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**Pseudo-Religious Challenges of Oriental Origins  
Regarding the Mission of Nowadays Church. Osho  
(Bhagwan) – Missionary Assessment**

**ABSTRACT**

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## Introduction

In the last decades, the New Religious movements have represented a very discussed subject in the theological environment abroad and in our country after the events in 1989. The term of *New religious movement*, at least on a primary level, is a terminology used to describe a large number of groups or organisations. The new religious movements offer a challenge regarding the definition of religion or analysis of groups that fall under this very large parameter of definitions.

The term of *New religious movement* is a relatively modern term that became used on a large scale in order to describe various groups or organisations that fall under certain specific parameters. This terminology refers to organisations that have evolved after the 1950s and that offer a pseudo spiritual or philosophical guidance. One must mention that not all the movements that fall under the New religious movement are new, even though they fall under this term.

The research of the Bhagwan movement from an Orthodox point of view and its assessment shall allow us the offer of certain efficient missionary measures in order to counteract the dynamics of grabbing new followers, at least in Romania. Thus, the necessity of the theme is an obvious one as the contemporary pluralist and globalist society facilitates the interaction between religions, between various cultures or traditions. This dynamics which is very hard or even impossible to control, generates the possibility of the emergence of a neo-religious non-conformity as an expression of the syncretism of various elements in the merger of certain synthetic patterns. Apart from this, we also witness an import in the West of Oriental concepts of all types by means of certain self-entitled *guru*, such as Rajneesh, who only denature the authentic significance of certain elements of Indian doctrine by presenting to the Occidental person new perspectives.

Due to these reasons, an accurate assessment of the Bhagwan Movement shall allow us to offer a missionary and pastoral response regarding the challenges generated by this movement which, essentially leads only to the depersonalization of the follower without any real improvement socially, religiously, culturally.

## **I. Oriental Pseudo-Religiousness. Fundamental Landmarks.**

Beginning with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oriental religions and practices have invaded the Occidental world, and, after 1990, they have emerged in the Romanian space as well. Oriental religiousness is the opposite of Christianity since, it is either polytheist given the fact that in Hinduism we find a multitude of deities, or there is no concept of God, as we find in Buddhism which does not deny the existence of a god nor it asserts it, “being the religion that accepts blind causality”<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, the antagonism of Oriental religions against Christianity is determined by observing the practices and specific concepts (yoga, karma, samsara) which contradict the Orthodox spirituality founded on the divine Revelation. “The syncretism that is offered by the association of Jesus with the “avatars” of the Indian religion or with the great founders of religions (Zarathustra, Buddha, Confucius, etc.) are actually contradictions of Christianity, as a religion revealed by God”<sup>2</sup>. The Oriental space knows many forms of religiousness or pseudo-religiousness, as we shall see, but in our endeavour we shall stop at Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism.

Even if in the framework of Oriental pseudo-religiousness we do not find a well-delimited teaching regarding the existence of a personal god, we shall see that in the Oriental space we find several types of concepts regarding the existence of a divinity and the manner in which it manifests in connection to the world, in general, and with the human being in particular.

Pantheism, from the Greek words *παν*, all, and *θεός*, god, is a view on the reality which tends to identify the world with God or God with the world. Pantheism is not a doctrine, but rather it is the implication of the opinions expressed in terms of world, god, absolute or infinite. Generally, it highlights the immanence of God in the world and it ignores His transcendence on the world<sup>3</sup>.

Pantheism is a religious philosophy that pretends to be a religion, since it refers to God and admits the existence of God. But the God of the Pantheists is not a person, but a substance, energy or quality. In Pantheism, existence is a unique substance in which, either the world is absorbed by God, or God into the world, God is not a person, but the supreme reality as energy or essence, merged with the world. According to the Pantheists, God is the dominant reality of

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<sup>1</sup> Ilarion Felea, *Religia iubirii*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2009, p. 484

<sup>2</sup> Pr. Emil Jurcan, *Maestrul oriental și duhovnicul creștin*, Edit. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2002, pp. 20-21

<sup>3</sup> D.S.Sarma, *A Primer of Hinduism*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 2020

existence, but, not being a person, it clearly arises that the ultimate reality or existence itself is not personal, but substance dominates, overwhelms and contains the persons.

Monism represents a philosophical system that highlights the uniqueness or unity of reality. Thinkers considered usually as Monists do not identify as belonging to this philosophical system. Unlike philosophical systems such as Platonism or Daoism, Monism cannot be easily identified or systematized. Moreover, unlike the schools of philosophical thinking such as Pragmatism or Existentialism, Monism lacks an identifiable point of origin, as well as historical framework. Thus, it would be more appropriate to use the term only as an attribute or to label a person or idea. Taking into account the debatable nature of Monism, the most suitable for this paper would be the presentation of several defining examples of a Monist system and generalization from such examples of specific features that make them Monist.

**Polytheism** (from the Greek: *polus*, several and *theos*, god) refers to the faith or adoration of several gods or deities. This manner of faith is a form of extremely common religious expression. Most of the Ancient religions entailed faith in several deities that managed various aspects of life. These polytheistic faiths represent a vital part of Hinduism, Shintoism and many other religious traditions currently.

**Theism** is the philosophical concept on the world that perceives the aspects of existence (physical things, organisms, persons) as being dependent on the being of The One God Who exists, Who only Him is worthy of worship. Theists differ amongst them regarding the view on the nature of God and the relationship of God with these existences, but they are different from the Deists, who, on principle, exclude revelation and divine intervention in the global order but also from the Pantheists, who identify God with the world. Theists assert that God, the transcendent creator of the world, remains an indivisible unit as it supports in compliance with their capacities and His final purposes<sup>4</sup>. **Karma** (in Sanscrit, *karman* and it means “deed”, “action”) in the Indian religious thinking is closely connected with the doctrine of reincarnation<sup>5</sup>. In one form or another, it is part of the faiths of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. From an Oriental point of view, karma represents the consequences that arise from the action of the deeds done by a person throughout their life. In Hinduism, this teaching has emerged as a

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred E. Taylor, “Theism”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, vol. 12, Clark, Edinburgh, 1994

<sup>5</sup> See Pr. Prof. Prof. Ene Braniște, Gheorghe Istodor, *Fenomenul sectar necreștin*, Editura Do Minor, București, 2009, pp. 27-40

“consequence of Vedic Naturalism and Mysticism.”<sup>6</sup> **Saṃsāra**<sup>7</sup> (Skt., Pāli, Prkt., „Wandering”) represents the transmigration or rebirth, in Asian religions, the cycle of birth and death as a consequence of an action (karma)<sup>8</sup>. Liberation (*mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, *kaivalya*) is the liberation from saṃsāra, designed either as going beyond the saṃsāra, or that it realizes it is an illusion (*māyā*). The idea of saṃsāra, like karma, most likely has a non-Vedic or heterodox origin, although this aspect can still be debated by the researchers in the History of Religions.

