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NEO-RELIGIOSITY AND POLITICAL RHETORIC:
A POSSIBLE “GENERATION MECHANISM”
OF ANTI-SYSTEM DISCOURSE

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Abstract: Shaped at the end of the 1960s, the *new religiosity* comes to reflect that “new and exotic” spirituality that Nicolae Achimescu put in a direct connection with the advance of post-modernity, namely with the mutations that postindustrial society has generated (under the pressure of globalization and secularization) in the field of religious consciousness. Combined with the reticence of “recent” man (H.-R. Patapievici) towards the biblical-dogmatic foundations and the hierarchical structure of the traditional Churches, the new religiosity – assumed as such by the entities known as *new religious movements* – aims to restructure the way of conceptualizing and practicing faith, including from the perspective of its relationship with the values of civil society. In these circumstances, the fact that sometimes the ‘messages’ of new religious movements sometimes interfere with radical political discourse in a partisan way should not come as a surprise, as their capacity to embody such aspirations cannot be neglected. Moreover, the conflictual and manipulative potential of some of these movements has brought them to the attention of EU bodies and national authorities in Western Europe in recent decades. It is precisely for this reason that we aim to diagnose the anti-system political vocation of some of the new religious movements, and to insist on the mechanism by which they use their doctrinal particularities to underpin a particular type of political rhetoric.

Key words: new religious movements (nrm), esoteric groups, neo-gnostic groups, neo-religiosity, post-modernity, religious movement.

1. Neo-religiosity: Contents and Delimitations

In spite of the lack of rigorous assessments, the proliferation of new religious movements on the old continent is unquestionable, their share in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, France or Great Britain (where there are thousands of such entities) currently reaching percentages comparable to those of traditional Protestant communities, so that their presence in an area substantially marked by the advance of secularization cannot be ignored (Xidakis 2022, 4-5).

In themselves, the terms *neo-religious* and *neo-religiosity* have a generic content, given both the heterogeneity of the doctrinal, cultic and moral-ethical referential that the groups in this category assimilate, and the unconventional forms in which these teachings are translated into practice (Achimescu 2004, 11). Therefore, attempts to “fit” the new religiosity into the usual analytical patterns, those that focus on dogmatic developments and historical courses of theological thought, are inapplicable, all the more so since, reflecting what Jean Vernet called “a particular kind of religious micro-culture” (Vernette 1994, 5-6), the new religious movements are based on a prior assumption of the need to challenge traditional beliefs (Augé 2005, 161).

a) The first diagnosis of these groups was made by the New Zealand theologian Harold W. Turner. Essentially, he described as “neo-religious” the post-1960 phenomenon whereby the ancestral beliefs of tribal communities in Africa and Asia or indigenous peoples (such as Amerindians or Maori) “merged” with the major institutionalized religions, a process in which the spiritual values of the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia were more or less displaced, but not totally suppressed. The genesis of this new religiosity - the effect of the creativity of tribal communities, but also of their spirit of self-preservation, as Harold W. Turner has pointed out - was the fruit of the interaction of indigenous beliefs with the great institutionalized religions, and was thus the result of a cultural contact (inevitable in the circumstances of globalization) in the context of which the dominant civilization was able to impose its own beliefs, but only to a limited extent.

Thus understood, the new religiosity will find its ultimate basis in the merger of two religious systems that are different both from a “theoretical” point of view and in terms of the level of theological-philosophical conceptualization. Therefore, the birth of a new religious movement will presuppose the a priori existence of a cultural contact of a certain continuity and intensity, a contact that may result in comparable mutual influences from a “superior” civilization (and religion) on an “inferior” indigenous population (and belief). The new religiosity will be

characterized by syncretism, the cohabitation of the “old” indigenous and the “new” allochthonous, leading to the emergence of new beliefs and cult practices, automatically improvised and therefore lacking in systemic coherence.

