

This is an accepted version of the manuscript to be published in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. Accepted by the editor Elisabeth Arweck on 13 April 2022.

Do ‘Spiritual’ Self-Identifications Signify Affinity With New Age?

Survey Evidence from the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper examines nationally representative survey data from the Netherlands collected in 2015 (N=2,197) to study whether the ‘spiritual but not religious’ embrace New Age spirituality and reject traditional Christian religion, whereas the ‘both religious and spiritual’ adhere to traditional Christian religion and understand spirituality in a non-New Age fashion (i.e. spirituality in a Christian sense). Yet, we find just as much affinity with New Age spirituality among the ‘both religious and spiritual’ as among the ‘spiritual but not religious’. This is because the more liberal and progressive Christians in the former category embrace New Age spirituality, too, while their more conservative and traditional Christian counterparts in this ‘both religious and spiritual’ category rather dismiss it. Both within Christian religion and beyond it, then, self-identifications of ‘being spiritual’ have become quite reliable shortcuts to identify sympathy with what used to be called ‘New Age’ in the past.

Keywords

spiritual but not religious; SBNR; religious and spiritual; traditional Christian religion; New Age spirituality; religious change

Word count

7,002 words

Introduction

Since the counterculture of the 1960s, massive cultural changes took place in the religious landscape of the West. First and foremost the ‘New Age movement’ emerged in

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the bosom of the counterculture of the 1960s to reach its “full development” in the 1980s (Hanegraaff 1996, 12). This expansion has ironically gone hand in hand with a declining appeal of the ‘New Age’ label as a self-identifier, which has led Hammer (2004, 75, emphasis in original) to observe that while “[t]he New Age *movement* may be on the wane, [...] New Age *religiosity* [...] shows no sign of disappearing” (see also Fuller 2001). Coinciding with these vicissitudes of New Age the catchphrase ‘spirituality’ emerged as the new buzzword in the religious field, giving rise to self-identifications of ‘being spiritual but not religious’ and ‘being both religious and spiritual’.

Given these coinciding developments it is remarkable and disappointing that those who have studied the popular use and meaning of the ‘spirituality’ label have hardly engaged with specialized scholarship about New Age. At the same time, experts in New Age spirituality have shown hardly any interest in studies about ‘spiritual’ self-identifications either. Given the resulting virtual absence of critical intellectual dialogue, this paper aims to connect these two areas of expertise. It does so by studying *whether the ‘spiritual but not religious’ embrace New Age spirituality, and whether they much like New Agers dismiss traditional Christian religion, whereas the ‘both religious and spiritual’ adhere to traditional Christian religion and understand spirituality in a non-New Age fashion (i.e. spirituality in a Christian sense)*. We address these questions by means of an examination of nationally representative survey data from the Netherlands collected in 2015.

Theory

New Age spirituality and traditional Christian religion

New Age spirituality has become increasingly widespread in the West since the 1960s (Hanegraaff 1996; Heelas 1996; Campbell 2007; Houtman & Aupers 2007), while traditional Christian religion, the type of religion that dominated the religious landscape of the West in the past, has meanwhile declined significantly and lost much of its former dominance, appeal and legitimacy (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2011; Tromp, Pless and Houtman 2020, 2021; Pless, Tromp and Houtman 2021). These developments have been widely identified as pivotal processes of religious change. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) for instance put forward the idea of a ‘spiritual revolution’ that may be under way, one in which the ‘subjective-life spirituality’ of the ‘holistic milieu’ gradually supersedes the ‘life-as religion’ of the ‘congregational domain’. Building on the work of

Troeltsch ([1931] 1956), Campbell (1978, 147) similarly regards “the contemporary transformation of religion [...] as a transition from ‘church religion’ to ‘spiritual and mystic religion’“, a gradual process which he has more recently described as an ‘Easternization of the West’, i.e. a development in which the dualistic worldview the West has known for centuries is gradually superseded by its Eastern monistic counterpart (Campbell 2007).

New Age spirituality differs profoundly from the two most important manifestations of traditional Christian religion, viz. ‘Church’ and ‘Biblical Christianity’ (Woodhead 2004), a distinction that corresponds largely with Catholicism and Protestantism, respectively. Seen from the perspective of New Age spirituality, ‘Church’ and ‘Biblical’ Christianity are both deeply problematic, the former for emphasizing hierarchism, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, the latter for underscoring strict obedience to theological and moral conservatism. For New Age spirituality does not conceive of the sacred as a transcendent personal God who has created the world and who makes demands on believers. It rather understands it as an immanent, diffuse, and impersonal spirit, life force or energy that is – and always has been – present in the world and the cosmos. It as such replaces the Christian dualism between God and creation by holism, i.e. the notion that at a deeper level invisible unity exists, because everything within the cosmos is in fact connected through this divine spirit, energy or life force (Campbell 2007). This implies that the world is neither inanimate nor soulless, but rather that the cosmos is alive, changing and evolving constantly. Due to the omnipresence of the sacred, it can also be found within each and every individual in the form of a spiritual self that most of the time remains concealed underneath a self that is viewed as ordinary, mundane, socialized and false (Houtman and Tromp 2021). With this, the Christian notion of sacerdotalism is dismissed because the ‘laity’ are now no less sacred than the ‘clergy’. In Heelas’ (1996, 19) words, “the person is, in essence, spiritual. To experience the ‘Self’ itself is to experience ‘God’, ‘the Goddess’, the ‘Source’, ‘Christ Consciousness’, the ‘inner child’, the ‘way of the heart’, or, most simply and [...] most frequently, ‘inner spirituality’”.

