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## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Syncretism - a major challenge to the Orthodox  
mission**

**Summary**

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## ***Introduction***

The term *syncretism* is used to designate any mixture of two or more religions, such as, for example, Hellenistic syncretism, in which elements of several religions unite and influence each other. It could also be used to refer to cases where elements of a religion are accepted in other religions without fundamentally altering the character of the receiving religion (due to the relatively small amount of adopted elements).

The Western world begins to disintegrate in terms of religiosity and spirituality. The level of education has increased and education has become secular and emancipated by ecclesiastical authority, resulting in the desecration of the content of education. The secularization of the society has undermined the authority of the churches, weakening the religious collective conscience and offering space to unbelief and religious internal disagreements, as well as an opening to other religious philosophies accepted in syncretistic fashion along with the Christian doctrine.

The media have promoted conflicting visions, messages, ideas, and values for the contemporary human being and, as a result of this reality, in the mono-religious societies, sectarian movements and new religious movements, which, in most cases, have a syncretistic character, have occurred. Some researchers have introduced the term "DIY" into the sociology of religion as a representation of the process of combining heterogeneous religious beliefs and practices while other scholars who record the same facts have used the terms "à la carte", "mosaic religion" and "kaleidoscopic" or referred to it, emphasizing a re-composition process.

### ***I. Syncretism - a major challenge to the Orthodox mission***

Syncretism is defined as the union of different beliefs, ideas, philosophies, ideologies. **The pseudo-religious syncretism** is the mixture of pseudo-religious ideas from different religions with revealed Christian teachings. It is not a functional mechanism useful in the transition to a new order, representing a new compromise between opposing powers. Instead, being a contradiction, it is an expression of conflicting interests, including the protest against the dominant, religious and secular power. As a synthesis, the pseudo-religious syncretism is interpreted as an instrument of oppression, creating a false unity and concealing social

conflicts. **The philosophical syncretism** is a pre-Christian phenomenon that emerged between the end of the 1st century B.C. and the beginning of the 1st century A.D. At that time, the Greek philosophical systems borrowed philosophical ideas from others, transforming themselves into syncretistic systems on the one hand or eclectic on the other. In the early period of the Christian church, the Gnostic syncretism emerged. Gnosticism has taken over ideas from various ancient cults, Jewish religion and Christianity. In contemporary society, there is a particular interest in yoga practices, despite the fact that there is no real connection or compatibility between the Oriental manifestations and the revealed Orthodox teaching. With regard to the relationship between science and religion, one can speak of a type of **scientific-religious syncretism** that states that both (science and religion) are two variants of one practice, namely the search for truth.

The phenomenon of secularization has made man come out of the tutelage of the Church and its revealed teachings and lie outside of it. At the same time, it was desired that the Church no longer represent a divine institution in which to obtain the salvation of the soul, but to try to transform it into an eminently secular, a human one in which certain services characteristic of man (wedding, funeral, etc.) can be performed. This man's distance from the divine-man institution founded by the Savior through His redeemed sacrifice made different ideas, conceptions or doctrines alien to divine Revelation to penetrate into the Western world and be considered as alternatives or additions to true faith. In this way, we can affirm that secularization is a consequence of the process of secularization that contemporary society has seen.

Secularization is a concept that has emerged since the Modern Period and has been related to the evolution of the role of religious sentiment built from the perspective of the relationship between modernization and the role of the Church in man's life at that time. A fundamental element of the phenomenon of secularization is represented by the plurality of religious offer and the entry of religion into a situation of free competition on a market without rules. It is an attempt at cultural unification, acceptance of the teachings belonging to several religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. Thus, we can say that secularization has not led to the decline or disappearance of religion, but has made the profoundly religious feeling, based on the revealed teachings of God, transformed into a pseudo-religious one that provides more ideas or teachings to man, choosing the right ideas for a particular context at his own liking.