It should be noted that the comparative weight of indigenous and non-indigenous “theological” themes in each of the particular structures of the new religiosity will inevitably differ. In this regard, Harold W. Turner distinguished five types of new religious movements (*neo-original, synthetic, deviant, adapted to indigenous culture, independent*), the criterion used to distinguish among them being the relative weight of themes specific to indigenous beliefs, which was very high in the case of neo-original groups and very low in the case of independent ones. Beyond this categorization, the new religious movements will take on something of the universalist vocation of the great religions that shaped them, even developing a missionary profile that will enable them to aspire to go beyond the limits of the culture in which they were born (Turner 2005, 183-186).

b) Thus conceived, Harold W. Turner’s vision of the new religiosity has a range of applicability that practically does not interfere with Western civilization, so that his diagnosis must be complemented by other points of view. It is a prerequisite to mention the opinion of the Catholic theologian Jean Vernet, who proposed an analytical perspective precisely related to the consumer society. According to this view, the new religious movements represent the particular ends of the solitary and chaotic “spiritual quests” of “recent” man, i.e. of the man whom secularized society has alienated from the Christian faith and severed from the ecclesial institutions within which he could find and practice it. This kind of ‘search’ is a typical postmodern phenomenon, which is sufficiently far-reaching, and which reveals the profound religious vocation of the human being, a vocation that is directly linked to his being as the image of the Creator (Genesis 1:26-27) and which, for this very reason, cannot be suppressed by the advance of secularism.

From Jean Vernet’s point of view, the efforts of “recent” man to rediscover the spiritual dimension of existence could lead to the emergence of new religious movements, especially when they interfere with the fields of *esotericism* and *gnosis*. At the same time, a speculative metaphysics of vague theological-philosophical inspiration will complete the profile of the new religiosity, which will thus be able to assert its monist-panteistic options, cultivating the illusion of the divinity of man and linking his destiny to that of a Cosmos which he would manifest in his own self (Vernet 1994, 5-6, 23, 29). The new religiosity will then “rediscover” a number of Eastern traditions and occult practices, by assimilating elements drawn from Indian beliefs, yogic practices or Eastern astrology, as well as by integrating teachings inspired by anthroposophy, theosophy, theosophy or parapsychology (Petraru 2000, 216-217). Thus,

from Jean Varnette's perspective, the new religious movements can be accurately identified on the vast psycho-market (Peter L. Berger) of Western faiths on the basis of their appetite for Eastern spirituality, esotericism, occultism and gnosis, the fact that they may retain certain Christian "reflexes", including in the form of the invocation of the Savior Christ, being symptomatic of the artificiality of the propagandistic discourse professed.

c) The French sociologist Louis Hourman identified the new religiosity with those "exotic" movements with an undeniably counter-cultural dimension which, since the 1970s, have promoted a spirituality tributary to the great Eastern religions and, therefore, directly opposed to the Christianity that is the majority in the Western world. Then, the new religious movements are also characterized by the non-conformist social behaviour of their followers, some of whom are "disrespectful of the conventions of the age" as long as they are part of the lineage of the great social protest movements of the 60s. This includes aspects such as "exalting life in the community", the use of "techniques designed to awaken altered states of consciousness" or "[subordination] to a master chosen for his charisma" – a prerequisite for the practices of dependence that sometimes appeared in the circles concerned. Mention should be made, however, that since the mid-1980s, the movements recognized for their emphasis on communal life have stagnated or even regressed, so that today the focus is on "individual quests for fulfilment in a world that has abandoned the effervescent dimension of community experiments".

At the same time, Louis Hourmant localized another feature of the new religiosity in the lack of interest in deepening the "theoretical" component of faith. The teaching professed by the new religious movements will thus be lacking in theological rigor, betraying the improvisations of the discourse used. As a result, the answers that they will be able to provide to the fundamental fears and aspirations of the human being will suffer in terms of theological-philosophical coherence, with the 'solutions' formulated being rather incomplete. However, the attractiveness of the new religious movements will be undeniable, since, by presenting themselves as "experimental [soteriological] paths", they will provide the "recent" man with what he expects above all: experience, satisfaction, and supposed "personal development". From this point of view of "self-transformation" the new religiosity will claim to be "more effective than traditional religions", since the changes it would induce in the minds of its followers could help them "to fit in better with society" or "to use their psychic powers to obtain concrete benefits" (Hourmant 2005, 201-206).