Nowadays, it is more and more difficult to talk about a Christian culture even in those parts of the world where Christianity has been preached for over a millennium; it is difficult to say that nowadays society is modelled on Christian values, especially in the Occidental Catholic and Protestant part, and the situation in the Orthodox Orient is mostly the same. The difference consists only in the more limited time of exposure of mostly Oriental Orthodox countries to the influence of the new religious movements of various origins.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Oriental denominations have become in America, and not only, an undeniable cultural force. There are thousands of Buddhist temples, groups of transcendental meditation, Zen centres, Hindu temples and Yoga studios on the entire territory of the United States and Europe. A rapid search of almost every library in the West and in our country shall reveal extended collections of books dedicated to Asian thinking and religions from the well-known and oddly entitled *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and *Tao de Pooh* to Dalai Lama’s *Art of Happiness*, to less known and less academic works, such as *Blue Rock Record* and *Zen and the Cricket*. Asian thinking, cultures and philosophies have genuinely infiltrated the Occidental landscape. Occidental history, in general and the American one, in particular, abounds of attempts at finding something new, efficient or new in order to solve society’s problems.

The diversity of Oriental movements have been and still are extremely difficult to define or classify in a certain philosophy or faith arrived from the Orient as the doctrines promoted by the new Occidental religiousness are far from the old Oriental religiousness given the fact that

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<sup>6</sup> Luis de la Valée Poussin, *Karma*, art. în “Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics”, vol VII, p. 673 *apud* Prof. Ene Braniște, Remus Rus, *Concepția despre om în marile religii*, în *Glasul Bisericii*, nr 7-8, 1978, p. 818

<sup>7</sup> “In the Sanskrit language, the word *samsara* was translated as reincarnation. Ad litteram, reincarnation means to be incarnated again, to receive a body again, or, more exactly, to be reembodied, to return from the dead in another physical body. For the Oriental, the word *samsāra* entails much more. It is a symbol word for a complete idea: the progressive reincarnation of the ego (*sattva*).” (Manly P. Hall, *Reincarnation. The cycle of necessity*, The philosophical research society, Inc., Los Angeles, California, 1978, p. 15)

<sup>8</sup> See Pr. Prof. Ene Braniște, Gheorghe Istodor, *Fenomenul sectar necreștin*, pp. 43-45

they have been transformed and adjusted by the leaders of the denominations in order to attract more followers, reaching the stage where the new pseudo-religiousness has nothing to do with the original philosophy or faith.

Swami plays an essential role within movements of Oriental origins. Swami in Hindu, is an honorary title given to an ascetic or Bairagi who has been initiated in a religious monastic order<sup>9</sup>. The significance of the Sanscrit root of the word is “the one who is one with the self” (swa means “self”)<sup>10</sup>. The term applies both to certain religious guru, and to Yogi, with or without disciples. The term is also used in Advaita Vedanta. The term is also used as a direct form of address (*Swami-ji* or *Swami Ji*). Oxford English Dictionary offers a definition of the term “swami”. *svāmī*, “master, lord, prince”, is used by Hindus as a term of highly respectful address<sup>11</sup>.

Beginning with the 1960s, the proselytism of religious cults in the West have increased constantly proportionally with the increase of social pressures and problems<sup>12</sup>. There are multiple examples of persons converted who give up families, friends and career plans in order to dedicate all their resources and energy to extremist or “bizarre” neo-religious movements of Oriental origins<sup>13</sup>. The critics of neo-religious cults believe that the only purpose of the cults is to prey on and exploit naive youngsters for selfish purposes<sup>14</sup>.

## **II. Bhagwan (Osho) – Syncretistic Oriental Denomination. Fundamental Landmarks.**

Osho, previously known under the name of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990), was a controversial spiritual professor in India, whose contemporary followers include thousands of Americans, Europeans and Asians<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Brewer E. Cobham; Camilla Rockwood (eds.), Chambers Harrap Publishing, London, 2009

<sup>10</sup> Paramhansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, 1997, p. 14

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Keiser; Jacqueline L. Keiser, „The Anatomy of Illusion: Religious Cults and Destructive Persuasion”, in *American Series in Behavioral Science and Law*, no. 1067, 1987, Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd, p. 4

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Pavlos, *The Cult Experience*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1982, p. 26

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Keiser; Jacqueline L. Keiser, *art. cit.*, p. 5

<sup>15</sup> Vezzi Anthony D'Andrea, *Global Nomads: Techo and New Age as Transnational Countercultures in Ibiza and Goa*, Routledge, New York, 2007; Satya Bahrti Franklin, *The Promise of Paradise: A Woman's Intimate Story of the Perils of Life with Rajneesh*, Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY, 1992; Marion Goldman, *Passionate Journeys: Why*

Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh was an Indian controversial spiritual professor who initiated and organised this new syncretistic religious movement named “Osho”. He organised this movement by starting modestly in India but which has reached its peak in America where he formed an important community in Oregon State. Here the movement also knew its downfall, living a major crisis in 1985, when the community he was building in Oregon fell apart after four years of conflict with the inhabitants of Antelope Town and their allies throughout the state.

Rajneesh, in its teaching, asserted that the “truth” or “God” is rational and unknown, even if religion claims that it knows the truth about God, universe and the human being. He asserted that nobody knows anything, meaning what is beauty, what is the truth or what is good or bad. According to him, the truth can be known only in a state of silence or in a state of unwisdom. There is no division between creation and creator; he preferred it to be silence regarding the origin of the final reality or of the universe. About the concept of human, he taught that the human soul or the self itself is God, he rejected the Maya (illusion) doctrine and encouraged people to become aware that their bondage is illusory. Regarding salvation, he perceived that this is possible by becoming non-human (God or empty). He rejected the concept of a human as sinful, because the human is God. His teachings allowed exacerbated sexuality as a means of reaching spirituality. He pleaded for vegetarianism and the removal of tobacco within the ashram.

Rajneesh encouraged in his teachings the practice of sexual freedom and experimentation as part of the spiritual practice. He attracted very much on Hindu and Buddhist tantric sources for the guidance of using sex in the search for transcendence (for the Osho transcendence means embracing everything that life has to offer, rather than closing senses and wearing down the mind). It is difficult to set down the relevant doctrine identities for a thorough description of Bhagwan’s movement. Over 350 books are attributed to Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, books that represent his opinions regarding all aspects of human and cosmic existence. Practically, all these are compilations of “speeches” usually having a “compiler” and another person as “editor”. The opinions are eclectic, mixing certain aspects of all the major religions of the world.