In the context of dechristianization, we also witness the crossing of Christians towards various groups, some of them pagan. Considering the number for each group, they may seem

insignificant but from the mission's perspective, the challenge has two directions. On the one hand, the loss of Christians themselves in such a situation is a missionary failure and is the consequence of the fact that sometimes the sects are not taken seriously and their presence is neglected. Unfortunately, sometimes the sermon of the priest does not refer to the sects found in his parish, or, more seriously, the sermon remains sectarians' responsibility. The pastoral mission in these situations must be serious, competent, without going into unnecessary polemics with the representatives of the sects, but with hard and intransigent co-operation. The "politically correct" strategy will certainly not bear fruit because sectarian proselytizing has almost reached perfection and is very well taught by sectarians that only a well-practiced pastoral tact can cope with it. The second point is that leaving the right faith by some members of the parish may have a positive effect on believers close to the Church through the fact that the pastoral mission can further strengthen their faith and loyalty, taking into account the negative example of betrayal of some who had long been part of the same Christian community.

Dechristianization is an act of transfer of the religious to the civilian, and the term is almost identical to that of secularization; in the concrete sense we are referring to the priest's subjection to the lay status. Today, we are witnessing a process of dechristianization that has been accelerating both through the atheism of man on the one hand and parting from the true faith and the acceptance of various, most of the time antagonistic pseudo-religious teachings on the other. Being religious has begun to become, unfortunately, something entirely original and absolutely personal, unrelated to the life of the community. By virtue of its pluralism and individualization, religion has become an individual monopoly, a purely private, intimate option. Thus, many times, in what is today called religion, no traditions, ecclesiastical institutions, rules of life, and prescriptions are found. It is simply a privatization of the religious sentiment, a "privatization" that has nothing in common with the Church or the institutionalized religion.

At the same time, in some countries, religious pluralism seems to create favorable conditions, including for syncretism. When the tensions created by different religions seriously affect the life of the community, people of different beliefs and faiths unite and share each other's beliefs and traditions. Revelation is essential because all its teachings are grounded in supernatural revelation. At the other end, there is the attitude of modern and postmodern thinkers who do not recognize revelation as a divine act directed towards its creation. In this context, syncretism proposes an axiological-religious leveling in the sense that it does not make a difference between the revealed teachings belonging to Christianity

and the unrevealed concepts of other religions. The elements that make up non-paganism are the expressions of a trend that grows and becomes strong if Church servants remain in an expectant attitude to the spiritual alternatives of the contemporary world that propagate in an insidious manner. Just as the paganism of our day is not the resurrection of pre-Christian beliefs, so even the forms through which it manifests itself, such as pantheism, polytheism or gnosticism are not exactly those against which the Holy Fathers fought in the first Christian ages.

## ***II. Pseudo-religious syncretism. General landmarks***

In modern times, there are several movements of a syncretistic nature that are desired to be spiritual and even religious, and take organized and institutionalized forms, although they are self-delimiting from traditional religions. Most of these movements are reunited under a single name: New-Age. New-Age is a generic name for a series of varied trends and ideas, which have their roots in very different traditions, often even opposed, hence the syncretism. However, they all converge to a certain point, claiming that mankind today is going through a so-called "turning period", which implies a real change in all areas, namely personal, social, scientific, pedagogical, therapeutic and religious. This change has to be done through the "transformation of consciousness", that is, both in the individual and the general human as well as in the whole cosmos.

Most exegetes of the movement find the basis of New Age thinking in the Theosophical Society founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky announcing the first "revelation" on the so-called "new era". However, the most important predecessor of what is now called "New-Age Spirituality" is Alice Bailey (1880-1949), the third president of the Theosophical Society, who published, in over twenty volumes, new details about the "new era" and the new world order. Very important for the occult history of new-ageism is the foundation, in 1922, by A. Bailey of the Lucifer Publishing Company, which would spark much controversy over its name, which is why it received a new name, Lucis Publishing Company, Ltd.; after that (1924), in the north of Scotland, was founded the Findhorn-Community settlement, which is considered a "planetary village", a model for the "alternative" mode of life proposed by the New-Age movement. Here they study the occult

works of Alice Bailey and apply a new pedagogy in educating children for the "new era". This is the Waldorf pedagogy, the same which gradually gains ground in Romania.

