above – take earlier critique on religion as a starting point for their own development, they also transcend the issues the criticize and offer an option out of the lack of religious identity, so characteristic of the modern age.

While even theologists refer to the 'death of God', many new religious heralds (such as Baha'ullah) proclaim the transcendence of God and the life of God.[1] As a result, an alternative religious position replaces the a-religious position.

In individual lives, we can sometimes see a transition towards a new religiosity from an initial atheistic outlook, with this religiosity emerging in a transitional state.[2]

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[1] Cif. W. Schilling, Einheit und Friede: Die Baha'i [Unity and Peace: The Baha'i faith], in: Handbuch Weltreligionen [The Handbook of World Religions], 269.

[2] Cf. for ex. the biography of Theosophist A. Besant.

The Search for a religious Experience

As shown, the new religious view of a unifying essence behind all religions has a certain parallel with the essence of religion as seen by the philosophy of Enlightenment. However, when we look at parallels, we should not overlook the differences between Enlightenment philosophy and new religious tendencies, such as the difference in religious practice, or the concrete experience of the Absolute and the Divine.

There are, so to speak, two types of religion 'behind' the specific religions: a deistic, neutral religion shaped by enlightenment ideals, and an institutionalized religion guided by personal religious identity. While the trajectory of modern intellectual history, with its abstract perception of the Divine, ultimately led to a distancing from religious experience, new religious movements nevertheless focus on the propagation of a factual relationship with God.

The conceptualization of modern religious philosophies in the context of the Enlightenment makes religion and the religion's understanding of God abstract, resulting in an impersonal image of a God who no longer can be venerated or no longer can be subject to personal piety. The 'God of philosophers' stands virtually opposite the God experienced on a religious level – the 'God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob', as Blaise Pascal concludes in his well-known text *Memorial*.

When referring to God in modern culture, two ways emerge: a philosophical one that aligns itself with modern concepts of tolerance, universality, general human courtesy, ethics, and so forth, and factual denominations in which God was venerated through prayer and ritual.

This necessarily led to a dichotomy that resulted in modern cultural and intellectual movements having a much reduced focus on God, while in denominational schools of theology there was the risk of speaking of the reality of God without adapting this message to the modern mindset.

This historical cultural development is reflected in individual situations. When growing up, people become alienated from the religion that shaped their childhood and end up living in a culture that is not characterized by religion. This results in a split between their religious and their existential consciousness. In this case, the task of a religion is to overcome this mutually exclusive dichotomy between culture and religion without calling into question the autonomy of the two, and without promoting or undermining one at the expense of the other.

Criticism of sacred or profane Dualism

New religious movements believe they mount a serious challenge to the traditional self-image of a culture which

postulates a strict division between the sacred and the profane spheres and between the private and the public domain.[1] The religiosity that results from this – as has already been established – is a secular world that consciously encompasses the 'profane' areas of existence in a spiritual sense. This religiosity can no longer be restricted to a specific sacred space.

The belief that religion is a form of piety that has no influence on society, and should be reserved for the private domain, and that religious mysticism is narcissistic or therapeutic, does not contradict the description of religiosity as a personal fulfilment, as it strives to encompass all aspects of life.[2]

Summarizing, we can say that in determining the relationship of the new form of religiosity to the modern age, these movements generally seek to reconcile two tendencies, namely conveying religious experiences (such as ecstatic mystical forms) in contrast to secularized modernity, and integrating the profane aspects and spheres of life in a religious sense.

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[1] Present politics, forbidding outer signs of religion (head scarves, crosses, David stars) for public officials in countries like France, show that in the public domain the dichotomy actually has become more apparent (note editor).

[2] Cf. on the critical allegation of narcissism A. R. Schwarz, Zeitgenössische religiöse Bewegungen angesichts der herrschenden Säkularisierung [Contemporary Religious Movements in View of Prevailing Secularisation], in: Concilium 19 (1983) 7f.

3. New Religions -
a Continuation or a Conquest of Secularization?

Religious criticism and atheism are characteristic symptoms of the ongoing development of secularization in our society. With the appearance of numerous new religious phenomena since the dawn of the 20th century, this universal diagnosis has become problematic.

The emergence of new religions cannot be aligned with the general concept of secularization. Instead, these 'creative forces of religion seem to run contrary to the claim of a general form of secularization'.[1]

Nevertheless, it can be said that an either-or mentality in relation to secularization would be an inaccurate alternative. The traditional structure of secularization must be called into question both in terms of the history of its origins and regarding present-day society (in the sense that society is segmented and the mundane is separated from the non-mundane).