The syncretism of the denomination can also be seen in its anthropological doctrine. There is a consistency in the purpose of creating a “new human” who combines the sensuality of

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*Successful Women Joined a Cult*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1999; Osho, *India My Love: A Spiritual Journey*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2002



Zorba the Greek with the spirituality of Buddha, says Bhagwan. The doctrine of the Osho group is syncretic as we find within it Oriental religious elements, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, aspects of the Occidental therapy, which is why we can assert that the group is syncretic, psycho-religious.

An important personality in the management of the practical business of Rajneesh was his disciple, Ma Anand Sheela (Sheela Ambalal Patel), who played an extremely important role in the activities of the ashram, from her adherence to the movement in 1972. She found the manor in Monclair, New Jersey, where the guru and his staff have installed themselves for the first time in the United States. Subsequently, Sheela was assigned to identify a larger space, for the proportions of the pseudo-religious community ascending in America.

In itself, Rajneesh's philosophy was not either terribly original, or terribly profound, being in its most part an elaborate synthesis, here and there quite ingenious, of a large array of philosophical and religious ideas extracted from an enormous array of sources, which gives the movement a syncretic feature as we have seen. The vast body of writings of Bhagwan is in itself a type of Postmodern synthesis: a crowd of ideas extracted from a remarkable array of sources, from Plato and Aristotle to Shankara, Lao Tzu and Jean Paul Sartre, also having a special sympathy for more radical persons, such as Nietzsche, Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley, which gave the movement a Hedonist and materialistic nature.

Above all, Rajneesh's teachings had in their centre the Indian tradition regarding the Tantra, more exactly, what he calls his own unique brand "Neo-Tantrism" - a special path adjusted to the desires of an Occidental audience at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tantrism, for Rajneesh, is essentially an "iconoclast brand of spirituality", "an antinomic philosophy and moral anarchism"<sup>16</sup>. As a religion "without religion" or even anti-religious, Neo-Tantrism is a radical path beyond conventional morality, purely Hedonistic, beyond good and evil, founded on the explicit rejection of all established traditions, doctrines and values. "Morality is a false coin, it deceives humans, it is not at all a religion", he warns, "a person with a real understanding is neither good, nor bad." They transcend both of them"<sup>17</sup> For Rajneesh, the cause of all out suffering is the distorted socialization or the programming of cultural institutions, such as family,

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<sup>16</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of CrazyWise Adepts, Holy Fools and Rascal Gurus*, Paragon, New York, 1991, p. 73

<sup>17</sup> Hugh B. Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2016, p. 55

schools, religion and government. All the general theories about the universe are just fiction, imaginary creations used by those in power in order to dominate the masses.

The practice specific for the Bhagwan movement was Tantra Yoga. As Bhagwan said, this was a completely different approach of enlightenment and self-transcendence<sup>18</sup>. He said that someone who practised tantra shall plead for the path to celibacy as being a sexual indulgence from all their heart. For him, tantra seemed a much more realistic manner; “it did not suppress or repress”<sup>19</sup>, but urged followers to spoil themselves by using their imagination and fantasy. At the same time, they must not be blindly led by passion, but enter into it with a proper and appropriate training.

The press, the media, the Internet has an overwhelming role in the sectarian proselytism, in general and in the proselytism of the Bhagwan denomination. For the media channels, what it matters and after all defines a certain attitude is the audience. Rajneesh’s group is highly promoted on all media channels, especially on the Internet or on social networks. Facebook is full of quotes that are assigned to Osho, his books are promoted by means of on-line marketing, which makes the group seem in the mind of the contemporary Romanian an acceptable “religion” which is frequented.

More than the majority of new or old religions, the Bhagwan movement has incorporated therapies in its program as an important part, if not essential, of spiritual life. The therapy groups, that were an important source of raising funds in the original ashram of the group in Poona (1974-1981) and in Rajneeshpuram (1981-1985), offered an eclectic array of pseudo-therapeutic techniques, massage, bioenergy, etc. During the analysis of the Rajneesh community in Montreal between 1978 and 1986, the authors have observed that many of the disciples interviewed have described their spiritual path in therapeutic terms - as a “personal growth”.

### **III. Missionary Assessment of the Bhagwan (Osho) Neo-Religious Denomination**

As we could see, the teaching of the Bhagwan movement regarding God and humans comes from Hinduism. Due to this, within the teaching of the movement one can see a

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<sup>18</sup> *Sexuality and New Religious Movements*, editat de J. Lewis, Henrik Bogdan, Palgrave Macmillan, Ney York, 2016

<sup>19</sup> Osho, *The Tantra Experience: Evolution through Love*, Osho International Foundation, Zurich , 2012

connection between a person (creation) and the personal God (Creator). From the Bhagwan point of view, God is an impersonal divine energy who is found in every person and who is experienced by the master, guru, embodied divinity, in our case Rajneesh. The guru-ist nature of the denomination is given by the fact that Rajneesh states that he has collected in himself all the divine energy and that he is similar to the founders of great religions, such as Buddha or Christ. Thus, the trace of Jesus represents the trace of Rajneesh.

Ad litteram, proselytism suggests a movement from one place to another, either the one who is moving (here from an expression of Christianity to another, or from Christianity to other or non-religion), or the one who has a causal role in the movement that takes place.<sup>20</sup> “For us all it is a derogatory term. But many of the ones who shall be accused of proselytism *are convinced that inside them they do not have desire, but a sole purpose - perfectly legitimate, laudable and Christian - the same thing*”.<sup>21</sup> It could be useful to start with some definitions of proselytism, before moving on to a look at the manner in which we could better understand it.

Religious syncretism is a large problem with which the religiousness of the contemporary person is confronted. “Generally, syncretism represents a mix of 2 or more antagonistic systems of faith and practice; an incompatible mixture of biblical truth and faiths and non-biblical practices”<sup>22</sup>.

