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**DACIAN NEOPAGANISM
IN THE CONTEXT OF
NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

(summary)

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

Priest University Prof. Dr. habil. Mihai HIMCINSCHI

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE:

Priest Marius Costel GHIDARCEA

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Structure of the paper

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I:

DACIAN SPIRITUALITY - PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIANITY

1.1. Zalmoxis – priest, king, teacher

1.1.1. *Zamolxis* or *Zalmoxis*? Form and etymology of the name

1.1.2. Zalmoxis: human or divine being? – as seen by historian Herodotus

1.1.3. Zalmoxis – priest and king

1.1.4. God Zalmoxis as a teacher. The concept of soul immortality and folklore reminiscences

1.2. The state-religion relationship in the geto-dacian world

1.2.1. The religious-political teachings transmitted by the priests to the Geto-Dacian people

1.2.2. The issue of royal residence during Burebista's time: Sarmizegetusa - political center or religious center?

1.3. Geto-Dacian places and forms of worship

1.3.1. Geto-Dacian places of worship

1.3.2. Sacrifice and cult of the dead in the geto-dacian religion

1.4. Geto-Dacian Monasticism

1.4.1. The cult of the Dacian monks

1.4.2. The monks and hermits of Zalmoxis

1.4.3. Monastic buildings

1.5. Eschatology in the Dacian religion

1.5.1. The Dacians, an immortal people

1.5.2. Patristic and historical valences of the Geto-Dacians' belief in immortality

1.6. Dacian spirituality, an element favorable to the process of christianizing our ancestors

1.7. Relationship with the Christian world (the Dacian-Roman saints)

1.7.1. Brief references on the spreading of Christianity in the North-Danubian territory

1.7.2. The beginnings of Christianity in the Geto-Dacian provinces

CHAPTER II:

NEO-DACIAN MOVEMENTS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF ORASTIE

2.1. New religious movements – de-christianization or revival?

2.1.1. Church, sect, religious movement

2.1.2. Attractiveness of the New Religious Movements

2.1.3. Theological organization and evaluation

2.1.4. Secularization, globalization, de-christianization

2.2. Dacian Fortresses - important point on the map of the new religious movements in Romania

2.3. The role of Dacian sanctuaries and genesis of the new spirituality

2.3.1. Link between the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (M.I.S.A.) and the Dacian Fortresses

2.3.2. New Age – new way of consuming and proclaiming religion

2.3.3. Occult influences and manifestations in the Dacian fortresses area: info-energy and astrology. Theological and missionary reactions

CHAPTER III:

PRESENT DAY MISSIONARY IMPLICATIONS ON THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

3.1. Role and importance of the Holy Spirit in the context of the new religious movements

3.2. The new religious movements and their reformist aspect

3.3. Missionary testimony of the Church on the challenges of the new religious movements

3.3.1. Testimony of the Roman Catholic Church to the challenges of the new religious movements

3.3.2. Romanian Orthodox Church and the danger of the new religious movements

CONCLUSIONS

APPENDIX I - Sources giving evidence of the Geto-Dacian spirituality

APPENDIX II - Images of the Dacian sanctuaries in the Mountains of Orăștie

The present research, *Dacian Neopaganism in the context of new religious movements*, aims to present, using an interdisciplinary approach, the way in which the Dacian neopaganism emerges and develops as a new religious movement. This contemporary religious phenomenon takes into consideration the desire to recover the Geto-Dacian pre-Christian beliefs, absorbing different norms, teachings and rituals from the spiritual dowry of our ancestors. The followers of these syncretistic movements bring into question, more and more, the similarities between the current Romanian Orthodox Christianity and the ancient religious tradition of Zalmoxianism.

The paper seeks to give the readers the possibility of knowing the forms of pagan revival of the Geto-Dacian religious life and, on the other hand, of summing up the complex phenomenon of the new religious movements, by offering them a pertinent and balanced response from the missionary and pastoral point of view of postmodern society and from a religious perspective.

In the first chapter I have pointed out that the first author who gives information about the Geto-Dacian religion is historian Herodotus, who, in the fourth book of his famous *Histories*, speaks of their religion, things he learned from the Greeks of the colonies located in the northern side of the Black Sea. The same author refers, for the first time, to the main god of the Geto-Dacians, known as Zalmoxis.

