

Folk Religion

Where pluralism in religious belief exists, there will be a small number of shared elements that partially float free from particular communities and frameworks (“folk religion”).

These causal attributions are essentially minimally-defined beliefs about common figures who represent basic common themes in supernatural/paranormal belief, but their depiction and use float free of the orthodoxies and goal directed practices peculiar to a specific traditional community.

Can be used (informally communicated) by those who have no or little current active involvement in traditional communities, but have residual beliefs (given a personal interpretation) or who are trying to put together selected aspects of belief from many different sources (religious “bricolage”).

An individual belief that can be invoked

- in mundane, otherwise secular circumstances (cf. Redden: “the re-enchantment of everyday life”) and
- to seek intervention and protection from supernatural/paranormal forces in uncontrollable situations where outcomes are important and personal disappointments and losses are in view. (cf. Redden: “taking back control of one’s life through inner spiritual power”)

Folk religion can persist during the secularization process (in which traditional communities lose power to maintain orthodoxy, oppose dissent or dissenting uses of religious symbols and texts).

Folk religion, however, depends upon acceptance of unconventional forces that are not accepted in the public sphere, so will eventually decline just as traditional communities do.

New Age Practitioners

Is there a common core of defining themes?

Note the emphasis in New Age techniques on seeing and knowing more than is ordinarily seen and known (link with earlier forms of esotericism/occultism).

More distinctive is

- the central emphasis on improving the quality of life in an uncertain and rapidly changing environment (better living here and now through a metaphysical mastery of life);
- critique and pushback on bureaucratic organizational structures, pre-set work roles that someone has laid down for us institutional work-settings, and evaluation of performance and identity by strictly technical criteria, which do not serve those in need of help or support but produce stress, a crisis of alienation (work is “meaningless,” “isolating”) and negative bodily impacts (“dis-ease,” suffering, unwellness, burnout, physical illness, life-threatening physical conditions, depression/anxiety/mental illness; “this work is not good for me”);
 - disillusionment with traditional forms of organized religion (particularly Christianity; which for the traditional middle class is the private-sphere counterpart to the public-sphere roles of institutionalized, compartmentalized, bureaucratic work)
 - mainstream education and medical practice, which create alienation and unwellness by forcing people into uniform, rationalized bureaucratic systems and treating bodies

mechanically or chemically, while refusing questions or criticisms by insisting on the supposed objectivity of these arrangements.

- emphasize the need to create
 - new patterns of living, family, and work (“un-careers”) that are authentic (lively, creative and spirited) and have integrity (based upon my own experiences, do not require one to give up who one is because of what is imposed from the outside)
 - new patterns of care which is attentive to the body, but seeks more fundamental (primal) causes behind the body that can be worked upon (if you want to help people, you must swim against the tide); note the number of people involved in service industries of helping/social care (social worker, counselor, psychologist, physiotherapist, massage therapist, etc.)
 - reject traditional sources of authority and attributions of power/validity based on connection with traditional groups (a dialogical relationships with some mediator between the individual and cosmos, who has been granted special power by God) in favor of value/power conferred and validated by individual choice/selection (subjective assessment of validity based on whether it creates calm and positive energy)
 - support from women reflects changing gender roles, changing participation of women in full-time professional work, and different gendered family or social arrangements (as opposed to wanting to regulate women or associating them with temptation or problems, as in traditional, authoritarian forms of Christianity)
 - promoting ideas through advertising, branding and media techniques, not evangelization that demands conversion and committed, exclusive loyalty to the cause or forms of institutional authority over how to perform rituals or interpret texts or which propose to exclude the validity of other religions/systems (limiting the individual’s capacity to explore and assemble beliefs through “bricolage”).