Rather than salvation in the traditional Christian sense – i.e. being released from suffering by an eternal life in the Kingdom of God – its New Age rendition takes shape as an escape from the pressures and demands made by society and its institutions. This can be achieved by ‘listening to one’s heart’ or one’s ‘inner voice’, i.e. one’s personal

feelings, intuitions, and emotions, understood as emanations of the spiritual self that lies within. In seeking salvation from suffering adherents of New Age spirituality thus rely on an epistemology of personal experience, also known as *gnosis*, rather than on an epistemology of belief, which holds “the ultimate truth” to be “revealed to man from some transcendental sphere” (Hanegraaff 1996, 519).

New Age consequently heavily relativizes the authoritative status of external sources and treats religious traditions, dogmas, creeds, clergy, charismatic leaders, and self-proclaimed experts who claim to have a hold on the absolute and exclusive truth with suspicion. Instead any human being is seen as capable of having direct experiential access to the sacred. Adherents of New Age spirituality are therefore radically de-traditionalized and anti-authoritarian, rejecting “voices of authority associated with established orders [...] even rejecting ‘beliefs’”, (Heelas 1996, 22) to the effect that “prescriptions of others, of tradition, of experts, of religious texts, and all such external sources are not considered legitimate” (Adams and Haaken 1987, 502-503). Indeed, they are ‘epistemological individualists’ with “voices of authority emanating from experts, charismatic leaders and established traditions being mediated by way of inner experience” (Heelas 1996, 21). In the end, then, “there is [...] no other authority than personal, inner experience” (Hanegraaff 1996, 519).

While external sources are therefore denied authority, they are not dismissed altogether. This is because deep down all religious traditions are held to be identical, interchangeable, and equally valid because they ultimately all worship and refer to the same divine and universal spiritual source. Hence, elements from various traditions are freely combined in ways that make sense to the individuals in question (Houtman and Tromp 2021). These notions are known as perennialism and bricolage, respectively. Needless to say, the least dualistic and most mystically-oriented religious traditions are New Age’s favorites (Hanegraaff 1996), precisely because they prioritize personal spiritual feelings and experiences of the divine over religion’s institutional, doctrinal, dogmatic and ritual aspects (Houtman & Tromp 2021).

Spiritual and/or religious self-identifications

Most students of religious change are keenly aware that ‘spirituality’ and its derivatives have become major new buzzwords in the religious field, with widespread self-identifications of ‘being spiritual’ as a result. Indeed, the question of what people

actually mean with this self-designation has become a major issue in empirical research that often relies on an inductive approach (i.e. asking for people's definitions of spirituality by means of open-ended questions). Do 'spiritual' self-identifications nowadays signify affinity with New Age spirituality, or can they refer to other things as well? And does the term have the same or a different meaning for the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'both religious and spiritual'? Studies conducted thus far yield a complex and ambiguous picture that does not provide clear-cut answers to these pivotal questions. While 'spirituality' appears often used to refer to New Age spirituality, it is also often defined differently, with some studies suggesting that the two categories entertain similar notions of 'spirituality' and others pointing in a different direction.

Ammerman (2013) finds a range of different meanings of 'spirituality', some of them with overly Christian overtones, others apparently hardly related to Christian religion at all. Her analysis revealed that 71% of her American interviewees spoke about "spirituality in [...] god-defined and god-oriented terms, terms they have learned from [their] religious traditions" (Idem, 267). Besides this *theistic* spiritual discourse, 57% of her participants made use of an *extra-theistic* spiritual discourse that reminds the reader of the previously discussed New Age spirituality. For them, spirituality can be found in the "core of the self" (Idem, 268) and is associated with the "inner self, with finding one's own 'spark of the divine'" (Idem, 270). This extra-theistic spirituality is therefore "immanent", it is about the "interconnectedness of all of life", and it requires "no authority beyond the person's own experience" (Idem, 269).

A more recent study by Steensland, Wang, and Schmidt (2018) suggests that the 'spiritual but not religious' entertain notions of spirituality that are *post-Christian* in nature rather than traditionally Christian. This category described spirituality more often in terms of a 'holistic connection' that focuses primarily on "connections with and feelings toward self, nature, and other people" and (much) less often in terms of 'organized religion', a 'belief in God', or having a 'relationship with God' (Idem, 460).

Comparing the 'spiritual but not affiliated' with the 'both spiritual and affiliated', Berghuijs, Pieper, and Bakker (2013) found that, in their descriptions of spirituality both categories refer most frequently to a very general *transcendent reality* (in a cognitive sense), followed by referring to the *human mind* (also in a cognitive sense) and to a *centripetal connectedness* that is experiential in nature. The 'spiritual but not affiliated' almost never refer to specific Christian notions in their descriptions of

spirituality. The 'both spiritual and affiliated' do that somewhat more often, but the differences between the two categories remain small nevertheless. God (in a cognitive sense) is the Christian notion that is most often referred to by the 'both spiritual and affiliated' when asked to describe their understanding of spirituality, but still only in 7% of the cases. Apparently then, hardly anyone in the two categories associates spirituality with Christianity and this is not due to a shortage of Christians in their sample. These findings therefore suggest that the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'both religious and spiritual' entertain similar notions of 'spirituality', but these notions can hardly be called Christian in the sense the West has known it for centuries.