d) The highlighting of the significance of the objective of "personal development" also characterizes the analysis of the British sociologist Paul Heelas, who considers that the new religious movements are individualized by the fact that they are "religions of the self", representing as

many hypostases of the “fusion of Eastern religiosity and psychology”. It is for this reason that the new religiosity will give increased importance to the cultivation of individual aspirations for “inner liberation”, that is, for “experiencing” the supposedly divine dimensions of existence. In these circumstances, Paul Heelas concludes that the new religious movements are merely diverting the religious quests of “recent” man, directing them in a direction which “goes beyond the traditional boundaries of both religion and psychology” (Achimescu 2004, 17). In fact, the confluence of some of the modern branches of psychology with the non-religious phenomenon is possible given the concerns, to some extent similar, for the expansion of the self and its perfection through “integration” into the divine or divinized Cosmos. This desire is also subordinated to those techniques of Eastern origin which are intended to lead to “ecstasy, mystical experience or [the acquisition] of cosmic consciousness”, the kind of objectives which crown both the action of the modern psychologist, who seeks to maximize the soul’s potential, and that of the non-religious leader, concerned with guiding his followers along the path of self-healing (Würtz 1994, 187-188).

e) In the second half of the 1970s, the Lutheran theologian Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack considered that the use of the concept of “youth religions” could exhaust all meanings of the new religiosity for the simple fact that the groups that could be included in this category included predominantly young adherents. Implicitly, the youth of the vast majority of adherents would be the most important characteristic of the new religiosity and, therefore, the most appropriate means of identifying (and defining) it. The same quasi-exclusive youth of the adherents could explain the particular propensity of the new religious movements to form and function like “big families” in the form of autarchic communities that claimed exclusive possession of truth and which the charismatic leaders unhesitatingly subordinated to themselves.

Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack’s perspective was the result of sociological research which, looking at Western society at the beginning of the post-industrial era, had highlighted the emergence of a “religious revolt of young people against the adult world”, a revolt which the new religious movements were absorbing to the full, enrolling the rebels “idealistic and malleable” in real “substitute families” (Hourmant 2005, 205-207). The fact is that, in the 1970s, the *baby boomer* generation discovered that the routine of consumption and accumulation, the drive for profit or traditional religious beliefs could no longer satisfy the very “dynamics” of a society overly preoccupied with the material dimension of life becoming “unbearable”. In seeking to escape the mores of the consumer society that surrounded them, the young protesters also called for a “re-evaluation of the [traditional] religious experience”, which, in addition to alienating them from the major Christian denominations, also made it easier for them to “encounter Asian religions and the mystical power of occultism

and esotericism”, which “opened the doors to a new world”. A new spiritual universe was the new generation’s aspirations, a universe that was morally and ethically ambiguous, but concerned instead with “the expansion and renewal of consciousness, with a view to achieving a cosmic religious solidarity”. The new religious movements, therefore, took the form of a multitude of “religious-youthful” entities, marked by “an ambivalent character, of rebellion and refuge”, which brought together Eastern spiritual and technological referents, pantheistic ontologies, and sometimes even traditional Christian elements (Achimescu 2004, 33-36).

Today, the perspective opened by Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack has lost some of its accuracy, given that, statistically speaking, the numerical proportion of mature people in new religious movements can no longer be ignored (Louis Hourmant). However, the association between non-religiosity and youth circles remains a justified one – as the young people continue to account for a significant weight within these communities – and cannot therefore be ignored by the relevant analyses.

2. A Possible Profile of the New Religiosity

Starting from the above analytical perspectives, the objective of profiling the new religious movements becomes possible. Therefore, we will try to “separate” the new religiosity from the other contemporary heterodox confessional groups, identifying those features capable of individualizing it with sufficient accuracy.

a) From a *doctrinal* point of view, the new religiosity is distinguished by its openness towards Eastern beliefs and by the sequential assimilation of their doctrinal themes, particularly those converging towards pantheism. Implicitly, it tends towards syncretism, especially since Christian “insertions” may be part (in truncated or distorted forms) of the discourse of the practitioners concerned. Additionally, the new religious movements will show a propensity for occultism, esotericism and Gnosticism (hence the emphasis on the desire to ‘reestablish’ religious knowledge), as well as parapsychology or astrology. Finally, the redefinition of the meaning of soteriology by linking it to its objective of “personal development” will complete the doctrinal particularities of the new religiosity. Of course, each entity of this type will assert its identity by particularizing these general features, so that the incidence of syncretism, esoteric valences or dependence on oriental beliefs will differ from case to case.