The doctrinal philosophers of the "New Age" profess the idea that everything in the universe is inwardly connected. The unity of the world lies neither in its materiality nor in its spirituality. There are not two substances, but there are only two or more aspects of different depths of one and the same cosmic substance. The disharmonies we see today are due to "dualism" and, above all, utilitarian interest, fetishized as "reason". The solution would be renewing consciousness, returning to holistic vision, re-thinking the way of thinking on the basis of globality. Among the objectives of the new program, the most important are: the integration of Western science and technology into the oriental wisdom, ancient mythology and the sphere called "occult", the magical reîncifrare re-incarnation of the world or, in other words, its "re-enchantment". In the contemporary world, the "Christian" West is developing a new vision of religion and its role and condition in society. This new vision is eminently secular and is part of the dechristianization process that increasingly embraces the secularized West, dechristianization being in fact a consequence of secularization. This post-modern vision of religion has nothing in common with the fundamental Divine Revelation for Orthodoxy and places religion in the spectrum of secular human alternatives to it, and the generalized confusion that generates uniformity and relativism in addressing the religious phenomenon.

Esoterism and occult sciences are of great interest to the contemporary man who is desacralized and passionate about pseudo-religious syncretism. The proliferation of esoteric-occult sects is facilitated by the esoteric-gnostic literature, in which we find a progressive growth, in which laborious compilations appear alongside the re-editions of sacred texts and the classical writings of the hidden Way. *Personal development* in the general sense can be understood as a form of *religious healing*, and this is the aspect underlying the New Age Movement: it is stated that liberation from human suffering and weakness can be achieved by developing our human potential, leading at last, to interacting with inner divinity. Considering the overall affinity between salvation and healing, the close link between personal development and healing in the New Age syncretistic doctrines is not surprising at all.

At the core of the *Human Potential Movement*, there is widely the dissatisfaction with how many people live their lives in modern society. Very early in our life we learn how to adapt to the requirements of our social environment and, in this process, to suppress our human potential very much. Spontaneity makes room for unnecessary conformism and the demands and expectations of the society. The price we pay for accepting these requirements is

the burden of our inner life and the suppression of the abilities that we have right through birth. Modern society produces mostly alien and lonely individuals who have lost contact with their own self and are on the way to perishing when looking for a more meaningful sense of their lives.

Syncretism delimits the authentic religiosity from pseudo-religiosity; within the authentic religiosity, there are no forms of syncretism. Instead, pseudo-religiosity operates with forms of syncretism, because within it there is no difference between revealed and unrevealed, between truth and false. New-age is the most complex and the most damaging framework of the syncretism manifestation. All forms of syncretism are found and blended into the new-age. New-Age Syncretism involves different areas of competence such as religion, philosophy, psychology, the science of matter or life, not just false alternatives of the fields of human knowledge. Pre-Christian oriental pseudo-religiosity has a predominant place in the New-Age syncretism, its "coryphaei" have grounded and built their syncretism starting from Oriental occult-esoteric concepts.

### ***III. Philosophical Syncretism. General landmarks***

Philosophical syncretism is the formation of new religious ideas from several distinct sources, borrowed philosophies, and religious teachings being often contradictory. Many of the religions (as well as philosophies, ethics systems, cultural norms, etc.) have a certain level of syncretism, since ideas come from themselves, except for Christianity, which is the religion revealed by the Son of God himself. The "Christian" gnosis of syncretistic origin represented for the Primary Church, indeed, the first great trial, because its roots and retentions risked to compromise and distort the whole teaching and ecclesial life. Its claim to relate to a mysterious, esoteric knowledge risks to transform Christianity into a mystery "religion" and to make the most affected by "glory in vain" to consider themselves elites, chosen, and even concrete manifestations of God. From the first forms of Gnosticism, the Primary Church reacted, beginning with Apostle Paul (I Epistle to Timothy). But the first anti-gnostic writer was St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher, who especially fights Valentine<sup>1</sup>. Then we have