Essential in the Geto-Dacian religion were their concepts about the immortality of the soul and about the next life, precepts that were very different from those of the other contemporary cultures and civilizations. If to other peoples, by immortality it was meant a simple continuation of earthly life, to the Geto-Dacians, immortality was a kind of *deification*, a participation in Zalmoxis' happy life and essence. Three dominant opinions have emerged about the Dacian religion: one that considers it monotheist, another that

sees in it a dualist religion and a third that supports its polytheism. As for the monotheism or polytheism of the Dacians, I do not think it should be exaggerated in any direction. There have been historians who promoted monotheism, considering Zalmoxis the only god of the Dacians, relying heavily on Herodotus' statement, who said that the Dacians would shoot arrows to the sky during storms, and believed that there was no god other than theirs. Others, accepting the presence of a female deity in the Dacian pantheon, conclude by stating that they were dualists. I consider it more appropriate to state that the Dacians used to be polytheists before Zalmoxis' religious reform. After that, Zalmoxis dimmed the importance and role of the old deities. However, there was no monotheism at that time, for the presence of the three symbols in the Dacian cult (the descent into the subterranean dwelling, spearing a human messenger as the supreme sacrifice and piercing the sky with arrows) surely corresponded to a triad of deities: a Chthonic one, a warrior one and a celestial one. After the religious reformation of Deceneus, a cosmological polytheism is underway, the seven planets of the solar system appearing in the Dacian pantheon together with their corresponding deities, which is supported in full by the sanctuaries in the Mountains of Orăștie.

Many components of the Dacian spirituality are found in Romanian Christianity, and the Dacian religion, without being "Christianity before Christianity," favoured the rapid penetration and spread of the faith in Christ on the territory of our country.

The second chapter of the paper demonstrates that dissent movements have always existed in all religions and times, but they could never be equated with the Universal Church, as they always had a regional character. What is new today is the fact that, thanks to the means of social communication, which propagate information and ideas on

the whole planet with maximum speed, the evolution of the new religious movements no longer has any obstacles against planetary circulation. The presence of the new religious movements in our country shows that the Romanian religious landscape has not been left untouched by the influences of globalization and that it is in a permanent process of pluralisation. New attitudes towards the new religious movements have evolved over time; I will present only two of these. A first attitude is the one that believes that all new religious movements are the work of the Antichrist, a demonic work in contemporaneity; the second attitude towards the new religious movements is to consider them incompatible with Christianity. I believe that the attitude of the Church towards these new movements could be one shaped on these parameters: both similarities and contrasts can be highlighted between Christianity and the other world religions; syncretism can be avoided and dialogue can be encouraged in order to discover, in the Christian tradition, similar elements present in other world religions; the attitude of the Church must evolve from anathema to dialogue; to consider the neo-oriental cults as a "possible preparation" for Christianity; to consider the beliefs and practices of the new movements as an opportunity to deepen and valorise their own similar experiences.

The Mountains of Orăștie represented, in the past, the centre of the spiritual life of our ancestors; today it is an area with important historical vestiges, and for the new spiritual movements with oriental influences one of the main points of subtle "energies" on Romania's map. Among the many new religious movements that relate to the sanctuaries in this area, we mention: *The Movement of Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (M.I.S.A.)*; *The Inforenergetic Foundation "Saint Apostle Andrew"*; *The Romanian Association of Radiesthesia*; *The Centre of Quantum Medicine*; *Alexandru Nicolici and his 50 disciples from Oradea*; *Healer Maria of Pitesti "heals"*

around the 20th of June her 150 followers and the others who trust in her "powers"; a *group of ladies from Satu Mare* who are meditating at Fetele Albe, they fast, do not sleep that night, and at dawn go to do ritual dew wash; a *group of young people from Arad*, about 100 people, led by a *guru*, comes to the fortresses twice a year, and the leader *removes the gloom from the palm* of those who are willing; the neo-pagan group formed around Mrs. *Melfior Ra* in Deva; *Alexandru Molnar*, the leader of a group of pagan, turbulent and neo-Nazi fanatics who believe in Gebeleizis; *Imagon Film* from Crișcior, with leader Ioan Biriș, who indulge in destruction and promote the revival of the Dacian spirit; "*Dreptatea*" *Association of Hunedoara* - Zalmoxians, about 80 members; *The Zalmoxians from Constanta* - about 40 people, who ask for the area to be removed from the UNESCO heritage; *Gheorghe Giovanni Teava* from Italy - comes rarely, but has many followers in the virtual environment and wants the establishment of the "Dacian Party"; *Ben Mehedin* - promotes a mixture of Christianity and Zalmoxianism (he wrote *The Soul of the Romanian Nation*, a disturbing amalgam of religious ideas, with many followers on the Internet); *The group of Daniel Roxin* - on his blog he resumes the ideas of Napoleon Săvescu, bringing them to extremes in his compilations *Dacia - disturbing truths*.