By contrast, evidence from Zinnbauer et al. (1997) suggests that a majority in both categories – i.e. the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'both religious and spiritual' – actually do associate spirituality with Christianity. In their seminal study, both categories referred most frequently to a traditional concept of the sacred in their definitions of spirituality, i.e. to "God, Christ, Higher Power, Holy, Divine, [or] the Church)" (Idem, 556). 74% of the 'both religious and spiritual' and 61% of the 'spiritual but not religious' did that. Again, the two categories entertained similar notions of 'spirituality' but now with markedly Christian overtones. Indeed, this is almost the opposite of what Berghuijs et al. (2013) have found, but that may of course be due to cross-national differences between the USA and the Netherlands, one of the most and one of the least Christian nations in the West, respectively.

At the same time, Zinnbauer et al.'s (1997) study shows that the 'spiritual but not religious' referred more often to a non-traditional concept of the sacred than the 'both religious and spiritual' in their definitions of spirituality. Compared to the latter, the former were also

less likely to evaluate religiousness positively, less likely to engage in traditional forms of worship such as church attendance and prayer, less likely to hold orthodox or traditional Christian beliefs, more likely to be independent from others, more likely to engage in group experiences related to spiritual growth, more likely to be agnostic, more likely to characterize religiousness and spirituality as different and nonoverlapping concepts, more likely to hold nontraditional "new age" beliefs, and more likely to have had mystical experiences (Idem, 561).

As we have seen, these are principal features of New Age spirituality. Also in Berghuijs et al.'s (2013) study, the 'spiritual but not religious' defined spirituality more often than the 'both religious and spiritual' in terms of a *centripetal connectedness* that is experiential in nature. Because this resembles the *self-spirituality* found in New Age circles, these findings may despite the overall lack of clarity suggest that the 'spiritual but not religious' embrace New Age spirituality.

New Age and spiritual self-identifications

Students of New Age have indeed pointed out the irony that while New Age spirituality became increasingly widespread in the West, the label 'New Age' itself fell into disuse as a self-designation (Fuller 2001; Hammer 2004). Even though Hammer (2004, 74) argues that "no new emic term for their collective identity seems to have formed", there are clues that the label 'New Age' has meanwhile been replaced by self-identifications of 'being spiritual', or more specifically, as being 'spiritual but not religious'. Zinnbauer et al. (1997, 561) for instance point out that this category resembles Roof's (1993) 'highly active seekers' in their rejection of "traditional organized religion in favor of an individualized spirituality that includes mysticism along with New Age beliefs and practices". Sutcliffe (2003, 216) observes that the "emergent 'spiritual' discourse demonstrates significant biographical continuities across the decades" and that "this discourse of 'spirituality' increasingly displaces 'New Age'" (Idem, 223). In addition, Fuller (2001) states that

It is difficult to know just how many Americans are sympathetic to New Age spirituality. Very few people ever use the term when describing their own religious beliefs. Even the 14 percent of Baby Boomers who describe themselves as metaphysical seekers rarely identify themselves as New Agers. There is, after all, no such thing as an organized New Age movement. Those interested in one alternative spiritual topic may have absolutely no interest at all in other topics that usually get lumped together as New Age. Yet it is probably fair to say that those who describe themselves as "spiritual, but not religious" are in general agreement with the broad principles of these alternative philosophies. This would mean that a full 20 percent of the population can be said to be sympathetic with the New Age movement (Fuller 2001, 99).

All this does indeed suggest that “those who describe themselves as ‘spiritual, but not religious’ [...] can be said to be sympathetic with the New Age movement” (Fuller 2001, 99). If this is indeed the case, then ‘spiritual but not religious’ refers to the well-known combination of affinity with New Age and the latter’s repudiation of ‘organized religion’, not least traditional Christian religion (Sutcliffe 2003; Houtman & Tromp 2021).

Yet, this still leaves us with those who self-identify as ‘both religious *and* spiritual’. Those concerned do not drive a wedge between religion and spirituality, hence they consider the two concepts compatible, which is why scholarship on New Age suggests that their notion of spirituality is different from the one embraced by the ‘spiritual but not religious’. This assumption is consistent with Ernst Troeltsch’s ([1931] 1956) classical distinction between two different renditions of spirituality or mysticism. The first of these closely resembles New Age spirituality (Campbell 1978), because it exists outside religious traditions and institutions. It ‘transcends’ religion as it “moves in the opposite direction to undercut the form and structure of organized religion” (Garrett 1975, 215). This “radical religious individualism” (Troeltsch [1931] 1956, 377) is “independent of all institutional religion, and possesses an entire inward certainty, which makes it indifferent towards every kind of religious fellowship” (Idem, 734). It is contrasted with, completely broken away from, and seeking to displace concrete or established religion, becoming, in effect, “an independent religious principle” that understands “itself as the real universal heart of all religion” (Idem) or “the true inner principle of all religious faith” (Streib and Hood 2011, 448). It is a “distinct religion in its own right with a distinct system of beliefs” (Campbell 1978, 147), “divorced from a containing frame-work of dogma, ritual or ecclesiasticism” (Idem, 149).