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine's heresy originates in the doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato. The latter, in Timeos, followed Pythagoras entirely; on the other hand, Timeos himself is for Plato an ordinary Pythagorean. Therefore, we need to recall some fundamental points of the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines before talking about Valentine's system. (Hipolyte de Rome, *Philosophumena, ou refutation de toutes les Heresies*, I, premiere traduction

Theophilus of Antioch who wrote against the heresy of Marcion. Also, St. Irenaeus must not be forgotten with his work "Against Heresies", then Clement of Alexandria, who indirectly combats Gnosticism in his works. In the West, the earliest adversary of Gnosticism was Tertullian, who left at least seven reference works to the Church, Hyppolitus with his "Philosophumena" and Saint Epiphanius of Salamis with his "Panarion".

The roots of gnosis were totally pagan, so we have to do with an attempt to paganism of Christianity. One of the greatest challenges of contemporary Christianity is the upgrading of the gnosis of the early period, into a modern neo-gnosis as a new paradigm, in which materialism and idealism are denounced, and Christianity and any religion or philosophy bring only reductionist representations of the world and life; to understand the cosmos and life, it is necessary to integrate all religions, philosophies and sciences into a new, all-encompassing gnosis. Under this imperative, great scholars of the world in many fields (mathematics, physics, biology, psychology) have developed the so-called "Princeton gnosis," denying membership in any ideology. The New Gnostics of Princeton resemble the Ancients to the extent that they believe in knowledge, science, and less in action and in power. Nevertheless, it is obvious that modern physics and biology are technical searches and do not at all resemble an enlightenment-revelation. That stoic and gnostic *spermatikos logos*, whose cult occasioned strange, shocking rituals of Barbelognostics and disciples of Basilides<sup>2</sup>, rites in addition to which the most scrupulous hippies of obscurity seem to be clean - does not resemble the *participant logos* that the new Gnostics like to find behind the discoveries of contemporary physics and biology. It remains that the term "Gnostics" has been accepted - meaning that they are seeking the True Knowledge, unsubstantiated of practical utility, at least not of immediate utility, because the ultimate goal is also a "successful existence."

When we talk about Yoga and the attempt of some people to bring it closer to Christianity in the syncretism called "Christian yoga," it is necessary to remember a clear message expressed by our Savior Jesus Christ in order to keep men from the deceitful miracle of serving the false gods. The statements of the so-called guru, who call themselves *Yoga professors*, that Yoga is a complete system integrating the concepts of most religions, including Christianity, are intended to confuse the minds of people uninformed and not stuck to their Christian faith - the non-exalted and unbalanced people in their own Christian faith.

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francaise avec une introduction et des notes par A. Siouville; Les Editions Rieder 7, place Saint -Sulpice, Paris 1928, p.35)

<sup>2</sup> They interpreted spermatikos in the cruelest biological sense and contributed accordingly. Basilide, one of the most famous Gnostics, lived in Alexandria between 120-140 BC. (See H. Leisegang, *La Gnose*, Payot, Paris, 1951, ch. V)



These gurus even urge Yoga practitioners to go to church and participate in religious services to capture the beneficial energies emanating from the presence of the divine. Commitments to good and avoidance of evil, or to moral principles, are equated with the practice of positive thinking without the need for social involvement to apply this "positive" thought through deed.

Philosophy is a field of human knowledge useful to theology to the extent that it remains within the sphere of profane culture that must be assumed and transfigured theologically through the profound process of inculturation. Philosophy can be Christianized following the Heraclitean, stoic or neo-platonic logic by John's logos, but if it remains in the non-Christian profane sphere, it develops a pronounced syncretistic danger. Such a philosophy is encountered as a Gnostic-pagan challenge within the primary Church. This syncretistic gnosis attempts to harmonize the Evangelical revelation with the data of a philosophy as a corrupt search for worldly undisciplined wisdom; that is why the Gnostic heresies of the early centuries have so much troubled the Church.

