

## ***Contemporary Spiritualities: Enchanted Worlds of Nature, Wellbeing and Mystery in Italy***

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The term spirituality has a long history, from its Christian meaning as being part of institutional religion to modern connotations of spirituality outside religions, as expressed by the formula “spiritual but not religious”.

The sociological study of contemporary spirituality presents us with three problems: theoretical, empirical and methodological. Existing studies are divided between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Empirically Italy is an interesting case because it combines strong mainstream Catholicism with many vibrant options. Methodologically we use an ethnographical approach to convey the main tendencies of Italian spiritualities.

The history of contemporary spirituality and new religious movements can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s. For example, the mass suicide of more than 9 hundred followers of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown Guyana attracted both worldwide public and academic attention to the phenomenon as well as illustrating that modern secularization had not eliminated the need for the sacred. This was the prelude to a new age when educated middle class youth reacted to bourgeoisie values of their parents, senator McCarthy’s witch-hunt and the Vietnam War by promoting a counterculture, some of whose keynotes were spirituality and experimental communities. The civil rights movement, feminism and ecologism added their voices together with oriental wisdom, psychedelic drugs and the Beat Generation, whose slogan was “Turn on, tune in and drop out”. From these movements derive present day spiritualities with their emphasis on creative, individual experience of the sacred outside mainstream religions.

This volume is divided into two parts. The first is theoretical.

Chapter 1 defines spirituality and its relations with religion. Our view is that religion and spirituality are different but interrelated ways of experiencing the sacred.

Chapter 2. The genealogy of spirituality rooted in Western esotericism and Christian mysticism. Our thesis is that spirituality is only partly new and only partly alternative. Our analytical model examines the “social field” of spirituality, populated by both religious and secular actors, and elements of cooperation and conflict.

The second part is empirical.

Chapter 3 focusses on traditionally Christian countries – Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox. Spirituality – a kind of international lingua franca combining tendencies such as subjectivity and eclecticism into forms of beliefs and practices – is subsequently defined according to the prevalent religious culture. We have introduced the concept of “multiple spiritualities” to express this heterogeneousness. Focussing on Italy, quantitative research reveals how modern spirituality may derive from an institutional historical mainstream religion such as Catholicism.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 examine Italian spirituality currents under three headings: the sacralization of nature; health and wellbeing; and those concerned with mystery. We identify these stream’s ambivalent relations with tradition and the mainstream culture, religious and secular.

Chapter 7 reflects upon research strengths and weaknesses of the book in the light of the variable borders of contemporary spirituality.