

“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA
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PhD THESIS SUMMARY

FORMS OF RELIGIOSITY IN THE CONDITION OF SECULARIZATION. MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE

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1. Argument and research objectives

This doctoral thesis intends to bring us into the concrete religious reality of the global society of today. We live in a sick spiritual world. The symptomatology of this

existential-type malady¹ triggered by dualist-rationalist thinking, ignoring the antinomic paradoxical logic of the type and of the Christian Church, is as serious as it asymmetrically polarizes the dialogical relationship of knowledge within the God-human-world dialogue. The result of this asymmetric polarization due to the logical mechanisms of the human intellect operating in binary oppositions, articulated in a reductionist dialectical way, was masterly synthesized by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople in the famous phrase of the fight of rights of man against the rights of God², the fight that will take the concrete form of the stand of the independent man against the constitution of his teandrical creature (Genesis 2, 27 and Acts 17, 26).

With origins in *illo tempore*, this alienation of the man from God began with the fall into the sin of disobedience and distraction of our forefathers, Adam and Eve, from the One who is the Creator of the world / Center of the world, distorted attention, that in time, will lead both to affecting the experience of the mystical knowledge of man, attention focused on the spirituality of the uncreated light of the Palamite theology as a life in Christ - the connection with the verticality of the divinity - and the alteration of immanent horizontal historical dimensions in the world as a result of Christ of Cabasilian theology. In other words, this (distraction) attention was translated by the lack of man's credibility in the mysterious purpose of the world and the recognition of its sacredness, the true sacred canopy³, which provided the framework for the unfolding of the life and unity of divine creation. The next step of this (distraction) attention will then be confronted by the passing from the sin of the pride of disobedience to the state of rebellion against God, the fight between the Rights of God and the rights of man that will manifest not only through the intensification of the separation of knowledge between the true life and spiritual death, between the soul and the body, between the intelligible and the sensible, between the reason and the faith, but also through a state of permanent crisis of Promethean agony of the autonomous man permanently being alone with himself. This alienation from God, a symptom of the ontological laziness by which the forefather Adam no longer wanted to be in dialogue with the Divinity, at the advice of the devil, would make Adam, the prototype of humanity, to choose for himself what he wants to be, perpetuating the choice of his fall, which will isolate him in a utopian antechamber of Paradise, in a continuous fall after the Fall. Looking for an utopian pseudo-answer at the expense of the meeting between the Miracle and Mystery and Mystery and the Divine Pleroma Authority⁴, of a man imagined by man without the help of God, what he is-the creature in relation to himself and the world, where it

¹Father Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos și maladia secularizării*, Patmos Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

² Olivier Clement, *Adevăr și libertate: Ortodoxia în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarhul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I*, Desisi, Sibiu, 1997.

³Father Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos...*, p. 64.

⁴ Vlad Niculescu, *Două modele: UTOPIA și PLEROMA*, in the *Interval* magazine, no. 3/1990, București, p. 20; where the term *Pleroma* is used with the meaning of actual and future perfection, perfection at the antipode with *Utopia*, which is something imaginary. The Pleroma is the integration of divine transcendence into the immanence of the Person.

comes from and what is his future, man will ignore that he is above all a relational being through creation. But not with himself in this relationship, dehumanizing him, but with the divinity, which he can find in the constructive religious conversation of the dialogue of love with the other man beside him, as well as with the whole creation to which he belongs. All these Promethean attempts will in fact conceal a scream of help for the uprooted man⁵, by virtue of the image given to him by creation, which provides man with the eternity of communion and the lost communication of Palamite theology, corroborated with the Cabasilian one, true practical spiritual ways of our personal and social transfiguration to the eschatological reality of the heaven and earth newly promised by God to Jesus Christ - the Man, the Savior of the world.

Product of an all-sufficient rationality, this autonomous man of agony left as prey to himself by refusing transcendence, but also by the refusal of any law and values given by an axiological ontological model of a religious type, could not, however, radically break from the attributes of his spirit, these remaining as a given being in his creaturely constitution. It is no less true that, due to the freedom he has given from God, freedom with which he is born through creation, man's options will be able to take the different forms of his liberal maladically deforming Promethean utopian wishes/ passions. They will focus on a so-called belief of the myth of continual progress, which will substitute the Christian process of the deification of man - theosis - through an infinite progression of knowledge and self-fulfillment without God, which will make him become a spiritually dead man among the living people of religious faith.