As a result of secularization, secular areas became autonomous and separated from religious domination, such as in education, ethics, and so forth. Religion is seen as a special area, a non-secularized area, to which profane standards can only be applied to a very limited degree (if at all). The sacred and the profane are separate and religion became institutionalized and denominationalized.

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[1] G. Lanczkowski, Neue Religionen [New Religions], 7.

In addition, there was – and still is – a non-institutional religiosity that has become an 'invisible religion' (Th. Luckmann) and, from another perspective, a 'civil religion' that is the subject of religious sociological considerations.[1]

However, new religious universalist tendencies cannot be integrated into the dualist structure mentioned above, nor can they be perceived as a free-floating form of piety that is not bound to any specific tradition. Religion is a practice in which human beings are all related and are often influenced by the concrete historical expression of non-Christian traditions.

This puts them in competition with traditional churches. For the traditional, established churches, the new religious movements pose a different challenge in the process of secularization. As a result, churches are questioned from within their own field, not at least by those alternative religions which oppose the self-image of Christianity as a denomination.

When viewed from an apologetic Christian perspective, it can seem as though this leads to undifferentiated,

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[1] Cf. H. Lübbe, Religion nach der Aufklärung [Religion after the Enlightenment], Graz 1986, 306ff.; E. K. Scheuch, Die heimatlose Religiosität [Religiosity without a Homeland], 227ff.

inaccurate terms such as 'substitute religion' or 'new paganism'.[1]

When considering the heterogeneous tendencies as a whole, the modern age is ambivalent towards the religious dimension, as it significantly influences forces critical of religion and affirmative towards religion. The dialectics in this process, to be determined here, are complicated as neither the critical forces nor those that are affirmative are unique in themselves.

As far as the new religious movements are concerned, there are – in addition to the universalist tendencies presented in this work – fundamentalist movements that comprise a different structure, at least in terms of their intention. The situation as a whole is summed up well by C. Cople, who states that the relationships 'between ideology and religion, religion and religious criticism, the formation of religions and secularization, are becoming increasingly dialectical'.[2]

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[1] Cf. F.-W. Haack, Europas neue Religion [Europe's New Religion], 1991; cf. P. Beyerhaus/v. Padberg (Ed.), Eine Welt - eine Religion?, Die synkretistische Bedrohung unseres Glaubens im Zeichen von New Age [One World, One Religion? The Syncretic Threat to our Faith in the New Age], Asslar 21989, passim.
[2] C. Colpe, in: Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte [The Handbook of Religious History], Vol. 3, 504.

Chapter 7
The Relationship between traditional universal Religions and new universal Religions

1. Neo-religious Movements as an Alternative to traditional Religions

Universalist new religious movements pose a challenge to traditional religions, as their emergence shows that traditional religions have not been able to integrate these new forms of spiritual religious awakening. People who have had such experiences no longer feel they can identify with the major religions.

This shortcoming is experienced primarily in two thematic areas. First and most fundamental is that traditional religiosity appears to be insufficient in spiritual and mystical terms. This leads into the second area, namely the belief that traditional religions are not able to do justice to what it means to be a human being today,

based as they are on pre-modern premises. An example is the already mentioned inequality between men and women. Overall, these religions are reproached for having specific historical foundations shaped by a legally limited tradition that is primarily centered around a specific culture instead of around the originally intended universality.

In comparison to the traditional religions, the historical fact that new religions arose in the modern era gives them a certain advantage. From a modern person's perspective, they are not weighed down with the burdens of pre-modern religions.

The mere fact that many religions originated one-and-a-half to two millennia ago, corroborates the theory that the epochs and civilizations of those early periods were primarily responsible for shaping the religion. Because of their close connection with state power, the old religions also acquired a major historical burden of conflicts, persecution, and even elimination of 'heretics' and all the barbarism that goes with it. This is particularly true for the relationship between Christianity and Islam, for the inner, religiously motivated struggles of Christianity and Islam, and for the religious repression of minorities. As we saw. in India, new religious movements arose primarily due to the inhumane practices of Hindu traditions.

As outlined above, traditional religions in many ways differ from new religions that emerged in the modern era.

For this reason, the structural characteristics of universalist neo-religious movements constitute a major challenge for traditional religions, and for their view of themselves and of the world. Examples are principles of equality between men and women in religion, the alleged equal validity of religious tolerance, the affirmation of inner-worldly values, the autonomous design of the form taken by a religion and by its rituals and its doctrines, the independent experience of salvation, and the no longer exclusive orientation around a founder or around the provisions and teachings of a single world religion.