In the Western world, the new religiosity often proposes the cohabitation of Eastern religions with Christianity, expressing this “synthesis” in ways that are typical of parapsychology, Gnosticism or esotericism, and advancing soteriological “solutions” devoid of a genuine transcendent dimension. This is why we recognize in the new religious

movements so many attempts to reconstruct the doctrinal dimension of faith (Manaranche 1987, 104), attempts that capitalize on the exoticism of Asian faiths and speculate on the alienation of the juvenile segments of society from the authentic Christian tradition. Therefore, when the practitioners of the new religiosity speak of “the power of God”, “the goodness of God” or “the help of God”, they do so from a perspective opposed to theism or Christianity, as long as the impersonal divinity they have in view will animate, through its supposedly subtle “energies”, a cosmos in whose space everything that exists will be consubstantial with it. Hence, the ecological-radical accents (a direct result of the divinization of creation) and, also hence, the “passion” invested in holistic medicine, alternative treatments and practices of self-healing through “spiritual power”. On the other hand, when He is mentioned, Christ will most frequently take the form of an “Enlightened One”, of a “Teacher”, who, through His teaching, has opened the “way” of spiritual evolution for those who understand how to relate to him, a vision which can be completed by the enunciation of heterodox “theological” speculations about his relationship with the Father.

In terms of worship practices, the new religiosity is distinguished by the place given to techniques of modification and expansion of consciousness and the endowing of these practices with alleged soteriological valences. It is perfectly possible, however, for adherents of new religious movements to attend traditional Christian churches and participate in public worship, which is a type of situation that has also been recorded in our country and which merely reflects a sufficiently inclusive conception of divinity on the part of those concerned. Therefore, it will not be impossible to locate in non-religious areas the existence of (at least apparently) condescending attitudes towards the Church, certain affinities with liturgical practice or individual devotion to the cult of certain saints (usually thaumaturgists), as well as with the practice of Christian fasting or participation in pilgrimages. In this framework steeped in theological relativism, it will matter less that the deity targeted by the non-religious practitioners bears little resemblance to Yahweh, or that their perspectives on Christology or pneumatology are equivocal. In these circumstances, some of these adherents will consider themselves in a position to speak about the Church, invoking its teaching, authority or personalities, and claiming to be loyal adherents of the Church.

Finally, from the point of view of the *ethics* of the new religious movements, the counter-cultural accents invoked by Louis Hourmant are to be noted, for the contestation of the values of secularized and globalized society (motivated by its decline and, above all, by the spiritual deficit that affects it) frequently appears in the discourse of these leaders. This is why some of the new religious movements will not hesitate to take a critical stance towards trends in the contemporary world (globalization, secularization, overexploitation of natural resources, armed conflicts,

etc.), as well as towards social institutions and public policies (such as vaccination). It is precisely this contestatory mechanism – Gnostic in its very essence, as Gnosticism itself was constituted as a counter-cultural fact (Culianu 1995, 76-77) – that will underlie the political discourse that the entourage in question may profess.

b) In view of the heterogeneity of the new religious movements, Nicolae Achimescu has developed a way of classification that has the advantage of reflecting the Romanian realities in this field (Achimescu 2004, 313-315). On this basis, we will be able to distinguish more easily between the various types of non-religiosity, and the examples given are: *esoteric and neognostic groups* (theosophy, anthroposophy, the “Grail movement”), *groups with an oriental basis* (Transcendental Meditation, “Ananda Marga”, “Sahaja Yoga”) and *groups with a religious-philosophical and psychological character* (the Church of Scientology or the religious components of the New Age movement).

It can be seen that these typologies correspond to the institutionalized forms of the new religious movements, which they describe as such. However, in the age of exploding social networks and the globalization of electronic communications, the coagulation of “on-line communities” (Peterson 2020, 1-11) which convey teachings and practices of a non-religious origin, even from apparently one-sided perspectives (for example, stressing relaxation, meditation and ‘personal development’ techniques, alternative therapies or vegetarian nutrition), is an undeniable reality. We are witnessing a ‘subtle’ form of expansion of the new religious movements, a way of working specifically designed to influence people who are still ‘tasting’ the ‘offerings’ on the psycho-market of religious beliefs and psycho-places, with the implicit aim of their eventual enlistment.