As a general feature, all future rationalist reductionist approaches of this creed will have as topic - either in a hidden, camouflaged way or openly, not only the elimination of the living sense of *homo religiosus*, but especially the conceiving of the spiritual death of God in the religious culture where it did not happen; this action will then be followed by the invention of the death of God's murderer, that is, the rationalist man. The one who dies is not God but man as a species, as humanity, but man as the representation of the creation of the demiurgic man, of a subject man, thought of as a pseudo-God, of a man made by a certain positivist and metaphysical speculative science, which, in the last half century, took the reductionist form of the disfigured and dehumanized face of the man of totalitarian ideologies. The last maladically deforming utopian concepts essentially concerned not only the disfigurement of the religious image of man and the world by the total removal of the meaning experienced in a world of metanoia, by its ontological substitution of being in the world, but also by the dissolution of the Christian image in a virtual and artificial world that operates serious permutations in the natural attributes of being, the Christian affection being replaced by violence, the completion of communion in the community with individual boredom, the love of communion with the emotional vacuum of the moment. This phenomenon was maintained through the well-harmonized voices of rationalist philosophies of the 19th and 20th centuries. It will be proclaimed, under these conditions, after the death of

⁵ Academician Dumitru Popescu, „Omul fără rădăcini”, in *Biserica în misiune. Patriarhia română la ceas aniversar*, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, București, 2005, p. 481.

God - as a natural consequence of the disfigurement of the world and of the religious man - the death of God's killer. In other words, the autonomous man, after a long way through the labyrinth of Godless knowledge, came to the shocking self-revelation of his devaluation as a systematic dialectical thinking, from which, by chance, the invasion of his non-spiritual universe with the fantasies of the irrational and philosophical absurd, of finitude and nothingness, as the ultimate discoveries of modern philosophical nihilism.

As objectives of this PhD thesis we propose: the exhaustive analysis in a current manner of secularization to the extent of the new religious challenges imposed by it, the highlighting of the frames of the nonreligious phenomenon and the components that it imposes in the expression of the New Religious Movements, the analysis of the metaphors that it imposes the reinterpretation of the sacred into the global, postmodern and secular society, with the emergence of new secular religions (political correctness, transhumanism, etc.).

2. Relevance of the work in current research

Understanding the socio-religious context of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, in which these new religious alternatives were born, allows us to provide a current and necessary framework for the Church's attitude toward them. Between the religious and social factors, which either we like it or not, reconfigures today's society and Christian identity in the West, we mention:

1. Secularization, which led to a devaluation of religious-Christian identity and religious indifference;
2. Globalization, which created the opportunity for intercultural relations in economically highly developed countries and where religious pluralism becomes a dominant note of Western society;
3. The scientific progress that created the framework of a robotic, digitized society in which man experiences the drama of exclusion from his own invention, absolute independence from technique in a daily newspaper that increasingly calls for man's ability to adapt to society;
4. The lack of a reaction, a failure of the Church to be mindful of all these mutations in contemporary society, the lack of pastoral-missionary orientation toward the man of today, which revolves around references other than ones hundreds of years ago. Understanding the psychology of the young man who embraces these new spiritualities, which is in continuous search and which no longer satisfies him today, in which everything is coupled with the accelerated deployment of consumerism, will allow the reconsideration and diversification of the pastoral-missionary activity towards the young.

In order to enroll the PhD thesis in the missionary theological interest, it is also a goal of the thesis, the missionary evaluation of secularization, the nonreligious phenomenon in all its complexity. In this sense, it is necessary to seek to offer a set of

pastoral-missionary solutions through which the Church can maturely answer to the challenges of the nonreligious phenomenon.

A lack of reaction from the Church is as damaging as the buffer attitude and indifference towards the followers of these movements. Missionary theology must seek a way of recovering people who have joined a particular religious movement by proposing an alternative to the Christian teaching that fully valorizes man as a human being, who bears the tension of the vocation of deification, the Personal God, the absolute Transcendent, that enters into a historical relationship with man through the Incarnation of the Creator and Savior Logos, the universe as the work and expression of the love of Personal God. By overcoming a "stereotyped theology," inconsistent with contemporary and inactive language to society's problems, and by understanding the social context of today's life, the Christian Church will prove inexhaustible in providing answers that articulate a meaning and a real value to the existentialism problems that the contemporary man raises.