Catholicism has regarded syncretism as being a negative phenomenon that emerged from the combination of pseudo-religious ideas and concepts with the Christian ones, where Christianity was preached. Beginning with Adolf von Harnack<sup>23</sup> and continuing with Barth<sup>24</sup>, Kraemer<sup>25</sup>, and others, “syncretism has been seen as a distorted form of the Christian faith, modified by cultural and religious influences where Christianity has appeared at some point. The

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Marty, “Introduction: Proselytizers and Proselytizees on the Sharp Arête of Modernity.” in *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism*, edited by John Witte Jr. and Richard Martin, Orbis Maryknoll, NY, 2001, pp. 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Nicolas Lossky, *L'urgence de l'annonce de l'Évangile, le témoignage et le prosélytisme*, rév. Irénikon, Tome LXVII 1994, Monastère de Chevetogne, Belgique, p. 477 apud Pr Prof. univ. Ene Braniște, Mihai Himcinschi, *Misiune și dialog. Ontologia misionara a Bisericii din perspectiva dialogului interreligios*, Editura Reîntregirii, Alba Iulia, 2005, p. 146

<sup>22</sup> David Sitton, *Glossary of Terms and Resources on Tribal Peoples*, in “International Journal of Frontier Missions”, Vol., 15:2, April-June, 1998, p. 109

<sup>23</sup> Adolf von Harnack (7.05.1851–10.06.1930) – German theologian and a figure of mark regarding the History of Church as a branch of theology.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Barth (10.05.1886 – 10.12.1968) – an important reformed theologian born in Basel whom Pope Pius the XII has named the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>25</sup> Hendrik Kraemer (17.05.1888 – 11.11.1965) – a great Dutch theologian, missiologist and lawyer and a prominent figure in the ecumenical movement in Holland.

roots of this negative attitude go deep into the Christian history and now they are confronted with varied forms of religiousness, especially in the Mediterranean basin. Certain theological assertions from the bosom of Christianity have helped traditions in supporting a negative view of syncretism”<sup>26</sup>.

In this repertoire, syncretism has been regarded as a mixture between the biblical truth and the local faiths and practices<sup>27</sup>. “Incompatibility should be regarded from the point of view of God and not from other cultural points of view. In a rising Church there are many cultural aspects that could influence its development. Each aspect must reflect the understanding of what Christianity entails within that community, consisting of believers interacting with one another based on their own concepts on the world and their own cultural practices. It is a hermeneutic community within which the Gospel is understood from the point of view of those concepts”<sup>28</sup>.

We live in a world affected by diseases, adversities and suffering of all kinds. These deepen the uneasiness of the contemporary person, especially since all these are in contradiction with the convenience of the nowadays person. At the same time, these also influence the sensitivity of our fellow humans and especially the conscience of the relation between disease and sin. Things get even more complicated for the Postmodern person, as the explanations of secular therapies that consider disease as being only the inner conflict, owed to hidden feelings and traumatic experiences that are in the subconscious, make it difficult for them. Thus, all sorts of pseudo-therapies, such as the ones promoted by the Bhagwan movement emerge, and which we have previously detailed.

So, being confused, he/she understands with difficulty that the diseases is actually a consequence of the ancestral sin and of the personal sins. One of the most serious problems with which the Orthodox theology is faced refers to the fact that disease and suffering - managed inappropriately - lead to hopelessness, despair, and finally, depression. Thus, theology, as

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<sup>26</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Defining Syncretism: An Interim Report*, in International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Volume 17, No. 2, 1993, p. 50

<sup>27</sup> Syncretism represents the reshaping of Christian teachings and practices through the cultural “accommodation”, so that these, consciously or unconsciously, are mixed with the teachings and practices of the dominant culture. “It is the mixture of Christian faiths and practices with the ones of the dominant culture, so that Christianity loses its distinctive nature and expresses itself from the point of view of the dominant culture.” (Dr. Gailyn Van Rheen, *Worldview and Syncretism*, presented in the Symposium „Distinctively Christian, Distinctly Mongolian” in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003)

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Shaw, *Contextualizing the Power and the Glory*, in “International Journal of Frontier Missions”, Vol. 12:3 July-September, 1995, p. 159

antidote, highlights the positive significance of the disease and suffering and ties it naturally to God's providence, but also to the godly iconomy.

From the point of view of the Orthodox therapy, healing does not resume only to the body, but it is a reality, a complete healing of the human person, with fundamentally soteriological valencies. Thus, within the Orthodox therapy, we clearly see the existence of certain fundamental dimensions which constitute as stages in acquiring healing: 1) it is firstly about the awareness of sin; 2) then about the great virtue of repentance without which we could not speak of healing, and 3) about the canon or epitheme received as reformation and fulfilment of healing as an authentic therapeutic act.

From its creation, a person was marked by the religious feeling regardless of the manner in which it understood the divinity, in a Pantheist, Deist, Theist, etc. A part of the religions believe in an only God, but they differ amongst them from the point of view religious doctrines and of the divine cult. This is explained from the point of view of a person's reformation from the primordial revelation due to the ancestral sin which had fundamental consequences for the human being and nature. Not being able to explain what is happening around it and not knowing the purpose of life, the human began to confuse God with nature or consider Him to be the world itself. Moreover, in time, the religions created by the human has suffered major or even total modifications, and others have completely disappeared. Many times, due to these changes, man has come to accept a religious syncretism, a conglomerate of ideas and concepts that are easy to be assimilated for a large number of people with different concepts. Such an example is India in whose religiousness we find a syncretism of religious doctrines which were grouped, thus giving rise to various philosophical schools. "In the classical Hinduism, as not all Hindus have shared or share the same point of view the existence in parallel of six hermeneutic schools was reached (named *darsanas* - "insight into" the truth) recognised as valid and which give special interpretations to Vedic texts. They are associated into three groups: Nyaya – Vaiseshika, Samkhya – Yoga and Mimamsa – Vedanta, each of them having one personal preoccupation: logic, epistemology, physics, evolution of matter, etc. About their emergence in the history of Hinduism one cannot indicate exactly a period, their evolution being quite long"<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Prof. Dr. Remus Rus, Pr. Conf. Dr. Alexandru Stan, *Istoria religiilor*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1991, p. 221

If the charisma of a leader can be measured in the number of its followers that he/she attracts in a short amount of time, we can say that Rajneesh's authority was important as it managed to collect approximately 350000 sannyasins or initiated<sup>30</sup>. However, newspaper *Oregonian* writes down that "The figures supplied by the Bhagwan officials in comparison with those offered by external observers have many times been different", mentioning a number of 60.000<sup>31</sup>.

Rajneesh has manifested his charisma by means of speeches or his public lectures, which were transcribed in several languages in over 350 books, and also, recorded on video tapes. These speeches have had an extraordinary effect on his followers. Several sannyasins declared that "they fell in love with Bhagwan", through exposure to his speeches.