3. Neo-religiosity and Post-modernity

Below we will try to argue the belonging of neo-religiosity to what we could call “postmodern spirituality”, i.e. to the diffuse and heterogeneous ideational space generated by the “exhaustion of the modern world” (David Lyon), respectively by the involution of the authority of its foundations (secularism, rationalism, consumerism), a process which, among other things, has also led to the “rediscovery” of religious faith (Zarkasyi 2024, 70-71). In fact, the revival of faith in post-modernity and the restoration of the legitimacy of religious discourse are two counter-reactions to the way in which the secular logic of modernity has discredited the human link with the divine, promoting instead a set of values in which belief could no longer find a place. Having realized the failure of the modern anthropological ‘project’, which proposed that

'recent' man should renounce his eschatological expectations in exchange for the 'benefits' derived from belonging to the world of consumer society, post-modernity has had to reconsider the role of faith, recognizing its capacity to endow each individual's existence with meaning and content. Thus, by reconsidering theological values, postmodern thought is part of "a curvature of historical space" (Jean Baudrillard), as this process only serves to bring the religious dimension of human life back to the present (Ică Jr 2005, 694).

a) The well-known British historian and philosopher Arnold J. Toynbee linked postmodernism directly to the "collapse of the rationalist worldview" since the second half of the 19th century (Călinescu 2005, 135-136), namely to a context in which respectively with a context in which reason has lost its gnoseological primacy. In practice, post-modernity will challenge the "excessive rationality" (Wolfgang Ivers) of the era (modernity) that preceded it, revalidating "symbol, ritual, sign, and myth" and imposing a paradigm shift with exceptional implications for religious belief (Achimescu 2013, 313). The "exhaustion" of modernity, has coincided with the diminishing credibility of its founding "myths" (the primacy of the positive sciences, the irrelevance of religion, or the "psychological" sufficiency of consumerism), a regression that brought with it the reconsidering the social status of faith.

For us, however, it is important that, by expressing "protest against the desacralization of nature and the triumph of the positivist view of the world," post-modernity echoes the revolt of a man whom the removal of God has "traumatized" (Patapiević 2001, 117) to the point where he feels an acute "need to return to faith". In other words, frustrated by the focus of modernity on consumption, well-being, and individual success, the "recent" man has followed his own religious impulses, rediscovering his spiritual aspirations. Thus, although it has provided standards of well-being and comfort that were once unimaginable, consumer society has not been able to completely and definitively suppress the religious vocation of "recent" man, whose "religious needs and imagination" (Călinescu 2005, 72) have practically forced him to reaffirm his original quality as *homoreligiosus*.

b) Thus, "driven to exasperation" by the advance of secular values, the "recent" man has capitalized on his religious vocation by rediscovering faith and "exploiting" it as a preferred means of personal fulfillment. Divinity, faith, and ritual will thus be reinserted into the horizon of legitimate human interests, with the once ascendant course of secularization being practically reversed, a context in which Peter L. Berger speaks of the imminence of "desecularization" Matthias Horx of the "respiritualization of the world" Martin Riesebrodt of the "return of religions" and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf of the "return of the gods" (Achimescu 2013, 398-399).

It must be said, however, that the resurgence of religion in post-modernity does not imply a return to dogmatic beliefs and pre-modern confessional structures (Tessier 1994, 179, 203-211) even if traditional churches continue to represent the “crown of society” (Jürgen Moltmann). It will not, therefore, be a question of a complete and unconditional restoration of that denominational past repudiated by modernity (Perszon 2024, 383), but rather the birth of a “new religiosity,” a distinct group of beliefs that, above all, is about the most subjective aspirations of people “disrupted” by the pressure of secularism. Therefore, the picture of post-modern religiosity will be decisively marked by subjectivism and theological relativism, the beliefs proposed to “recent” man being all his previous experiences. Therefore, post-modernity proposes to the “recent” man he should adopt a vision of religion based on the primacy of personal experience, that is, in accordance with the “do it yourself” principle. Moreover, manifesting “a profound contempt for everything rational”, post-modernity is little interested in conceptualizing religious discourse, its “irrationalism” (which implies a reluctance toward anything truly profound) fueling its preference for the primacy of “experiencing” faith (Achimescu 2013, 313).

The main cause of this situation lies in the incompatibility of post-modernity with the concept of normative reference of faith (the case of the *Holy Scriptures*), so that what matters is not how a particular teaching is substantiated, but its ability to satisfy the most subjective expectations. Therefore, post-modernity will bring with it “a system of beliefs that is offered to the public for consumption” (Marin Aiftincă), with religion entering into the competitive logic of a psycho-market animated by the imperative of satisfying individual “spiritual” aspirations, but with little sensitivity to the theological accuracy of the teachings being propagated. Basically, post-modernity rejects the idea of the revealed foundation of faith, a perspective from which any particular religious discourse can claim the attributes of authenticity and legitimacy. We will find ourselves in the paradoxical situation in which each of the postmodern beliefs will declare itself to be “redemptive” and therefore valid from a soteriological point of view, even though, theologically speaking, the differences between them cannot be reconciled in any way.