Some of what is defined as *New Religious Movements*, materialized in the 21st century in particular, has become over time true "global movements", with a large enough share in the socio-religious field, as is the example of Scientology, which began in America in the 1950s. In order to have this global character, thus overcoming the particular framework of an ethnic group and a country, the *New Religious Movements* took full advantage of the new socio-cultural context in which globalization and secularization played a key role. That is why it is not wrong to talk about a "globalization" of the *New Religious Movements*⁶, as "vehicles" of a new spirituality,

3. Current state of research

At a brief observation in the Romanian space, the problem of researching the phenomenon of secularization is a very present one, finding books, studies, articles dealing with secularization in its generality from several perspectives: missionary, dogmatic, phenomenological, sociological, etc.

In the research of the non-religious phenomenon as a whole, the *New Religious Movements* are placed on the first positions, as evidenced by the number of publications on the specialized market, dealing with the theological, sociological, psychological and cultural optics, the presence, the proliferation and the impact of the non-religious phenomenon in the West besieged by a motivated desacralization of secularization and the irreligious attitude of the people, which confirms the increasing popularity and

⁶ According to Roland Robertson, „The relativization of societies, modern religion, and globalization”, in *Cults, culture, and the law*, Thomas Robbins, William Shepard and James McBride (Eds.), Scholars Press, Chico, CA, 1985, pp. 31–32.

Actually, the “globalization” concept is very used today in the field of theological and sociological analysis. Globalization defines the reunification of each religious culture into a general, universal ensemble by overcoming its own cultural frontiers. The sociology of religion has established that “globalization” essentially refers to three distinct but interdependent analytical issues: 1. A condition of contemporary social life, 2. A concomitant change in man's way of understanding his or her social life, and 3. A way of theorizing about contemporary social life. According to *ibidem*, p. 33.

interest of the *New Religious Movements* as references to a new spirituality. But since the 2000s, in the theological and sociological analysis has entered the trend of new secular religions such as political correctness, transhumanism, gender ideology, etc.

With regard to the works devoted internationally to the general subject covering various aspects of the analysis of *New Religious Movements*, we can report here a number of extremely important contributions, such as: M. L. Delbridge, „*Family*” as a *Problem for New Religious Movements: The Pastoral Epistles Collaboration with the Greco-Roman Household*, Union Theological Seminary, 2001; Svetoslava Toncheva, *New Religious Movements in Europe (National and Transnational Contexts)*, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2011; Daniel O’Connell, *Educating Religiously toward a Public Spirituality*, Boston College, The Graduate School of Arts and Science, Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (2008); Robert David Swanson, *Members of New Fundamentalist Religious Groups: Religious Fundamentalism, Right-Wing Authoritarian, and Psychological Well-Being Scale Scores*, Faculty of the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary (2005), and many others, which it would be redundant to exemplify them here.

In Romania, the issue of the *New Religious Movements* came in particular to the attention of the theological doctoral research, a fact confirmed by a series of doctoral theses submitted after the year 2000. We mention here: Father Ciprian Marius Cloșcă, *The dimension of the non-religious phenomenon in the present Romanian society*, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași, Faculty of Orthodox Theology (2008); Assistant professor Constantin Iulian Damian, *Manipulation techniques specific to new religious movements*, “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, (2011), Grigore Georgiu, *Offensive of the New Religious Movements (NMR) and the reversibility of secularization*, “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, Faculty of Orthodox Theology (2013). In this context, it should be noted that until now there has not been a PhD thesis presenting a missionary evaluation of the Orthodox theology of spiritual perfection promoted by the *New Religious Movements*.

The PhD and Master Theses presented at the Universities of Europe and America show that the *New Religious Movements* are of interest to young researchers as well as to established scholars, being an area that constantly discovers its valences in analysis and novelty in a critical and analytical analysis of the mutations that the nonreligious phenomenon produces in today's society. For this reason, the last decades have witnessed a steady increase in Western, theological and sociological interest towards the *New Religious Movements*, given the fulminant proliferation of these new paradigms and religious organizations, some of which are the legality of the principles governing society, others highlighting a pronounced character of social movements, involving their monitoring by competent institutions. But in particular, the *New Religious Movements* have come into the sphere of interest of theologians and sociologists, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theologians seeking to apologetically answer to the challenges of these religious alternatives, and sociologists being concerned about the psycho-social analysis of the changes that the *New Religious Movements* produce in the lives of their followers, in particular, and in society in

general. Here we note important scholars who have opened and shaped the study of the *New Religious Movements* in a theological and sociological plan, whose works are of major importance: Bryan R. Wilson⁷, Rodney Stark⁸, John A. Saliba⁹, Elisabeth Arweck¹⁰, William Sims Bainbridge¹¹, Johannes Aagaard¹², George D. Chryssides¹³, Lorne L. Dawson¹⁴, Irving Hexham¹⁵, James R. Lewis¹⁶, Ron Rhodes¹⁷, Eileen

⁷ *Contemporary transformations of religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1976; *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992;

⁸ *Religious Movements: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers*, Paragon House, New York, 1985; *The future of religion – Secularization, revival and cult formation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985.