A second type of spirituality or mysticism identified by Troeltsch may however be found within religious traditions and institutions as some sort of ‘experiential add-on’ to otherwise non-spiritual or non-mystical religion. It does as such not ‘transcend’ religion but rather ‘supplement’ it. It “can be combined with every kind of objective religion, and with the customary forms of worship, myth, and doctrine” (Troeltsch [1931] 1956, 734) and it “intensifies and accentuates certain affective religious elements without denying concrete religion” (Garrett 1975, 215). In fact, it “functions in such a way as to provide legitimation and support for established ecclesiastical structures” (Idem). Adherents of this second form of spirituality do find personal piety

and fostering experiences of the divine more important than religion's 'external' and institutional aspects and mere belief in the sacred.

With Troeltsch's distinction in mind, it would be hardly surprising if the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'both religious and spiritual' do indeed refer to very *different* types of spirituality, the former one that 'transcends', 'undercuts', and 'displaces' traditional Christian religion and the latter a Christian rendition that 'supplements' traditional Christian beliefs and practices. This leads us to expect that the 'spiritual but not religious' have much affinity with New Age spirituality but not with traditional Christian religion, whereas the 'both religious and spiritual' have exactly the opposite, i.e. much affinity with traditional Christian religion but not with New Age spirituality.

Methods

Data

We analyse data from the Netherlands because this is one of the countries in which traditional Christianity and New Age spirituality have respectively declined and increased most since the 1980s (Houtman & Aupers 2007; Tromp et al. 2021). Specifically, we make use of a large online survey conducted in the Netherlands in 2015 by CentERdata (2015), a Dutch institute for data collection and research based at Tilburg University. CentERdata is specialized in online survey research and maintains a validated panel of respondents that is representative for the Dutch population aged sixteen years or older. The survey was presented to 2,956 individuals, 2,243 of them responded, and 2,197 filled it out completely (74%). The survey was administered in Dutch so the first author (whose mother tongue is Dutch) translated all the questions and answers below into English¹.

Measurements

To answer our research questions, we need to measure religious and/or spiritual self-identifications, New Age spirituality, and traditional Christian religiosity.

Instead of measuring how active people are in the 'holistic milieu' (Heelas & Woodhead 2005), we measure the 'New Age spirituality' it institutionalizes. This way we move beyond the idiosyncrasies of particular spiritual groups and practices and measure affinity with the underlying spiritual worldview that is shared by participants

of the various groups and practices. Specifically, we measure New Age spirituality with a continuous scale that consists of responses to the following seven statements:

1. There is something that connects man, world and nature down to the core.
2. Truth must be experienced inwardly.
3. You should rely on your inner voice.
4. One can find a real, authentic and 'sacred' core in every human being that is unspoiled by culture, history and society.
5. Religion can spring from many sources.
6. You must put together your own religion using the wisdom of a variety of traditions and ideas.
7. You can combine different teachings and practices to what suits you best.

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they (dis)agree with each item using a scale ranging from 1 = agree to 3 = disagree (with 2 = partially agree, partially disagree in the middle). We reverse the original response categories so that higher scores indicate stronger agreement with the statements. The proportions of missing values are extremely low (0.2-0.3%). Factor and reliability analyses² indicate that the seven questions can be combined safely to construct a scale that reliably measures New Age spirituality (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.80). Scale scores are assigned as means to all those with valid scores on all seven items. Higher scores on this scale indicate more affinity with New Age spirituality.

Religious and/or spiritual self-identifications are measured with the following two questions: (1) *Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?* and (2) *Irrespective of whether you consider yourself to be religious or not, how spiritual would you say you are?* The response options for the first item comprise: 1 = definitely yes; 2 = actually yes / somewhat; 3 = actually not; 4 = no, definitely not. The response options for the second question are: 1 = definitely spiritual; 2 = somewhat spiritual; 3 = hardly spiritual; 4 = definitely not spiritual. For both variables, response options 1 and 2 are recoded into '1' indicating that one self-identifies as religious or spiritual, respectively. Response options 3 and 4 are recoded into '0' indicating that one does not self-identify as religious or spiritual, respectively. 44% of the respondents consider themselves religious, 54% did not, and 2% did not know. The 'don't know' answers are treated as missing values.

One-third of the sample self-identifies as spiritual, two-thirds does not. The answers to these two questions are combined to construct a fourfold typology. 44% of the respondents consider themselves 'neither religious nor spiritual', 23% self-identifies as 'religious but not spiritual', 22% consider themselves 'religious and spiritual', 12% are 'spiritual but not religious'. Dummy variables are created for all four categories.

We measure traditional Christian religiosity with a scale that consists of four variables/subscales, viz. (1) affiliation with a Christian denomination, (2) frequency of church attendance, and (3) theological and (4) moral conservatism.

First, affiliation with a Christian denomination is measured with the following two questions: (1) *Are you affiliated with a church denomination or religious group?* The response options comprise: 'yes' (29.0%), 'no' (69.4%), and 'don't know' (1.6%). Only those who answered 'yes' received the follow-up question (2) *With which church denomination or religious group are you affiliated?* We create a new dichotomous variable with 1 = Affiliated with a Christian denomination (26.4%) and 0 = Not affiliated with a Christian denomination (73.6%). Specifically, the first category contains those affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (13.0%), Protestant Church Netherlands (9.6%), Reformed Churches Netherlands (freed) (0.8%), Christian Reformed Churches Netherlands (0.7%), Reformed Municipalities (0.7%), United Pentecostal- and Evangelical Municipalities (0.7%), Dutch Reformed Churches (0.5%), and Restored Reformed Church (0.4%). The second category contains everyone who answered 'no' or 'don't know' to the first question, or Islam (0.5%), Hinduism (0.1%), Buddhism (0.1%), Judaism (0.0%) or 'don't know' (0.1%) to the second question. The 'Other' category (1.7%) with open answers was examined and 34 of those responses could be added to the first category, and three of those answers could be added to the second category.