These syncretistic gnoses are unfortunately upgraded within a post-modern neo-pagan gnosis, namely in the "Gnosis of Princeton," a gnosis that gives authority to the ideology that overwhelms both philosophy and science. Then the old Western human wisdom is in itself a more monistic, pantheistic, pan-entheistic or dualist philosophy than religion or religiosity, and we have the syncretistic element with the attempt to harmonize, for example, on the background of de-Christianization and the loss of Christian identity - Samkia Yoga with the orthodox hesychasm, a noxious effort and entirely syncretistic.

We meet this Christian yoga syncretism after the Romanian Revolution as well, in the form of the fallacies of Vasile Andru, plus a hedonistic dimension, represented by Gregorian Bivolaru.

#### ***IV. Scientific-religious syncretism. General landmarks***

Ideology represents the multitude of philosophical, moral, religious, and political ideas and concepts which reflect from a theoretical perspective the interests and aspirations of certain categories in a certain era. In addition, when talking about ideology, we refer to all the ideas and concepts that form the theoretical part of a current or system. Scientism represents the distortion of science by ideologizing the results of the scientific approach. This ideological

form of science demands the self-sufficiency of human reason. It is believed that through science everything can be explained and predicted. In the imposition of a scientific conception a significant role was played by philosophy on enlightenment and positivism. Although most honest scholars were not opposed to faith, a false perception was created by imposing a scholarly mentality, according to which science would be antagonistic to religion. The scientological doctrine is a syncretism of ideas taken from different religious and cultural spaces, and pursues to control the members of the movement, to control their memories to master the subconscious and a "mental mass" - the engrams - for every person to become responsible.

The Scientology doctrine has come close to the spiritual and symbolism of Hinduism that compares the successive levels of the human body, the charts of individual evolution with the chakras. The Scientologists' cross itself, with eight arms evokes in their vision the eight dynamics of existence: a) survival; b) couple and procreation; c) group and communication; d) humanity, group extension to humanity; e) nature - ecology; f) matter and energy in space-time, aspects of the same reality; g) the supreme being in the deist sense.

The evolutionist theory is guided by four great teachings. 1. Evolution of species is a real fact, but it was not by chance, but led by God. 2. Adam is the first man, but he had animal parents. 3. The living world (including Adam's nature) was, from the start, corrupt and mortal. The animals died, decomposed and sedimented, tens of millions of years before Adam. 4. The Bible does not contradict the theory of evolution, and the days of creation are geological eras. Accepting evolution with the (apparently) resolving of a problem (the tension between reason and faith) raises a number of other collateral problems that cannot be overlooked. Finally, the ideological system of the church gets eroded in vital parts. Then why would an Almighty God use evolution as an instrument of creation? Theistic evolution induces a misconception of the nature of God. Logically speaking, the God of theist evolution cannot be the same as that of the Bible in which He is described as almighty, holy, and full of love. In reality, the God of the theist evolutionists is but a God of voids, who will then be removed from the stage. On the other hand, how can we reconcile the doctrine of original sin with the theory of evolution? Evolution demonstrates that suffering and death are not the consequences of falling, but are part of our world a long time before humanity got on stage. Instead, the theologians stubbornly quote St. Paul<sup>3</sup> who sees that the origin of evil and death lies in the fall of Adam - understood as a singular person and not at all as an allegory of a

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<sup>3</sup> "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (I Corinthians 15, 21-22)

primal group of hominids. For an ideological consistency, the Church (whatever it is), by accepting evolution, should abandon the doctrine of original sin and implicitly the teaching of atonement, forgiveness, and the validity of the sacrifice of Christ and implicitly of God. At this level, we must admit that the atheist evolutionist is more consistent than the theist, without any guarantee that this consistency would imply truthfulness.