⁹ *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement: A Critical Assessment*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1999; *Perspectives on New Religious Movements*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1995; *Signs of the Times. The New Religious Movements in the Theological Perspective*, Médiaspaul, Sherbrooke, 1996; *Understanding New Religious Movements*, AltaMira Press, Lanham, 2003; „Disciplinary Perspectives on New Religious Movements: Views from the Humanities and Social Sciences”, in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, David G. Bromley (Ed.), Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 2007, pp. 41–64; „The Christian Church and the New Religious Movements: Towards Theological Understanding”, in *Theological Studies*, Vol. 43 Issue 3 (1982), pp. 468–485.

¹⁰ *Researching New Religious Movements. Responses and redefinitions*, Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, Abingdon and New York, 2006; *New Religious Movements in Western Europe: An Annotated Bibliography*, Greenwood Press, Westport & London, 1997.

¹¹ *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, Routledge, New York and London, 1997; *What Is a New Religious Movement? Defining the Area of Study*, Routledge, New York, 1997.

¹² „A Christian Encounter with New Religious Movements and New Age”, in *Update & Dialog*, Vol. 1 (1991), pp. 19; „Modern Syncretist Movements: A General View”, in *Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1981), pp. 29–36; „Occultism/Satanism and the Christian Faith”, in *Le Défi magique*, Vol. 2: *Satanisme, sorcellerie [The Challenge of Magic. Vol. 2: Satanism & Witchcraft]*. J.-B. Martin (Ed.), Presses Universitaires de Lyon, Lyon, 1994, pp. 259–267.

¹³ *A Reader in New Religious Movements*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006; *Exploring the New Religions*, Cassell, London & New York, 1999.

¹⁴ *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1998; *Cults in Context: Readings in the Study of New Religious Movements*, Canadian Scholars' Press, 1996; „The Cultural Significance of New Religious Movements and Globalization: A Theoretical Prolegomenon”, in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (1998), pp. 580–595; „The Meaning and Significance of New Religious Movements”, in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, David G. Bromley (Ed.), Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 2007, pp. 115–134; „Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why: Twenty Years of Research and What Have We Learned?”, in *Cults and New Religious Movements. A Reader*, Lorne L. Dawson, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 2003, pp. 116–130; „Anti-modernism, modernism, and post-modernism: Struggling with the cultural significance of new religious movements”, in *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1998, pp. 131–156.

¹⁵ *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1997.

¹⁶ *Controversial New Religions*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005; *Legitimizing New Religions*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2003.

¹⁷ *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions. The Essential Guide to Their History, Their Doctrine, and Our Response*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009; *Find It Quick Handbook on Cults & New Religions*, Harvest House Publishers, Oregon, 2005.

Barker¹⁸, James A. Beckford¹⁹, David G. Bromley²⁰, J. Gordon Melton²¹. In our country, the concern for this new religious reality promoted by the *New Religious Movements* was effectively expressed after 1989, when, on the basis of political and social liberalism, which had taken over the authoritarian communism, there was an increasing presence of the proliferation of *New Religious Movements* of Oriental type (for example, *Transcendental Meditation*). We note the contribution of Father Petre I. David, who perhaps rises for the first time in Romanian theology the problem of the neo-religious phenomenon: *Călăuză creștină. Sectologie*, Episcopia Argeșului Publishing House, Curtea de Argeș, 1994. Father Prof. Nicolae Achimescu, PhD, in the year 2000 opens the study of the *New Religious Movements* in the Romanian theology, by publishing the book: *Noile mișcări religioase*, Limes Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, a book of Orthodox theological presentation, analysis and answer to esoteric-neo-gnostic movements, movements with an oriental religious foundation, groups and currents with a religious-philosophical and psychological character and occultism. Father Prof. Gheorghe Petraru, PhD published in the year 2006, *Secte neoprotestante și noi mișcări religioase în România*, Vasiliana Publishing House '98, Iași, which adds more relevance by presenting the *New Religious Movements* with an esoteric-occultist, extremist religious orientation in Romania. Father Prof. Istodor Gheorghe, PhD, published an exhaustive analysis of the pseudo-religious paradigms of

¹⁸ „New Religious Movements in Modern Western Society”, in *The Encyclopedia of World Faiths*, P. Bishop and M. Darton (Eds.), Macdonald Orbis, London, 1987, pp. 294–306; „A Short History, But Many Changes: A New Religious Movement”, in *Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions: Dedicated to R.I. Zwi Werblowsky*, S. Shaked, D. Shulman, and G. G. Stroumsa (Eds.), Brill, Leiden, New York, Copenhagen, Cologne, 1987, pp. 35–44; „New Religious Movements: their incidence and significance”, in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (Eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 1999, pp. 15–32; „The Church Without and the God Within: Religiosity and/or Spirituality?”, in *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life. Essays in Honour of James. A. Beckford*, Eileen Barker (Ed.), Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham and Burlington, 2010, pp. 187–202.