Postmodern religiosity will therefore be constituted on the margin of an incontestable ideological “amalgam”, so that even the groups that openly proclaim their Christianity will do so from perspectives that will betray their insufficient connection to its biblical-dogmatic foundations. We will find in the space of this “spirituality” the effects of a “dis-membered imaginary” capable, here, of joining elements of Christian origin (Christ, saints, pilgrimage, etc.), oriental, neo-gnostic (Robertson 2022, 108-138), occult, esoteric or pantheistic teachings and practices and “dressing” them in the garment of a discourse centered on the ideas of solidarity, peace or freedom. Therefore, trying to give effect to a religious

instinct that he cannot elude, the “recent” man elaborates his “own universe of beliefs”, collecting “Christian and cosmic, psycho-spiritual and moral elements” and integrating them “into an integral imaginary production”, to which he will attribute the attribute of absolute truth (Achimescu 2013, 359-360). Thus, religious gnoseology will fail in the realm of the equivocal (Damick 2022, 31-33), especially since, in general, in post-modernity “there is no objective criterion for determining whether someone is right or wrong” (Patapievic 2001, 117).

c) At this point, we can conclude that the new religious movements fall within the realm of postmodern beliefs, as they too bear the same hallmarks of relativism, subjectivism, and theological syncretism. In fact, non-religiousness is a typical phenomenon of postmodern spirituality, reflecting the concerns of “recent” man to integrate into a religious universe that is as compatible as possible with his own aspirations. As a result, when proposing the practice of alternative beliefs, new religious movements explicitly express their belonging to post-modernity, just as when they resort to reinterpreting the fundamental themes of traditional theologies. Then, by bringing to the fore the formative role of the leader to the detriment of doctrinal *corpora* or norms developed by ecclesial institutions, neo-religiosity proceeds according to the logic of post-modernity, one for which the past is valuable only to the extent that it can reshape the present (Bigliardi 2023, 42-43). Finally, doctrinal ambiguities, the claim to exclusive possession of the truth, speculative theognosia, a “passion” for esotericism, or the temptation to valorize Asian beliefs are, in turn, arguments for the post-modernity of new religious movements.

Of course, non-religiousness does not exhaust postmodern spirituality, the latter having a broader content, as long as it includes Christian denominations (such as groups linked to ancient heresies) which, having a certain biblical basis, cannot be included in the category of new religious movements. Nevertheless, non-religiousness and post-modernity overlap to a significant extent, both being related to the effort of “recent” man to rediscover his religious vocation and reaffirm his aspiration to regain communion with God.

4. Neo-religiousness and Political Approach

It is obvious that certain exponents of the new religious movements are entering the political scene by concealing their “confessional” affiliation and using rhetoric that is atypical from the point of view of *mainstream* values and options, a type of discourse that reveals the specific accents of anti-system views. Naturally, this type of activism does not necessarily occur, and embracing it is not a truly defining characteristic of the new religiosity, but its mere existence on the domestic political scene

makes it timely to decipher the mechanisms that generate it and the concrete forms in which it manifests itself.

a) Our analysis starts from Louis Hourmant's observation about the defining dimension of new religious movements, which is highlighted by their focus on challenging the values of post-industrial society, criticizing traditional beliefs and the institutions that promote them, the profession of radical environmentalism, and the poorly contextualized reiteration of values such as solidarity and peace. Through all this, the new religiosity asserts its status as an "alternative public voice", a voice that seeks to be the direct echo of the "alternative spirituality" that each of the groups in question proposes to society. In practice, these positions overlap with the professed religious discourse, reinforcing its ability to emphasize the exclusivity (gnoseological or soteriological) toward which the new religiosity tends a priori, this is also because, from the perspective of its supporters, "the root of all evil must be sought in certain external factors", society as a whole being the bearer of this evil (Achimescu 2004, 23).