The scientific creationism is a discipline of creationism that seeks to provide scientific support for describing the appearance of the Universe in the Book of Genesis, and which disapproves of generally accepted facts, theories, and paradigms of Earth's history, cosmology, and biological evolution. From the start, we can see that we have to deal with a real and dangerous syncretism between science and theology regarding the creation of the world and implicitly of man. The honest scientist should tell where the scientific investigation stops without trying to bring forward scientific arguments for what is not in the field of investigation of science, and even less to impose the leap to revelation. An atheist can also stop here without having to accept the continuation, waiting for a better scientific solution. However, the Orthodox Christian must take the next step, the step from science to faith, and confess God the Creator. A Creator who does not manifest, as wrongly as some may believe, only where science does not reach, but also, at least from the Orthodox perspective, and in what science has correctly explained; but the works of God transcend all that is known to man, and it is natural to permanently keep the consciousness of this, recognizing our limitations and respecting the mystery. Unfortunately, the West, by departing from the thinking of the Holy Fathers and being influenced by the philosophical and scholastic thought, has made it possible to have a phenomenon that links God to His creation only through the idea of designing a project.

Today science is the authorized and normative voice of contemporary society. It became what theology was in the Middle Ages, being the most justified in having a public discourse, theology being restricted especially in the private space of human life, and philosophy being accepted only in the sphere of humanities and not as a field of its own. The scholar and science are today the elements that legitimate the postmodern secular man, the religiosity of man being reckoned rather as a manifestation of the quasi-rational affectivity of contemporary man.

Even though science is the mark of elevated living in today's man, yet it is not free from the dangers of its distortion. There are two fundamental dangers to today's science: 1) ideological danger and 2) syncretistic danger. The ideological danger to science refers to the misappropriation of scientific research by ideologies that parasite science since modernity.

The most important ideology that parasites scientific research is scientism that absolutizes science turning it into a universal panacea that solves and explains everything. Scientism makes science come out of its sphere of competence, answer questions that are not specific to its field of competence and claim certain achievements that have nothing to do with scientific goals. Besides scientism, we still have other ideologies that we have not dealt with in this work - naturalism, materialism and atheism that completely deform the meaning and significance of scientific research. Ideology is the opposite of research, and ideological science becomes a danger to man and creation: from irrational exploitation of resources to pollution, from climate change to radiation, from the danger of extinction by nuclear weapons, to the moral degeneration of man by accepting a hedonism harmful to man and to the saving relationship with God.

### ***V. Syncretism in the Orthodox Christian's daily life***

The contemporary man characterized especially by superficiality is very vulnerable to all the challenges of the pseudo-religious, philosophical or scientific-religious syncretism in the sense that he does not devote the time necessary to research the correctness and the revealed characteristic of the various concepts that endure him daily through all means of communication. Today, mass media and especially the Internet are pervaded by all sorts of pseudo-alternatives to the religiosity experienced by Christianity revealed for three thousand years, pseudo-alternatives that are particularly appealing and comfortable for the postmodern man. A short prayer received on Facebook and read on a mobile phone is considered to be the replacement of real spiritual experience, a simple worship in front of the church, or the entrance into the Holy Church to light a candle is a real participation in the divine cult for the cosmopolitan man.

The media is today a force in communication, a force that occupies a central place in our lives, invading and globalizing all aspects of it. This force is very often used by the pseudo-religious, philosophical and scientific-religious syncretism promoters to propagate all their conceptions foreign to the teaching and spirituality of the Church. Similarly, this force can be used successfully by the Church in its mission, when the phenomenon is well mastered by those responsible. But the use of mass media in the Church can also be a resounding failure, when its power is not fully understood and mastered; so that the power of the media

appears to us as a two-edged sword: it can help the spiritual creation of man on the path to salvation, but it can also deviate from the Way of Salvation.