¹⁹ „New Religious Movements and Globalization”, in *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, Philip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins (Eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 2005, pp. 253–264; „New religious movements in Western Europe”, in *Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change*, James A. Beckford (Ed.), SAGE Publications Inc, Newbury Park, 1986, pp. 29–54.

²⁰ „The sociology of new religious movements”, in *New Religious Movements*, Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2012, Cambridge, pp. 13–28; „Teaching New Religious Movements/Learning from New Religious Movements”, in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, David G. Bromley (Ed.), Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 3–28.

²¹ „An Introduction To New Religions”, in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, James R. Lewis (Ed.), Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, pp. 16–35; „How new is new? The flowering of the «new» religious consciousness since 1965”, in *The future of new religious movements*, David G. Bromley and Philip E. Hammond (Eds.), Mercer, Macon, 1987, pp. 46–56; „Introducing and Defining the Concept of a New Religion”, in *Teaching New Religious Movements*, David G. Bromley (Ed.), Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 2007, pp. 29–40; „Perspective: Toward a Definition of «New Religion»”, in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2004), pp. 73–87.

Oriental type: *M.I.S.A. și yoga în lumina Ortodoxiei*, Arhiepiscopia Tomisului Publishing House, Constanța, 2005.

Regarding the secular religions analysis, we mention here the excellent contribution of Prof. Nicu Gavriliuță, PhD: *Noile religii seculare*, Polirom, Iași, 2018.

4. Approach and used methods

As far as the research methods proposed of the subject are concerned, we will combine the systematic approach, highlighting the content of secularization, the irreligious phenomenon and the contemporary secular religions, and a comparative one in which we will analyze in a critical perspective what promotes the "new spiritualities" from the perspective of Orthodox theology. We will have the opportunity to draw some comparative lines between the two sides by emphasizing the added value and meaning that Orthodox theology offers with respect to perfection.

The systematic analysis of the theme proposed for research has the advantage of providing a coherent and careful presentation of secularization, non-religious phenomena and contemporary secular religions, and observing the particular character of each of the subject in question. One might think that such a reflection on secularization, the nonreligious phenomenon and the research methods of the proposed subject, will combine the systematic approach, highlighting the content of secularization, the irreligious phenomenon and the contemporary secular religions, and a comparative one in which we will analyze in a critical perspective, what promotes "new spiritualities" through their evaluation from the perspective of Orthodox theology. We will thus have the opportunity to draw some comparative lines between the two sides by emphasizing the added value and meaning that Orthodox theology provides for the perfection of contemporary secular religions, which is also the largest part of the doctoral thesis, entailing a very high objectivity. During the research, we will have the opportunity to realize that these alternative spiritualities have in mind today's man, devalued by personal dignity, a *homo tehnicus*, whose life unfolds under the veins of a digitized, consumerist and globalizing society. We ask ourselves whether Christian spirituality can be proposed to such a man, and if the Church has effective missionary methods of recovering and valorizing Orthodox spirituality as a religious and personal plenary experience of man with God. Practically, the spiritual program, or rather the pseudo-spiritual, of the *New Religious Movements*, of the secular religions and implicit of the secularization, fundamentally differs from Christian spirituality, in that it rethinks in a completely different way the Divinity, which restructures in a different way all their whole theoretical and practical doctrine.

It should be noted that in terms of the references that will be consulted in the writing of the future PhD thesis, this is largely in English, given that the vast majority of the fundamental works of sociology and theology aiming at secularization, the *New Religious Movements*, the secular religions were written in English. A thorough, detailed knowledge of the subject proposed for research, offers the opportunity for logically and efficiently argued answers, not the expression of unconscious opinions.

For the missionary evaluation of the issues in question we will use theological literature in Romanian, which will allow us to emphasize that the Romanian Orthodox Church has all the resources to missionary respond to the challenges of the new spiritual alternatives. Interpreting key concepts, technical terms, will involve calling to specialized dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

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