Another key difference when compared to major religions can be found – at least according to the claims of many new communities – in the experience of the Absolute. This experience is not seen as being exclusively linked to any traditional religion, but to different or even all religions.

Each individual religion, as it emerged in its historical form, colored by the culture or period in which it arose, is considered as relatively 'true'. Therefore it can only serve in a limited sense as a revelation of the Divine or of God. Only the universal experience is 'true', as it has a new, different, and unique form. The new aspect of the new religions discussed here is the religious experience of a mysticism or doctrine aiming to bring about the 'unity of religions'. This is not an abstract theory, but a direct, immediate concern. In traditional religions, by contrast,

the vital stream of religious experience dried up due to a strict adherence to tradition, law, and dogmatism.

This is the true religious and ultimately decisive level that follows on from the structure shaped by modern circumstances. In the desired dialogue between traditional and new religions and movements, it is essential to do justice to the religious level and to the structure rather than focus on one at the expense of the other. Both dimensions are discussed in the two points below(2. and 3.).

2. Renewal based on Origin in modern Terms

Overcoming Alienation between Religion and Culture

The new situation as characterized in particular by the emergence of new religions, requires traditional religions to restructure to a certain extent. A precondition for this is the explicit avoidance of unacceptable practices and events from the past. In other words, the religious communities concerned must distance themselves from the injustices of the past. They are called to make an inner change in relation to intolerance, persecution of so-called heretics, religious conflict, legal systems that violate human rights, and so on. Despite the overlap, the political world today is different from the world of religion. For instance, both fields are concerned with the realization of ethical and humanistic perspectives. The emergence of a religious society as a repressive factor, runs counter to how people perceive themselves in the modern era. The return to a culturally closed, monopolistic form of religion that believes it is able to renege on the premises of modern religious freedom is no longer acceptable.

The Christian tradition is primarily concerned with questions of a modern life style, a modern understanding of history, and a modern society. This situation, specific to Europe, is a task that cannot be sufficiently remedied by adapting or restoring certain structures. It requires to face and accept the difficulties that have arisen as the

result of a long period of alienation, and to work with them. When religions become socially relevant, they can offer an integration of meaning that is significant for the individual, which in an overall cultural sense can be indirectly effective.

Of course, this integration relies first and foremost on the willingness of the religion in question to resolve the issues that led to the critique, and which indirectly established the basis for the emergence of new religious movements.

The general expectation – more urgent now due to these new religions – is that the established religions turn a critical eye to their practical structures and their self-image, shaped by a culture and the circumstances of a bygone era. Religions are called to demonstrate their ability to respond to new issues that did not exist when they were founded. Subjects such as equal rights for women, awareness of democracy, the value of worldly matters, and individualistic mentalities need to be clear against the backdrop of major religious traditions. If a religion is unable to fulfil this task, it loses relevance – especially if it continues to adhere rigidly to specific historical structures, as then a modern view on the world simply cannot be integrated into certain areas of the religion.

Renewal based on Origin

Ultimately, the ability to renew and modernize one's views is only the start, an inspiring foundation on which to build again. Every religion is called on to accentuate its guiding principle and to critically examine its historical and present structures and views.

These are just a few observations on how to gain a basic form of religious inspiration in the modern age. Looking at the original form of inspiration is by no means concurrent with a regression, fundamentalist or otherwise, to past behavior and therefore a renunciation of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Instead, it may uncover the wrong paths taken in the past and the imbalances in the present. In addition, it sheds light both on the outdated structures that underpin religious practice and restrict profane, modern views. However, the one-sided modern guiding principles that led to the emphasis on an isolated rationality, the aggressive conquest of nature, or inhumane conditions around the world, must not lead to the belief that humanist ideas of the modern age are in any way watered down. On the contrary, the insights of religion in the inner structure of these conditions allow for a more realistic assessment.

Religious motivation can facilitate and support the realization of ideas. From this perspective, the demands, based on the ideal of equality from the Enlightenment,

are not eroded because of religion, but are reinforced thanks to an additional and ultimately transcendental form of reasoning.

This applies to the general nature of such ideas, and demonstrates its worth when these ideas are implemented in practice. When transitioning from theory to practice, the focus on the early period of a religion becomes detrimental, because – as stated – this may be of fundamental importance to the religion historically, but it may not be a suiting guiding principle the modern era. Adapting the historical circumstances to the present would not benefit the religion, as it is based on sources that are decidedly not 'profane'. Neither would it benefit a modern world view, as this way, secularity would only allow for an impoverished form of religiosity.