Opposed to the totalitarianism that we can find in the Bhagwan movement, Christianity promotes freedom as a constitutive part of God's "likeness" in humans. It represents the effect of a person's good choice, the use towards salvation of the gift of the free will from the Good God. Human dignity is fundamental for the human being, it represents God's gift as an inalienable right from the Creator. Human dignity is at the same time a calling from the Creator of man, on the dimension of human dignity, man into Christ, acquires the value of spiritual and intellectual discernment, of spiritual courage and balances against the ideological usage of human "rights" - in a total autonomy from God - the great virtue of Christian responsibility, interface of human dignity.

#### **IV. Missionary Strategies and Remedies for the Purpose of Fighting Against Oriental Pseudo-Religious Challenges**

Pantheism, due to its notion on life and the world, had a special spread around in the world, and the doctrines specific to the East have always been founded on this notion. From a missionary point of view, Pantheism takes to extreme the presence of God in the world, His immanence, respectively, getting to identify the world with God Himself. In other words, in Pantheism God is confused with creation and divinity has practically the same identity with the world.

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<sup>30</sup> *Rajneesh Times*, 14 October 1983

<sup>31</sup> *Oregonian*, 1985, p. 3

Father professor Dumitru Stăniloae offers a pertinent and complete answer to Pantheism: “A world existing since forever in evolutionary forms, essentially identical to the current one, would be itself the absolute, meaning the only reality. But the absolute cannot bear the brand of nonsense and limitations that the current form of the world has in itself, regarded as the only reality, or the ones essentially identical, in which everything composes and decomposes. Even if there was a superior unknown meaning in this relativity, it should be someone aware of itself in an eternal manner, in which case He would be the absolute truth, superior to this relativity.”<sup>32</sup>

Man was created as a free being. The absolute freedom of God is the result given by the difference between the not created and created; from this we understand that the world was created from the absolute love of God, love which extends to the created reality - the world, and the purpose of this reality is to share the love of God.

The Pantheist notion according to which the world is identified with God is very appealing for the desecrated contemporary and dechristianized man, his decline towards the material can be justified without the fear of being judged for certain deeds of his. However, this notion cannot constitute a truth that we accept as Christians.

The human person is not a conscious existence only, but also a giving and receiving existence in relation to another, having joy for the person to whom it is given and which receives it and this joy fulfilling through participation in it of a third person. No human person is only a giving father or receiving son, but each is a giving father in relation to one or several persons and a receiving son in relation to two persons (parents). This is because no human person is the origin by excellence, but each is a giving origin and receiving person, because all human persons are essentially from a supreme giving origin (Heavenly Father), but through a Son and in the Holy Spirit received from the Father and from the Son as their common joy. This makes them fathers and sons. People are not only sons, because they are not only from the Son. They are not only sons, as the Son, nor because they are not from the Father, exclusively, but because they are from the Father through the Son. This has a consequence that the Son imprints on people a seal which makes them capable of being origins as well, or fathers but fathers not from them, but from other fathers and in the last analysis from the unique Father of the Son. The act of creation

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<sup>32</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos-lumina lumii și îndumnezeietorul lumii*, Editura Anastasia. București. 1993, p. 45

and the care for the creation gives the Son the chance to be the One through whom the Father works, making Him a participant in the quality of the Father of origin not His, but of others, thus makes them as well receiving sons and at the same time giving fathers. But in the inner Trinitarian relationship, the Father is solely and exclusively the Father and the Son solely and exclusively the Son. There is a pure paternity and filiation. In the Trinity there is no reciprocity or participation of each person in the personal properties of the others.

**Human.** From His great love for people, God gives humans the greatest and most wonderful gift: *life*, creating them after His face and likeness (Gen. 1, 26-27). The Holy Trinity is the inexhaustible spring of human and Christian life. Through the wonderful gift of life, man's position in this world is unique. Man is positioned between the spiritual world of angels and the material world, nature, in its composition containing the two worlds. Man, after the likeness of the Creator, becomes a spiritual value<sup>33</sup>, bearer of moral values, that he must cultivate in the community for obtaining eternal life.

Through His resurrection, Jesus Christ has shown all people from all periods and places that life is a fundamental gift, and death does not have the last say on human life, placing it in an absolute relation with all its manifestations. Through resurrection, Christ re-establishes communion with God, and man participates once again in the eternal life towards which the Creator has assigned<sup>34</sup>.

All people are «the gift of God». This gift must be made visible by increasing, progressing and going forwards towards consummation in Christ. But the road of consummation in Christ is long and cannot be crossed without communication with the world, but in communion, in opening, in a dialogue of love, with God and with the fellow humans, as man was created by God as a dialogic, inter-speaking person, thus with a profoundly community-ecumenical nature.

**The world.** The attitude towards the world has a determining cluster in the evolution of civilisation, as this attitude can take one of the two extreme and opposed forms: form of accepting or form of denying the world. The acceptance of the world brings with itself an intense experience, tasting the joys of life and the aspiration to transform the world for certain purposes. Activism generated by the attitude for the acceptance of the world becomes, thus, the engine of

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1996, p. 62

<sup>34</sup> Jean Meyendorff, *Le Christ dans la theologie byzantine*, Les Editions du Cert, Paris, 1969, p. 155



progress, of civilisation, and through this the spring of good living. Denying the world, on the contrary, directs a person's attention towards other horizons, determining a passive attitude before life and preventing the progress of civilisation.

**Freedom.** Through freedom, with its most general meaning, one understands the absence of any constraint. Thus, in the common vocabulary it is called the “free” growth of forest trees and field flowers, the flowing of waters in the layer that they have carved for themselves, the life of wild animals and of migratory birds. Spontaneous speaking, as well as their conduct that do not take into account the opinions of other people is also called free. Such a freedom is not, however, a part of the ethical values but the insignificant natural phenomena<sup>35</sup>.

Regarded in itself, freedom does not mean, however, only the absence of any constraints. It is the expression of the innate capacity of man as a psycho-physical being gifted with reason and with its own will, of deliberately choosing amongst many possible alternatives and consists in the power of acting or not in the direction of good, without any constraint or hindering from outside. Exactly because it has a positive content, freedom constitutes an ethical value, a spiritual good, a corollary of human superiority in relation to the other beings, an essential condition for the fulfilment of the mission and manifestation of the dignity of the human being. Thus, freedom makes up one of the major and permanent aspirations of all humans and peoples and represents the first of the conditions of progress.

Christian teaching regards the capacity to assess, choose, decide for an action or other and to then act consciously and voluntarily, as being an essential and characteristic attribute for the human being. Christianity asserts based on the divine Revelation, that this capacity is part of the social quality with which God has endowed man beginning with the creation. Moreover, Christianity asserts that all people have the same origin and nature, as descending biologically from the same protofather Adam; that they all have the same dignity and mission, as they are sons by grace of the heavenly Father and are equally called, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ to salvation, consummation and eternal happiness.