Occultism that has a strong syncretistic character proposes a special challenge to Christianity, to the life and spirituality of believers. The Church within its internal and external mission must be mindful of how it should relate to contemporary occultism because, unfortunately, it is more inclined to preaching the word of the Gospel to those who are alien to the life of the Church. Many of the accounts of occultism and of Satanism may be exaggerated or erroneous, but the truth behind this reputation is no less dramatic because of the spread of occult practices with profoundly syncretistic tendencies. The correct understanding of the danger of the Oriental themes is particularly important because the syncretistic oriental influences have found a fertile ground in the desecrated and secular West and also threatens the Christian East.

In this context, the West was seduced by the practices and teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism or even Islamism. Today, more than ever, we need an approach based on the teachings and deeds of Christ the Savior, the Son of God incarnated for our salvation, in combating the practices and teachings of the oriental teachings promoted by the media and the Internet. The penetration of Oriental philosophies in the West brought a lot of pseudo-healers who no longer saw in God a person who infinitely loves man, but transformed him into cosmic energy or vital force. The secularized and desecrated contemporary Western man is confronted with the seduction of the Orient by borrowing in his religious language terms belonging to the Oriental religious space such as Buddha, Krishna, Nirvana, Satori, Yoga, Karma. In this sense, a tendency to alienate from the revealed Christian spirituality and teaching and to adopt Hindu, Buddhist or even Islamic religious teachings was created, generating a kind of syncretism strongly promoted by the mass media and on the Internet. This ignores the specificity of the Christian religion that is based on the belief in the One God Who exists eternally in three Persons, who revealed Himself to man for knowledge, in truth, through the Son Himself, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Many Orthodox Christians are today in a fierce search for healing. This makes them want to heal the diseases at all costs and seek relief anywhere, even in the alternative methods of syncretistic healing coming from the Orient and which have a great success, both in the Western world and in our country, especially in the post December period. The penetration of Oriental philosophies in the West brought many pseudo-healers who no longer saw in God a Person who loves man infinitely, but transformed Him into a cosmic energy or vital force. The truth of syncretism in the alternative therapeutic practices presented succinctly in this

subchapter is given by the fact that contemporary man borrows them from Asian practice, especially Chinese. Apart from practicing a kind of medicine that has no scientific basis and is often dangerous to human health, there is the danger of borrowing Oriental philosophy that has a pantheistic character or elements belonging to these religions (Qi Energy, Meridians, energies, etc.).

## ***VI. Missionary methods and means to combat syncretism***

Catechesis is a solution at the priest's fingertips, whereby he has the opportunity to explain to the believers the teaching revealed by the Savior Christ; it is centered on the One God Who exists eternally in three Persons, the opposite of syncretistic teachings and concepts. It is absolutely necessary for the priest as a catechesist to consider the framing of all believers in the mysterious Body of Christ - the Church, sharing with them the spiritual and saving teaching and explaining the difference between it and the pseudo-religious, philosophical or scientific-religious syncretism harmful to the contemporary man. The educational system must be adapted to the real situation of children and young people and should not become a topic of electoral campaign or be found in the sphere of political and philosophical influences. Children must understand and remember that through proper behavior they behave like a Christian, thus being in the love of Christ. Only a child proud of being a Christian will have the joy of wearing a cross on his neck, he will say a prayer before eating, he will reject the blasphemy and the cruel gestures he will encounter at school. Such a child will never be ashamed to be an Orthodox Christian. The school does not become the master of the child, nor does it have the right to impose on the family a way to raise their children or a certain standard set of values.

The strategy of the Romanian Patriarchy to combat pseudo-religious, philosophical or scientific-religious syncretism must first of all emerge from a correct, coherent and effective communication because language in communication is particularly important. If it is an intelligible, clear one, its effectiveness is guaranteed. The missionary effort of the Romanian Orthodox Church must include the teaching that the Church is not only a community with a large number of members, but even if there are fewer believers, these are the ones in which lies the spiritual testimony of living in life and in the soul of the life of Jesus Christ, the authentic one, and not all the conceptions and philosophies promoted by syncretism. The

mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church is primarily aimed at multiplying the believers who know and live the saving doctrine that was revealed by the Son of God Himself.