Second, frequency of church attendance is measured with the question: *Do you regularly go to church or another religious gathering, do you go sometimes, once in a while at most, or do you never go?* The response options are: 1 = regularly (12.9%); 2 = sometimes (7.1%); 3 = once in a while at most (23.7%); 4 = never (55.8%). We reverse the original response categories so that higher scores indicate more frequent attendance. The proportion of missing values is only 0.5%.

Third, theological conservatism is measured with a continuous scale that consists of responses to the following six statements: (1) *Which of these statements comes closest to your own beliefs?* The response options are: 1 = There is a God who is concerned with

every human being personally (15.6%); 2 = There must be something as a higher power that controls life (28.6%); 3 = I don't know whether a God or higher power exists (33.3%); 4 = A God or higher power does not exist (22.5%). We dichotomize this variable by recoding a conception of the sacred as a personal God as '1' and the other three responses as '0'; (2) *Which of these statements comes closest to your own beliefs?* 1 = Christ is Gods son (22.8%); 2 = Christ was sent by God, but he is not Gods son (6.0%); 3 = Christ was a special human being with extraordinary gifts (25.1%); 4 = Christ was an ordinary human being just like everyone else (25.3%); 5 = Christ never existed and is only a legend (20.7%). We dichotomize this variable by recoding a conception of Christ as Gods son as '1' and the other four responses as '0'; (3) *Do you see the Bible as the word of God?* 1 = Yes (13.3%); 2 = Is partially / in a sense the word of God (22.9%); 3 = No (42.8%); 99 = Don't know (21.1%). We dichotomize this variable by recoding a conception of the Bible as the word of God as '1' and the other three responses as '0'; (4) *Do you believe in a life after death?* 1 = Yes (23.5%); 2 = I am not sure (36.6%); 3 = No (39.9%). We dichotomize this variable by recoding a belief in life after death as '1' and the other two responses as '0'; (5) *believing in heaven* and (6) *hell* are already dichotomous items with 1 = Yes; 0 = No. Factor and reliability analyses³ indicate that the six questions can be combined safely to construct a scale that reliably measures theological conservatism (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84). Scale scores are assigned as means to all those with valid scores on all six items. Higher scores on this scale indicate that one is theologically more conservative.

Fourth, moral conservatism is measured with a continuous scale that consists of responses to the following six statements/questions:

1. Morality is threatened when no one believes in God anymore.
2. Egoism has free reign if the churches disappear.
3. Belief in God ensures that society does not deteriorate.
4. How important do you find religion for child rearing?
5. How important do you find religion for showing us how to live well together?
6. How important do you find religion for the conservation of values and norms?

Concerning items 1-3, respondents were asked to indicate how much they (dis)agree with each statement using a Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 =

Strongly agree. Regarding questions 4-6, respondents were asked to indicate how important they find religion for these matters using a scale ranging from 1 = Very important to 3 = Not important (with 2 = Somewhat important in the middle). The response options are mirrored for items 4-6, so that higher scores indicate that one is morally more conservative. For all six items holds that the 'don't know/no opinion' answers are treated as missing values⁴. Factor and reliability analyses⁵ indicate that the six questions can be combined to construct a scale that reliably measures moral conservatism (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.92). Scale scores are assigned as means to all those with valid scores on at least three of the six items. Higher scores on this scale indicate that one is morally more conservative.

Finally, factor and reliability analyses⁶ indicate that these four features can be combined safely to construct a scale that reliably measures traditional Christian religiosity (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.85). The final scale is constructed by taking the mean of the four standardized variables/subscales. Higher scores on this scale indicate stronger adherence to traditional Christian religion. See Table 1 for the descriptive statistics of all the variables/scales included in our models.

TABLE 1 *Descriptive statistics*

	N	MIN	MAX	M	SD ^a
Self-identifications					
Neither religious nor spiritual	2,152	0	1	0.44	
Religious but not spiritual	2,152	0	1	0.23	
Spiritual but not religious	2,152	0	1	0.12	
Both religious and spiritual	2,152	0	1	0.22	
New Age spirituality (scale)	2,191	1	3	2.09	0.52
Something connecting man, world and nature	2,192	1	3	2.09	0.79
Truth must be experienced inwardly	2,192	1	3	2.14	0.77
Rely on your inner voice	2,192	1	3	2.41	0.70

Real, authentic and 'sacred' core in everyone	2,192	1	3	1.85	0.79
Religion can spring from many sources	2,191	1	3	2.00	0.79
Put together your own religion	2,191	1	3	1.89	0.79
Combine different teachings and practices	2,191	1	3	2.22	0.78
Traditional Christian religiosity (scale)	2,134	0	1	0.29	0.26
Affiliation with Christian denomination	2,197	0	1	0.28	
Church attendance	2,186	1	4	1.77	1.05
Theological conservatism (scale)	2,186	0	1	0.15	0.26
Moral conservatism (scale)	2,145	0	1	0.43	0.26
Valid N (listwise)	2,092				

^a Standard deviations are not shown for dichotomous items.