And, since all people are endowed with reason, sentiment and their own will, are faced from birth before the same requirements of life and nourish similar aspirations towards welfare and Individual happiness, freedom - which is an essential condition for the development of personal virtues and acquisition of happiness - it must constitute a fundamental right of each

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<sup>35</sup> *Dictionnaire prectique des connaissances religieuses*, vezi E. Lenoble, “Libre arbiter”, Paris, 1926, col. 380

person. And which constitutes a fundamental right and a condition of spiritual and material upsurge for each, it must be sanctioned as being an unalienable right, a sacred good and an essential condition of life, and for human groups, for each people<sup>36</sup>.

Based on the Christian teaching, man is the special result of thinking, will, love and plan of God. The Book of Genesis assesses that man was not created in the manner of the other things and beings, but in a specific manner: “after the likeness of God” (I, 26-27). This expression, transposed as literally as possible in the old translations of the Holy Scripture, was understood in many types of commentators. The Book of wisdom of Solomon is rendered through the words: “God created man towards purity and made him after His likeness” (Wisdom of Solomon II, 23). Some Holy Fathers and church writers report the “face” and “likeness” of God from man, to his mission and capacity to master over the entire material creation and to place her in the service of his needs and aspirations<sup>37</sup>. Most of them have thought, however, about the spiritual nature and virtues of the soul: immortality, intelligence, freedom<sup>38</sup>.

**Salvation.** A fundamental teaching and Orthodox specific of the biblical and patristic theology is the teaching about the deification or salvation of the believer as a consequence of the deification of the body of Christ. Deification or salvation is the experience of the evangelical truth under the watch of the grace and Holy Ghost, or “life in Christ”. It excelled in the East especially between ascetics and fathers with an improved life, of the primary ages as between Christians of all social categories and of all times waxed, known or anonymous.

The principle or agent of the holiness and deification of the Christian is the divine grace, as an uncreated energy, and the Holy Ghost as a trinitarian Person. He transmits to the faithful man and through him the surrounding nature the working power and charities of the redemptive grace. Through these energies of the grace, the believer tends towards the “likeness of God” and communion with Him more and more, desiring with intensity happiness and the spiritual goods of eternal life and as an abode of heaven.

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<sup>36</sup> Mitropolit Nicolae Mladin, *Studii de teologie morala*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Sibiu, Sibiu, 1969, p. 18

<sup>37</sup> Sfântul Grigore din Nyssa, *După facerea omului*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1998; Fericițul Teodoret al Cirului, *Comentariu la Corinteni*, XI, 7, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2020; Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile VIII, IX, XIV la cartea Facerii*, în PSB, nr. 21, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1987

<sup>38</sup> Saint Augustine (of Hippo), *The Trinity*, XII,2, New City Press, Hyde Park, NY, 1990, Sfântul Macarie cel Mare, *Omiliile duhovnicești*. Omilia XXV, zi, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 2010; Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, XL 2, Editura Scripta, București, 1993

The deification appears as the highest step of the iconomy of salvation, meaning the state which the uncreated energies and the gifts of the Holy Ghost become assimilated by the believer, becomes the body and soul of the “temple of God” (I Cor. VI, 19-20), feeling that “Christ lives into him” (Gal. II, 20), and through Christ the entire Holy Trinity.

Created “after the likeness of God” (Genesis 1, 26), “Man is a creature who received a command to become God” says Saint Basil the Great<sup>39</sup>, and after him, Saint Maxim the Confessor said that man is a “created god”<sup>40</sup>, or a creature who tends towards deification.

The salvation of the Christian person is a long process, which has already started from paradise, but was interrupted through the fall of Adam, and recommences with the birth again, “from water and spirit” (John III, 5), through the Sacrament of Baptism and continues to progress until eschatology. Endowed from creation with a rational soul or “spirit of life” (Genesis II, 7), which is the “face of God” into him, the Christian exceeds the angels with this<sup>41</sup>. Through creation and by being granted the “face of God”<sup>42</sup> Christians are in terms of creation children of God and have a spiritual adoption. Since “all people are after the face of God; and after the likeness are only those who through much love have enslaved God’s freedom”<sup>43</sup>. If “the face of God” in man, the soul, is “through breath”, after the nature, it must become both through grace and glory. Thus, it can justly be said that: “The soul is the face of God in three manners: after the nature, after grace and after glory... Thus, the one who wants to know what soul is, to know that the soul is the great work of God, it is the living imprint of the Holy Trinity”<sup>44</sup>.

The history of Oriental religion has a very long history. Throughout time it has changed due to the changes of environment, social-economic and political changes. And when the religious wave has changed, the social and cultural pattern has also changed amongst the people in that area. Maybe because in this region there are over 70 religions and a very diverse cultural system that continues in this area. But religious faith started here a very long time ago, as we return to the pre-historical society.

In the pre-historical Indian sub-continent, the religious system was as similar with the religions of tribal people from our days in this area. Certain discoveries that prove the practising

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<sup>39</sup> Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Impotriva lui Eunomie, Cartea IV-a*, Editura Crigarux, București, 2007

<sup>40</sup> Myrrha Lol-Boradine, “La doctrine de la deification dans l’Eglise grecque jusqu’au XI-e sticle”, in *Revue de histoire des religions*, Paris, 1932, p. 23

<sup>41</sup> Ilie Miniati, *Didahii și Predici*, Editura Sfintei Mitropolii a Ungro-Vlahiei, București, 1945, pp. 51-53

<sup>42</sup> *Învățătura de credință creștină ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1952, p. 63

<sup>43</sup> Diadoh al Foticeei, *Filocalia I*, trad. Pr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Sibiu, 1948, p. 341

<sup>44</sup> Ilie Miniati, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54

of certain pre-historical rituals and a religious practice have been found. Information in Vedic texts regarding tribal religions, the cult of nature, black magic through Vedic text and traditional custom was found. Nonetheless, there are no written documents connected with the religion of the civilisation of the Indus valley, except for certain figurines, graves and seals. Various local natural deities that are named *Yaksha* and *Yakshini* are found in the age of post-Indus civilisation<sup>45</sup>. They were the caretakers of natural treasures hidden in the ground and the roots of trees.

The new Oriental religiousness has nothing in common with the traditional religions from which they claim to flourish as the teachings, philosophies, notions borrowed are so greatly modified, reinterpreted and mixed with other notions, as these lose their own meaning. The new religiousness also reinterprets the practices specific to the East but in a new, own manner, completely transfiguring them in order to be as attractive as possible through their exoticism and pseudo-esotericism. We can say that the new religiousness is the deeply harmful marketisation of the old authentic Oriental religiousness which represents a genuine danger for life and the spirituality of the contemporary person.