## ***Conclusions***

Syncretism viewed in all its aspects, pseudo-religious, philosophical and scientific-religious, represents a real danger to Orthodox life, teaching and spirituality. First of all, pseudo-religious syncretism is a challenge to Christian teaching because within it, it is hoped that on a Christian foundation to be added ideas, conceptions or teachings from other religions that are, in most cases, antagonistic to revealed Christianity. Based on weak religious education, a harmful compromise is being attempted - to accept other doctrines, i.e. a conception of contemporary man being that all religions are good, not making a clear distinction between revealed and unrevealed, between authentic and false, between the divine teaching and the human one. Secondly, philosophical syncretism in general is the mix of philosophical systems, especially encountered in pre-Christian antiquity, where Greek philosophies borrowed ideas from other philosophies, giving rise to certain syncretistic systems. In our scientific activity, we have approached certain pseudo-Christian systems or groups that borrowed various philosophical ideas or philosophical practices from philosophies outside of Christianity; here we are talking about gnostic groups from the early period, modern gnosis - Princeton Gnosis or Christian yoga. Thirdly, scientific-religious syncretism affirms that science and religion are two areas of human knowledge that can unite into one teaching.

Pseudo-religious syncretism manifested itself very aggressively in contemporary society, and represents a real danger to Christian teaching because, by assimilating the concepts found in unrevealed religions, within the syncretistic groups, the teaching revealed by the Son of God Himself was distorted. These syncretistic movements are meant to be spiritual, even religious, and take organized and institutionalized forms, although they are self-delimiting from traditional religions. Most of these movements are reunified under the name of New-Age, which is the general name for a series of varied trends and ideas, which are rooted in completely different traditions, often even contradictory, hence the syncretistic character. These movements promote and teach real change in all areas, namely personal, scientific, pedagogical, therapeutic, social and especially religious.

The philosophical syncretism is the formation of new ideas, groups or pseudo-religious sects from several distinct sources, borrowed philosophies, and religious teachings being often contradictory. Many religions (as well as philosophies, ethical systems, cultural norms, etc.) possess a certain level of syncretism, since ideas come of their own, except for Christianity, which is the religion revealed by the Son of God Himself, the Incarnated Logos.

The scientific-religious syncretism views the mix of some ideas and scientific theories with religion, especially with Christianity. Scientism is such an example in which we find the distortion of science by idealizing the results of the scientific approach. This ideologicalized form of science supports the self-sufficiency of human reason and the fact that through science everything can be explained and predicted. Even though most honest scholars were not opposed to faith, a false perception was created by imposing a scientific mentality, according to which science would be antagonistic to religion. One of the most powerful, influential and dangerous scientific groups has Scientology, whose doctrine was very close to the spirituality and symbolism of Hinduism that compares the successive levels of the human body, the charts of individual evolution with the chakras.

The struggle with the challenges of syncretism can be fought by the Orthodox Church on the basis of a catechesist effort whereby the priest has the opportunity to explain to the believers the teaching revealed by the Savior Christ. It is centered on the One God Who exists eternally in three Persons, as opposed to syncretistic teachings and concepts. In addition, the educational system plays a fundamental role in combating syncretistic ideas because any correct religious education must be rooted in school. Only with a thorough religious education, the Orthodox Christian can discern between true faith and contemporary heresies, between what is revealed and what is human invention, between the right path leading to salvation and the one leading to perdition. Therefore, the strategy of the Romanian Patriarchy to combat pseudo-religious, philosophical or scientific-religious syncretism must first of all proceed from a correct, coherent and effective communication of the revealed Christian teachings so that all Christians whom they teach may have access, understand and live what the Savior Christ, the Son of God has transmitted through His Holy Apostles.