Methods and Results

The first step in our analysis is finding out whether the 'spiritual but not religious' and the 'both religious and spiritual' embrace traditional Christian religion to the same degree. We examine this by calculating the average scores on traditional Christian religion for the four categories of self-identifiers. We find that the two categories rejecting a religious self-identity barely adhere to traditional Christian religion. By contrast, the two categories embracing a religious self-identity have considerable affinity with traditional Christian religion (see Table 2). The 'both religious and spiritual' have therefore much more affinity with traditional Christian religion than the 'spiritual but not religious'.

TABLE 2 *Category Means*Traditional
Christian Religiosity

Neither Religious Nor Spiritual	0.12
Religious But Not Spiritual	0.47
Spiritual But Not Religious	0.14
Both Religious & Spiritual	0.51

The second step in our analysis is finding out whether the two categories embrace New Age spirituality to the same degree. We examine this by means of a linear regression analysis with New Age spirituality as the dependent variable, and the four self-identifications as the independent variables. The latter are dummy variables and we use the 'both religious and spiritual' as our reference category to see whether the difference with the 'spiritual but not religious' is statistically significant. We find that the two categories rejecting a spiritual self-identity have much *less* affinity with New Age spirituality than the two categories who do consider themselves to be spiritual (see Table 3, Model 1). Strikingly, we find that the 'both religious and spiritual' have just as much affinity with New Age spirituality as the 'spiritual but not religious'. To explain this, we take the alleged mutual dislike between New Age spirituality and traditional Christian religion into account and enter the latter as an additional predictor.

Adherence to traditional Christian religion does indeed detract from affinity with New Age spirituality, just like vice versa, which confirms the existence of a tension between the two (see Table 3, Model 2). Unsurprisingly, if in doing so we statistically control for the traditional Christian inclinations of the 'both religious and spiritual' category, its affinity with New Age spirituality increases even further and becomes even stronger than that of the 'spiritual but not religious'. This means substantively that the 'both religious and spiritual' who are *least* involved with traditional Christian religion have *most* sympathy for New Age spirituality, and vice versa.

As a final step in our analysis, we examine whether the 'both religious and spiritual' is the only category that features a tension between traditional Christian religion and New Age spirituality or whether the same holds for the other three categories. Statistically this means that we add interaction terms between the four self-

TABLE 3 Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting New Age Spirituality (N = 2,092)

<i>Independent variables</i>	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Neither Religious Nor Spiritual	-0.49***	0.03	-0.46	-0.56***	0.03	-0.53	-0.91***	0.05	-0.87
Religious But Not Spiritual	-0.26***	0.03	-0.21	-0.27***	0.03	-0.22	-0.47***	0.06	-0.38
Spiritual But Not Religious	0.01	0.04	0.01	-0.06	0.04	-0.04	-0.31***	0.07	-0.19
Religious & Spiritual (ref. cat.)	0			0			0		
Traditional Christian Religiosity (TCR)				-0.18***	0.05	-0.09	-0.57***	0.08	-0.29
<i>Interaction effects</i>									
Neither Religious Nor Spiritual * TCR							1.71***	0.18	0.28
Religious But Not Spiritual * TCR							0.40***	0.11	0.18
Spiritual But Not Religious * TCR							0.75*	0.30	0.08
Religious & Spiritual * TCR (ref. cat.)							0		
Constant	2.36***	0.02		2.46***	0.04		2.65***	0.05	
R^2	16.8%			17.2%			20.7%		

Note: The same number of respondents are involved in all three models (i.e. 2,092) because we want to make sure that any observed changes in the relationships between self-identifications and New Age spirituality are solely due to statistically controlling for traditional Christian religion and not to possible changes in sample size. TCR = Traditional Christian Religiosity. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

identifications and traditional Christian religion to the model (see Table 3, Model 3). Concerning the ‘spiritual but not religious’, we find that the degree to which they have affinity with New Age spirituality is *not* affected by their level of traditional Christian religiosity, most likely because hardly anyone in this category has considerable affinity with the latter⁷ (see Figure 1 for a visualization of the interactions).

By contrast, we find that the other religious category - i.e. the ‘religious but not spiritual’ - features a similar tension between traditional Christianity and New Age as the ‘both religious and spiritual’. Thus, for those who self-identify as religious – both spiritual and not spiritual – having more affinity with traditional Christianity detracts from their affinity with New Age⁸. Those who self-identify as ‘religious’ do therefore not necessarily dislike New Age spirituality, but do not necessarily like it either. The decisive factor is how strongly they adhere to traditional Christian religion: the more they do, the less sympathy for New Age spirituality they have. Liberal Christians, especially those who self-identify as ‘both religious and spiritual, thus tend to be open to New Age spirituality whereas their conservative counterparts are not.