For the followers of these esoteric movements, Zalmoxianism is just a form of applying Hinduism in our country. The feeling of belonging to the Dacian "ancestors" is very much used, and from this principle they arrive quickly to the Dacian religion, proposing a return to the ancestral religion, prior to Christianity. The target of these "missionaries", however, is not necessarily an exclusive cult of Zalmoxis, but polytheism in general. After the idea of polytheism is inoculated, they move from Zalmoxis to the Hindu gods, who are also promoted by the spirituality of the New Age.

The third chapter of the paper points out the fact that the new religious movements represent a real pastoral and missionary challenge, especially for those countries where there is no tradition of religious pluralism. The development of society and of man, which until a few years ago was considered to be irreversibly and unstoppably heading towards secularization, seems to have changed decisively, despite the prophecies about the end of religions which at the end of the last century marked the culture of that time decisively. Today more than ever the personal experience is very important for the postmodern man; it is therefore necessary for the vision of the Orthodox Church to be much more careful and focused on openness to the religious searches of the post-modern world in order to help it overcome its fragility and ambiguity.

The new religious movements regard the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, as a receptacle of manifesting cosmic energy, or which has, as a prime objective, the denial of the historical uniqueness of Jesus Christ. It should be noted that after the Ascension of the Saviour to heaven, the Holy Spirit continues the sanctifying work of the Church without replacing the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ. These movements consider the Holy Spirit to be the origin of the new revelations, or this is inconsistent with the Christian faith. If we went along this spiritual syllogism it would mean replacing the revelation of Christ with that of the Holy Spirit and creating real chaos in the frame and work of the Holy Trinity.

The Church must have a firm yet elegant attitude towards these new religious movements, moving from the anathema stage to the dialogue stage. Certain Protestant theologians have suggested the possibility of considering the new oriental cults as a preparation for Christianity. These non-religious groups must be seen as challenges to revitalize

the meaning of true knowledge and of a flexible tradition within Christianity itself because Christianity promises a new creation, new knowledge and a new way of existence in the world. This religious challenge brought to Christianity by the new religious movements which promote transformative meditation practices is, in the end, the return to a way of experience.

After 1960 the Roman Catholic Church started to be invaded by a wave of new religious alternatives. Their success was seen in connection with the phenomenon of secularization which had invaded the European society in the post-war era. The pastoral-missionary approach of the Vatican has three general principles: 1) the sects should not be seen as a threat, but rather as a pastoral challenge; 2) establishing a dialogue which observes the ecumenical principles established by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Church documents; 3) the link between the crisis of socio-cultural values and the promotion of new religious movements, in the sense that they represent an alternative in a world marked by chaos, ethical night and lack of values. The information about the pastoral-missionary preoccupations of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the new religious movements is also a topic of thought for the Romanian Orthodox Church. The characteristics of the social, political and cultural context in the post-1989 Romania expose in a similar way the realities and challenges that the Roman Catholic Church experienced two or three decades before and, for this reason, its experience can be mentioned in a missionary strategy.

The Romanian Orthodox Church has developed over the years a number of principles that guide it in relation to the trends and phenomenon of the new religious movements: 1. *Developing a personal experience with God within the parish community*; 2. *Highlighting the importance of spiritual guidance in the parish community as well as in the believer's*

personal life; 3. Renewal of religious life through the work of the Holy Spirit in the world; 4. Transforming the parish community in ecclesial communion; 5. Using the communication resources offered by the current technology: radio, TV, internet, the press; 6. Social and philanthropic initiative, where people need to be attracted to develop this system.

The critical and objective evaluation reached by this doctoral thesis looking at the whole range of new religious movements in general, and the Dacian neo-paganism in particular is that sometimes, retrospectively, Orthodoxy has practically neglected the fact that Christian living implies the existence of an ecclesial identity which has to be dynamic and communal. The big cities with giant parishes and megalomaniac cathedrals contradict the sacramental reality of the faithful reunited around the Divine Liturgy. Perhaps this is the most visible vulnerability of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the face of these new religious movements that came with the alternative proposal of a society made up of small, solid groups united around a mentor, built against the false values issued by the culture of ample secular tendencies, before which Orthodoxy seemed to make concessions.

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