As a whole, the traditional religions have pre-modern roots and convey dimensions that are lost in many ways due to the more recent development towards the profane. If their aim is to provide modern human beings with something that they do not already have in view of the difficulties specific to the modern age, old and new religions are called upon to look back and remember the reason for their existence.

They can draw on the inspiration and motivation that they gain from looking back to their origins to adapt and not as an external fundamentalist restoration based on past ideals. This way, they can instigate a revival which

may offer a convincing solution, even for people who are not religious. This applies in principle to every religion and religious group that stays true to its humanist principles.

3. The Significance of mystical Religiosity

Special States of Consciousness
to inspire religious Experience

The ecstatic and visionary experiences of founding figures play a key role in the new religious movements that have emerged since the mid-19th century. Likewise, mysticism is of fundamental importance to virtually all new religions and groups, in particular to those movements influenced by Eastern and Islamic Sufism. These experiences offer an especially intensive encounter with the reality of the Divine. They can break through the boundaries of traditional, institutionalized religions, and can – as demonstrated – lead to new religions or to a mystical, unified perspective of old religions.

Psychologically, ecstasy and mysticism are extraordinary states of consciousness.[1] They have a different structure, as becomes clear both in their outer appearance and in their empirical, psychological data.[2] The more underlying, more original phenomenon is undoubtedly the

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[1] Cf. B. Bäumer/H.G. Hödl, in: J. Figl (Ed.), Handbuch Religionswissenschaft [The Handbook of Religious Studies], 2003, 2nd Edition, 2017, 702-717.

[2] Cf. G. Guttmann, Zur Psychophysiologie der Bewußtseinssteuerung Meditation-Trance-Hypnose [The Psychophysiology of Mind Control through Meditation, Trance and Hypnosis], in Einheit in Vielfalt (Festschrift G. Bandion), Wien 1990, 345ff.; also N. G. Holm (Ed.), Religious Ecstasy, Stockholm 1982; A. Sharma, Ecstasy, in: The Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. V, 11ff.

ecstatic experience known as a 'trance'. M. Eliade describes this ecstatic experience as a 'primordial phenomenon', which is 'a constituent element of the human constitution and therefore known to all archaic human beings'.[1]

Starting from this basic concept, it is understandable that ecstasy occurs in various religions, embedded within different historical religious environments, and that it experiences a different interpretation and valuation due to its religious context.[2] Likewise, it is clear that this phenomenon does not belong to any single religion, and both transcends their boundaries and unites them.[3]

Trance, ecstasy, and mysticism are phenomena that transcend religion and break with the confines of traditional religion. As we saw, ecstatic experiences were the catalyst for the formation of many modern religions in Japan. They are also at the heart of more recent psycho-religious movements, although this can also lead to some problematic developments.[4]

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[1] M. Eliade, Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik [Shamanism and the Archaic Technique of Ecstasy], Frankfurt/M. 1975, 464, cf. 4.

[2] Cf. I.c., 466; cf. 17.

[3] Cf. I.c., 17.

[4] Cf. H. Zinser, Ekstase und Entfremdung. Zur Analyse neuerer ekstatischer Kultveranstaltungen [Ecstasy and alienation. An analysis of new ecstatic ritualistic events], in: Religionswissenschaft [Religious Studies], Ed. H. Zinser, Berlin 1988, 274ff.

Mysticism in the modern Age

Many people today – and not just those who move in religious circles – strive to uncover the mystical-spiritual dimension of experience. In many neo-religious movements, mystical elements are overwhelmingly inspired by non-Christian faiths, regardless of whether these movements are based on Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Sufism. What they have in common is the emphasis on meditative experience as part of religious understanding. The call for a revival of mystical tradition can be observed time and again when looking at theological theses of present-day society. There is a desire to bring about this revival by reflecting on the need for silence in one's encounter with the reality of God. Talking about the importance of mysticism for the future of Christianity, Karl Rahner famously stated that:

> In the days ahead, you will either be a mystic (one who has experienced God for real), or you will be nothing at all.[1]

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[1] Cf. K. Rahner, Frömmigkeit früher und heute (1966) [Piety Yesterday and Today, in: ibid., Schriften zur Theologie [Theological Writings], Vol. VII, Einsiedeln/Zurich/Cologne 1971, 22f.; cf. for ex. J. Sudbrack, Mystik. Selbsterfahrung -Kosmische Erfahrung - Gotteserfahrung [Mysticism. Personal Experience - Cosmic Experience - Divine Experience], Mainz/Stuttgart 1988, 19 et al.; see in general: B. Jaspert, Mystik - eine unentbehrliche Bestimmung des