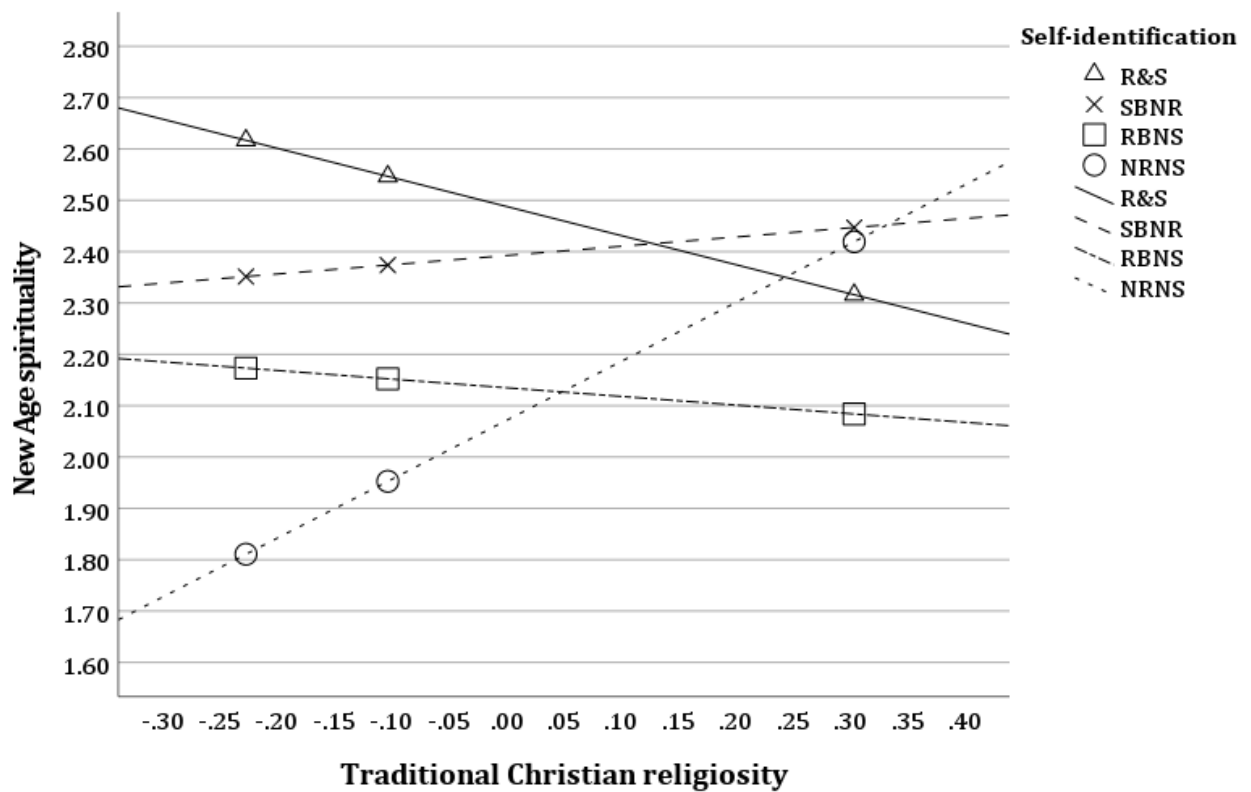


FIGURE 1 Interaction Effect Between Religious and/or Spiritual Self-identifications and Traditional Christian Religiosity (Mean Centred and Values at Percentiles 16, 50 and 84)

Conclusions

Steensland et al.'s (2018) findings suggested that the 'spiritual but not religious' have considerable affinity with a holistic 'New Age' spirituality but not with traditional Christian religion, and that is also exactly what our study demonstrates. Consistent with Zinnbauer et al. (1997, 561), they are "less likely to engage in traditional forms of worship such as church attendance and [...] less likely to hold orthodox or traditional Christian beliefs," compared to the 'both religious and spiritual'. Hence, they also resemble Roof's (1993) 'highly active seekers' in their rejection of "traditional organized religion in favor of an individualized spirituality that includes [...] New Age beliefs and practices." (Zinnbauer et al. 1997, 561) The 'both religious and spiritual', on the other hand, do have considerable affinity with traditional Christian religion, but much more surprising, they have no less sympathy for New Age spirituality than the 'spiritual but not religious'. This study therefore challenges the suggestion that arose from the findings by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) and Berghuijs et al. (2013), namely that the 'spiritual but not religious' have more affinity with New Age spirituality than the 'both religious and spiritual'. So even though Fuller (2001) was correct when he argued that the 'spiritual but not religious' have sympathy for New Age, our study shows that a significant share of the 'both religious and spiritual' like New Age too, indicating that New Age spirituality is in fact more widely supported by the population at large.

We also found that the 'both religious and spiritual' and the 'religious but not spiritual' categories feature marked tensions between traditional Christian religion and sympathy for New Age spirituality. This means that those who self-identify as 'religious' – and especially those who also consider themselves 'spiritual' – do not necessarily dislike New Age, but do not necessarily like it either. More specifically, the more dogmatic/dualistic/orthodox/conservative the Christianity they adhere to, the weaker their affinity with New Age spirituality, and vice versa. Hence, it is not even the 'spiritual but not religious' who have most affinity with New Age, but those liberal/progressive Christians among the 'both religious and spiritual' who are *least* involved with traditional Christian religion. Ammerman (2013) similarly concludes that an *extra-theistic* spiritual discourse does not remain confined to the religiously inactive, but people who are religious in a non-conservative way make use of it too. She furthermore observes that the type of "spirituality' being endorsed as an alternative [to religion] is at least as widely practiced by those same religious people as it is by the people drawing

a moral boundary against them” (Idem, 275). We find that this is generally true for the ‘both religious and spiritual’, but not for the ‘religious but not spiritual’ who have significantly less affinity with New Age spirituality than the ‘spiritual but not religious’.