**Materialism.** Unlike some religions, Christianity asserts that God intentionally created the physical world, extending the skies “as a tent” (Psalms 104,2). He called it “good”. God assigned His creation to become a bearer of His grace and to confess His name. The psalmist called everything to “praise the Name of God” (Psalms 148, 5). And humanity, modelled from the dust of the earth, God has entrusted the administration of the “good” creation. From the beginning of the Church, it faced challenges regarding its doctrine about creation.

Some have accused “matter” (the physical) to be the appanage of evil and credited “the spirit” to be a source of that is good. The Docetists of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, for instance, denied Jesus’s humanity. They said that “matter” is irremediably evil<sup>46</sup>. Later on, Gnostics represented a major threat. Not only did they believe that matter is inherently evil and spirit is invariably good, but they believed that “souls” have become trapped in the “matter” and they needed a “saviour” in

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<sup>45</sup> *Encyclopedia of Ancient Deities*, Charles Russell Coulter, Patricia Turner, Routledge, New York, 2013

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Coyle, *Mary in the Christian Tradition: From a Contemporary Perspective*, Twenty Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 1994, p. 30

order to save them. Some Gnostics identified Jesus, who seemed only a man, as a Gnostic saviour<sup>47</sup>.

Against such types of attacks, the fathers of the primary Church insisted that God created the world and that it is the object of redemption. They insisted that Christ cannot redeem what He did not undertake - full of creatures, complete humanity. In the Embodiment, God became “one with us”<sup>48</sup>. Saint Apostle Paul placed the physical world amongst “the children of God” and said that, together with the other children of God, creation is waiting now its final redemption (Romans 8, 22-25).

**Hedonism** represents another feature of the denominations of Oriental origins, in general, and especially, a lifestyle of the followers of the Bhagwan movement. The term of Hedonism itself comes from the Greek language and is translated with “pleasure”. It is believed that the philosophy of Hedonism was taught firstly by Aristippus of Cyrene, a student of Socrates<sup>49</sup>. He taught that the meaning of life is pleasure, and, thus, pleasure should be the supreme search. Although it is possible that Aristippus to have been the first to have taught Hedonism, he was not alone. About at the same time, Chinese philosopher Yang Zhu taught that, since there is no afterlife nor a god, man can seek as much pleasure as possible in his life<sup>50</sup>.

**Therapy.** We live in a world affected by diseases, adversities and suffering of all kinds. These deepen the uneasiness of the contemporary person, especially since all these are in contradiction with the convenience of the nowadays person. At the same time, these also influence the sensitivity of our fellow humans and especially the conscience of the relation between disease and sin. Things get even more complicated for the Postmodern person, as the explanations of secular therapies that consider disease as being only the inner conflict, owed to hidden feelings and traumatic experiences that are in the subconscious, make it difficult for them. We could easily notice this approach within the Bhagwan movement which promotes various techniques of mental therapy that have proven to be harmful for the mental health of the followers of the movement.

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<sup>47</sup> Edward D. Andrews, *The Gnostic Jesus: The Jesus of Second Century Gnosticism*, Christian Publishing House, Cambridge, Ohio, 2021, p. 10

<sup>48</sup> Gregory Afonsky, *Christ and the Church: In Orthodox Teaching and Tradition*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 7

<sup>49</sup> *Early Greek Ethics*, editat de David Conan Wolfson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020, p. 380

<sup>50</sup> *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age: A Reconstruction under the Aspect of the Breakthrough Toward Postconventional Thinking*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993, p. 243

From the Orthodox point of view, disease represents an immediate consequence of the ancestral sin<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, disease is also a consequence of personal sins<sup>52</sup>. One of the most serious problems with which the Orthodox theology is faced refers to the fact that disease and suffering - managed inappropriately - lead to hopelessness, despair, and finally, depression. Thus, theology, as antidote, highlights the positive significance of the disease and suffering and ties it naturally to God's providence, but also to the godly iconomy. The Orthodox teaching seeks the profound change of man, purpose also met within psychotherapies of reconstruction. Repentance has a fundamental role first and foremost for the spiritual health of man: "Repentance begins with a total discontent towards the relationships that we had with simple things, relationships which on a background of non-discovery the reasons of God behind things, have led to disorder and pain, in a nutshell they have led to sin. Under these conditions, repentance emerges and is manifested as a conversion, as a return of attention from the sensitive exterior towards the intelligible interior, towards the kingdom of God."<sup>53</sup>

**The Totalitarianism** of Oriental denominations is an obvious one as they have in their centre the founder of the denomination, most of the times a so-called guru, who wants to control both the spiritual life of the followers, and the worldly one, many times turning to violent actions (physical or mental). Violence is present in the Bhagwan movement and makes up a "continuum" in which abuses are the only part of violence perceived by foreigners<sup>54</sup>. In addition to the official written history, which denies that the guru is at the origin of abuses, other stories are orally transmitted. Their discovery is part of an initiating process and each corresponds to a certain stage of the involvement of the disciple in the movement. Actually, access to these stories requires the elimination of the existing preconceptions of the disciple. Through spiritual practices and the thoroughness of the relationship with the guru, he/she gradually internalizes violence and becomes convinced of its legitimacy<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Ene Braniște, Gheorghe Istodor, "Terapia ortodoxă cu privire la boală și suferință. Evaluare misionară" în *Condiția umană între suferință și iubirea lui Dumnezeu. Terapia bolii și îngrijirile paliative*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2012, pp. 320

<sup>52</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, "Terapia ortodoxă cu privire la boală și suferință", p. 322

<sup>53</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, "Terapia ortodoxă cu privire la boală și suferință", p. 331

<sup>54</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes și Philippe I. Bourgois folosesc expresia "continuum al violenței". See *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, 2004, pp. 1-28

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Robbins; Dick Anthony, "Sects and Violence: Factors Enhancing the Volatility of Marginal Religious Movements" din *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, pp. 236-259

Christianity represents a religion of peace not of violence and of totalitarianism, issue arising best and completely from the Embodiment of our Saviour Jesus Christ: "He is out peace, He who made from two - one, breaking down the middle wall of the partition" (*Ephesians* 2, 11-22) Peace represents a reality existing in the Unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Saint Gregory the Theologian presented distinctly profoundly this reality, showing that "for us there is only one God, as there is one Godhead and although we believe that they are Three, the Persons in Him have their reference to the Oneness. As One of the Three is not more God, and another one less God and no One a God first, and another One a God last, nor is it separated through will, nor is it divided through power ... but, if I must say it in one word, Godhead is undivided between the reigned and as Three Sons united with one another, a sole mixture of Light"<sup>56</sup>.