Rahner himself emphasizes the significance of this path in his meditations titled 'Encounters with Silence'.[1]

Within Christianity, the question remains how it can regain this mystical dimension. Generally speaking, there are two ways to achieve this: first of all by returning to the religion's own rich mystical tradition, and secondly through the reception of meditative practices that originated in non-Christian religions.[2]

Both options should be explored in order to adequately meet the need for a deeper spiritual outlook. With regard to the focus on the religion's own tradition, the focus could be on expressing the modes of thought and experience of the medieval and early modern mystics within the framework and in the context of a (post-)secular situation. However, this is extremely difficult due to cultural changes and the resulting major gap between the perception of the reality when these texts were created and the

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christlichen Glaubens [Mysticism – An Indispensable Determination of the Christian Faith], in: ibid., (Ed.), Leiden und Weisheit in der Mystik [Suffering and Wisdom in Mysticism], Paderborn 1992, 75ff.

[1] Cf. the pioneering work of E. Biser, Glaubensprognose. Orientierung in postsäkularer Zeit [The Prognosis of Faith. Orientation in a Post-secular Era], Graz/Vienna/Cologne 1991, passim. The second edition of the work titled 'Encounters with Silence' was published in Innsbruck in 1940.

[2] Cf. J. Figl, Mystik und Dialog der Weltreligionen [The Mysticism and Dialogue of the World Religions] (1989) 14ff.

perception of reality today, and because the religious, theological analysis of Christianity in the modern age has itself largely become non-mystical, and heavily didactic.

As a result, the reception of these texts will only be sufficiently possible if the spiritual dimension of Christian life is expressed more strongly in all its components, and if modern conditions with their evolved structure are taken into consideration and are reflected on from a theological perspective.

Modern history is now several centuries old and may offer a basis to openly appreciate positive humanitarian and rationalistic developments without adhering to the restrictions of this cultural epoch, as these restrictions had a major influence on religion. Within the context of a secular environment, the most difficult task of all may be to uncover and open up for the path of spiritual experience.

The second path to seek out spiritual experiences in the Western cultural realm involves the application of non-Christian meditative practices. The basic question here is whether meditative practices can be taken outside of their original religious context and find a home within another religion. This is possible when one takes the universal religious aspect of mystical experience into account. Zen meditation does this convincingly. In many of his publications, D. T. Suzuki makes a special note of

its general anthropological relevance.[1] As Zen has a form that transcends Buddhism, it is suitable to be practiced by many Christians.[2]

In a similar fashion to how Zen was received by Christianity, it is possible to imagine to incorporate the universal dimension of Sufism in another religion. Up to now, elements of Sufism have only to a very limited degree been received by Christianity.[3]

The mutual reception of forms of meditation from other religions is possible when they are encountered with an open mind and – as the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church pointedly stated – the truth and

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[1] D. T. Suzuki was one of the figures who strongly influenced the development of the Zen movement. As a scholar, he accompanied his Zen master to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893); he was one of the most significant practitioners of this form of meditation for the Western public in the 20th century. Zen was seen as a universal school of thought conceived for every human being, and could therefore be practised by non-Buddhists; cf. for a general overview: H. Dumoulin, Zen im 20. Jahrhundert [Zen in the 20th Century], Munich 1990, esp. 135-154.

[2] Cf. for more details J. Figl, Theorie und Therapie der Kulturen [The Theory and Therapy of Cultures], in: Zen Buddhism Today. Annual Report of the Kyoto Zen Symposion Nr. 9, Kyoto 1992.

[3] Cf. the notes by H. Gstrein, Islamische Sufi-Meditation für Christen [Islamic Sufi Meditation for Christians], Vienna 1977, on the efforts of priest and specialist in Middle Eastern and oriental studies Ernst Bannerth in Cairo in the 1960s and 1970s, cf. 9f.; it is worth recalling the work by L. Massignon, who looked at Islamic mysticism in detail and is considered a pioneer in Christian-Islamic dialogue.

sacredness of other religious traditions is recognized and appreciated.[1]

Neo-religious movements and new religions are also part of this, and should be seen as a partner in dialogue rather than as an opponent, not in the least due to their universalist outlook, which enables them to offer a rallying cry for all religions to make their own contribution to a global universality which unites all.[2]

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[1] Cf. the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the relationship to non-Christian religions, article 2.

[2] Cf. F. König, article on dialogue, in: Lexikon der Sekten [The Lexicon of Sects], 172ff.