Then, in both Zinnbauer et al. (1997) and Berghuijs et al. (2013), the ‘spiritual but not religious’ and the ‘both religious and spiritual’ had similar notions of spirituality, but in the former study a majority in both categories associated spirituality with Christianity, whereas in the latter study hardly anyone in the two categories did that. Given that the ‘spiritual but not religious’ in our study generally embrace New Age, but reject traditional Christianity, it is hardly imaginable that they associate the spirituality they embrace with the Christianity they reject. Instead, it is much more likely that they associate religion with Christianity and spirituality with New Age. Our findings suggest that the ‘both religious and spiritual’ generally make the same connections. However, the more conservative/orthodox the Christianity they adhere to, the more likely it becomes that they associate both religion *and* spirituality with Christianity.

Discussion

Ironically, as New Age spirituality became increasingly widespread in the West, the label lost much of its former traction as a self-designation, confusing many researchers in the process. So do ‘spiritual’ self-identifications nowadays signify affinity with New Age? Based on our analysis, we would say ‘yes, they do’: self-identifications of ‘being spiritual’ have become quite reliable shortcuts for sympathy towards New Age spirituality (as defined here). No less than a third of the Dutch population considers itself at least somewhat spiritual and a majority of them agrees with the central tenets of New Age spirituality. When the ‘spiritual’ subsequently add that they are ‘not religious’, they mean that they reject traditional Christian religion. The category of ‘both spiritual *and* religious’ is however much more of a mixed bag in terms of adherence to traditional Christian religion. It contains liberal Christians who are very much open to New Age spirituality as well as orthodox ones who are much more hostile to it. The latter have however become a minority in the Netherlands, with even among religious people – both spiritual and not spiritual – only a small group remaining strongly committed to traditional Christian religion. This means that a sizeable number of Christians are nowadays into New Age spirituality *because* a considerable share of them is no longer orthodox. New Age spirituality is thus no longer a marginal phenomenon at

the cultural fringe of society but is currently faring well both within and beyond Christian religion⁹. Hammer (2004, 75, emphasis in original) therefore correctly observed that while “[t]he New Age *movement* may be on the wane, [...] New Age *religiosity* [...] shows no sign of disappearing”. Or to put it in Possamai’s (2004, 426) words, the term “‘New Age’ is dead but not what it signifies”. And even though Hammer’s (2004, 74) other assertion, that “no new emic term for their collective identity seems to have formed”, is hard to affirm or disprove based on the etic perspective adopted in this study, our findings, as well as those by others, nevertheless suggest that the label ‘New Age’ has meanwhile been displaced by self-identifications of ‘being spiritual’. The popular discourse on ‘spirituality’ is, for a substantial part, “the legacy of ‘New Age’: a product of its genealogy” (Sutcliffe 2003, 223). So the term ‘New Age’ may be dead, but the type of spirituality that it signifies lives on in self-identifying ‘spiritual’ people. They are, to put it in Sutcliffe’s (2003, 196) words, “the metaphorical ‘children of the new age’”.

Notes

1. The Dutch version of the survey can be retrieved from <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl/ui/datasets/id/easy-dataset:66879>
2. PCA without rotation. All items load high and positive on the first component with factor loadings ranging from 0.54 to 0.75. This component has an Eigenvalue of 3.199, explaining 46% of the variance.
3. PCA without rotation, extracting only one component with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 ($\lambda = 3.407$), explaining 57% of the variance. Factor loadings range from 0.59 to 0.86.
4. The six items have relatively low proportions of missing values, ranging from 5.3% to 8.3%.
5. PCA without rotation, extracting only one component with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 ($\lambda = 4.258$), explaining 71% of the variance. Factor loadings range from 0.81 to 0.86.
6. PCA without rotation, extracting only one component with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 ($\lambda = 2.775$), explaining 69% of the variance. Factor loadings range from 0.80 to 0.89.
7. Even though the slope of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ appears to be positive in Figure 1, it does however not differ significantly from zero ($b = 0.18, p = 0.54$).
8. Unlike the positive slope of the ‘spiritual but not religious’, the negative slope of the ‘religious but not spiritual’ does in fact differ significantly from zero ($b = -0.17, p < 0.05$). The same holds for the ‘both religious and spiritual’ ($b = -0.57, p < 0.001$).

9. Our findings do not in themselves challenge the process of religious decline that is ongoing in the Netherlands since the 1960s (see e.g. Kregting, Scheepers, Vermeer & Hermans 2018).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Galen Watts, Peter Achterberg, Bart Meuleman, Rudi Laermans and Staf Hellemans for their helpful remarks on early drafts of this manuscript. We would like to thank Anneke Pons – De Wit and Francesco Cerchiaro for their critical questions after a presentation of this paper at the 4th Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion in Münster, Germany (30 August - 2 September 2021). We are grateful to Joris Kregting for sharing the *God in the Netherlands* data from 2015 with us. Last but not least, we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their helpful suggestions and critical questions. Incorporating their feedback definitely strengthened and improved the quality of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research is part of the first author's PhD project on religious decline and religious change in Western-Europe (1981-2017) and was supported by KU Leuven (grant number 3H160220).

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