The catechesis and the sermon have been and remained one of the means chosen in full action and with the beneficial Christian influence on the human soul, used by the Church since the first centuries of Christianity and until our time.

The origin and meaning of catechesis are with God, with our Lord Jesus Christ, whose echo of moral guidance, of Christian teaching and religious spiritual education is represented through its name: to resonate downward<sup>57</sup>. Meaning that the downward echo of the divine Logos, God the Word in the soul, moral life, religious thinking of man.

Hence all the teachings, all the Christian religious-moral educational guidances have the supreme spring into the divine Logos, as He Himself said: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters...nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah." (*Matthew* 23, 8-10). The supreme testamentary command was expressed by the Saviour to the twelve Apostles, saying to them: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (*Matthew* 28, 18-20).

The motivation of the Christian pedagogy is represented by the upbringing and accomplishment of youngsters after the will of God, after the face of His Son, the accomplishment of a genuine Christina, who through his life, through all his manifestations,

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<sup>56</sup> Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvântarea a V-a despre Dumnezeu*, Editura Herald, București, 2013

<sup>57</sup> Kingsley Anagolu, *The Relationship Hermeneutics in the Context of Pastoral and Catechesis*, LIT Verlag GmbH, Zurich, 2019, p. 262

through his thoughts, words, and deeds can represent, in the middle of his fellow humans everywhere, Christ Himself; matching his powers, to show into the world the love of Christ, His peace and justice, the spirit of sacrifice for the good of humanity<sup>58</sup>.

Christian educational action aims at the achievement of the Christian truth which through all of its own not seek only one's gratitude, peace, quietness, and salvation, but the thriving in all these of the fellow humans as well, towards building a Christian who shall not be seduced by the esotericism and exoticism of the Oriental denominations.

Christian religious education is capable of reaching such as objective, through the fact that from the beginning it has regarded the Christian in all its entirety, a whole capable of moral, spiritual, religious progress, capable of development from a religious and moral point of view, it directs him towards reaching the ideal of Christian perfection discovered by God in Jesus Christ, ideal embodying in itself the ministry of God but also the ministry of fellow humans everywhere<sup>59</sup>.

The proliferation of groups of movements of Oriental nature represents a major challenge for the Orthodox teaching and spirituality, but also a problem both for the Romanian state and legislative system, because it creates a dilemma: on the one hand, through the constitution religious freedom is guaranteed and, at the same time, each state must ensure the safety and protection of its citizens against abusive practices of any kind. The middle way between these two realities and rights is sometimes difficult to achieve given the fact that what for some it constitutes the assurance of religious freedom, and for others it represents disregard and lack of protection. "Moreover, what for some expresses a natural attitude of protection of citizens, for other persons, it expresses religious persecution<sup>60</sup>.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the Bhagwan movement is not easy due to the changing and inconsistent nature of the movement that did not indicate any coherence regarding the ideology promoted by

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<sup>58</sup> Pr. D. Călugăr, "Portretul unui creștin", în *Mitropolia Ardealului*, III (1958), nr. 1-2, pp. 105-106. Also see other considerations in connection with religious education in D. Călugăr, *Preocupări catehetice*, Sibiu, 1916, p. 1043 ; D. Călugăr, *Caracterul religios-moral creștin*, Sibiu, 1955, p. 148-272

<sup>59</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Sibiu, 1943, p. 201

<sup>60</sup> J.C. Soper, "Tribal Instinct and Religious Persecution: Why Do Occidental European States Behave So Badly?", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 40, nr. 2, 2001, p. 177



it. Moreover, faiths, practices, and objectives have distinguished themselves as being extremely changing, even though some doctrines that have persisted throughout time have been identified. The Rajneesh movement has proven itself to be completely “fabricated”, meaning that faiths, practices, identities, and even the physical location can be rapidly changed in order to fit the needs and comfort of the moment of Rajneesh and of the leaders of the group. As sannyasins were pushed to live “here and now”, their social systems and legal identities were not permanent, existing modifications throughout time depending on the financial interests of the leaders.

Analysing the history of the Bhagwan movement, we can say that it can be characterised through **mobility and wide spread** with followers spread on five continents. Meditation centres are as dispersed and have become even more outspread after the expulsion of Bhagwan from the United States. The levels of involvement vary from the ones who gathered in order to live and work with Bhagwan in Poona and Rajneeshpuram, to those who worked in the offices of Rajneesh and even more, others who identify themselves as sannyasins and who live very varied private and professional lives.

**Bhagwan movement has a deep syncretic nature.** The syncretism of the denomination is identified in the teaching of the movement regarding man, who is a combination between the sensuality of Zorba the Greek with the spirituality of Buddha. Syncretism is also obvious from the fact that we find Oriental religious elements, and, at the same time, aspects of Occidental therapy.

**The doctrine of the Bhagwan movement is a dualism** within which good and evil, God and Satan, holiness and sin, good and evil coexist contentiously. Man should accept himself, first and foremost, as he “is”.

**Rajneesh movement has a hedonistic nature.** Rajneesh’s teaching has in its centre the Indian tradition regarding the Tantra, transformed into what he calls his own unique brand “Neo-Tantrism” which represents a special path adjusted to the desires of an Occidental audience at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tantrism, for Rajneesh, is essentially an “iconoclast brand of spirituality”, “an antinomic philosophy and moral anarchism”. Neo-Tantrism was characterised as a religion “without religion” or even anti-religion, and it represents a radical path beyond conventional morality, purely Hedonistic, which disregards good and evil, founded on the explicit rejection of all established traditions, doctrines and values.

**The political dimension of the Bhagwan movement** arises from the fact that, after their arrival into the United States and their establishment in Oregon State, the leaders of the movement wanted to place sanayasins in the administrative functions of the state which would facilitate the expansion of the community.

**Bhagwan movement is a yogin one.** Tantra Yoga represents a yoga alternative to the Indian mystical teachings. Yoga refers to the path of capitulation, while tantra encourages any type of indulgence, so that the Yogi shall pick up the awareness of its own existence. The practice specific to the Bhagwan movement promoted intensely by Rajneesh was Tantra Yoga. For the leader of the movement, tantra seemed a much more realistic manner; “it did not suppress or repress”, urging followers to spoil themselves by using their imagination and fantasy. Through tantra, passion and indulgence come to have a purpose, and man to self-discover more easily.

Taking into account these things, we can state that neo-religious groups with Oriental foundation, in general, and the Bhagwan movement in particular, represent a major challenge in the mission of the Orthodox Church nowadays.

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