New religious movements are therefore capable of disseminating critical positions towards the social establishment and its values, the logic of this opposition continuing that of criticism directed at traditional religions. Starting from here, anti-system political discourse can easily develop, taking on a contestatory tone precisely because it follows criticism of public institutions and authorities. By developing in opposition to traditional beliefs, new religious movements can "extend" their criticism of these beliefs in a way that will lead them, in a first phase, to contest social and political institutions, and then, from the position of epistemological superiority that they claim, to develop an alternative political discourse that may also include anti-system approaches.

Therefore, the new religiosity has the capacity to easily shift from criticizing traditional religion to contesting public institutions and, ultimately, to formulating a type of political discourse presented as an alternative to the lines of force of the contemporary political establishment. Our opinion is that the "transition" described above is subordinate to the Gnostic logic that the postmodern phenomenon of new religiosity has followed since it placed itself in open opposition to traditional beliefs. This logic can explain both its "contestatory" character at the religious, social, and ultimately political levels, as well as the content of the assertions put forward, some of which are always opposed to the traditional references corresponding to each of these three levels. As a result, anti-system discourse can be considered the "result" of a Gnostic "generation mechanism" by virtue of which the fundamental coordinates of the political establishment will be reformulated until they take on the structure of explicit radical political attitudes.

b) Our point of view is based on the observations of German sociologist Eric Voegelin, who identified in the separation of the modern from

the medieval an “inversion of the fundamental ontological postulates of tradition” a gigantic “change of sign” that disrupted the theological values of the Middle Ages, replacing them with a series of clearly contrary options, namely those validated by the modern world (secularism, rationalism, positivism, personal success). In practice, Eric Voegelin concluded, by subjecting medieval value references to an authentic “reverse exegesis,” modernity was built like a veritable gnosis, integrating the finalities of a premeditated process of systematic denial of everything that was decisive for the past from which it had broken away. Implicitly, a Gnostic-type “generating mechanism” can help us understand how the depth of medieval faith in God was replaced by modern indifference or atheism; likewise, how it was possible to replace revealed knowledge with the rationality of the positive sciences or the community spirit of the Augustinian City with the individualism of “recent” man, that is, the transformation of the identity profile of medieval society through the reversal of its “fundamental ontological postulates” (Patapievici 2001, 99-101).

In turn, the separation between modernity and post-modernity can be explained in the same way. Thus, through the same “mechanism” post-modernity has “overturned” for example, the thesis of the “death of God” (that is, the very “founding principle of modernity” – H.-R. Patapievici), rehabilitating belief in the existence of divinity, even if it did so primarily from perspectives dominated by subjectivism and relativism. In fact, overcoming modernity necessarily implied “rejecting its founding principle – Gott ist tot” precisely because “the only way out of modernity is through rediscovering God” (Patapievici 2001, 125, 96). Therefore, post-modernism will separate itself from modernism, establishing itself as *in negativo* replica of the latter and, ultimately, as a synthesis of “ontological postulates” directly opposed to those it replaced. We will thus understand why post-modernity is reticent about the way modernity is reflected in social infrastructure, public policies, and socio-political institutions in general.

c) In these circumstances, we believe that, fundamentally, the ability of new religious movements to convert opposition to traditional beliefs into forms that challenge the political establishment can be explained by the logic of the “generation mechanism” described above. In practice, the new religiosity follows the general framework of the axiological tension between the modern and the postmodern, so that it will be able to realize its countercultural valences in the form of the circulation of political positions with an anti-system orientation and structure. The “genetic” link between this type of discourse and the theological particularities of the new religious movements can be traced below:

Neo-religious “theological” discourse

Criticism of traditional religious institutions (irrelevant, compromised, corrupt, outdated).

Rejection of the authority of major religions in theological gnoseology and the claim possession of absolute “truth”.

Criticism of the teachings, practices, and ethical values professed by major religions and their replacement with alleged alternative “solutions”.

Criticism of the clerical elite (corrupt, manipulative, indifferent) and propagation of the imperative to distance oneself from their institution.

Criticism of the interactions between major religions and the political environment (obedience, inadequacy, opportunism).

Anti-system political discourse

Criticism of state institutions (corrupt, inefficient, “treacherous”, anti-national).

Criticism of public policies and the discourse of political authorities (manipulative, deceitful, self-serving), with the use of the imperative represented by the appropriateness of alternative political alternatives.

Criticism of macro-social phenomena specific to modernity (globalization and its implications at the political-military, economic-financial, and cultural levels), with the exacerbation of the significance of identity factors and national interests, invocation of ancestral mythologies, or the revalidation of protocronism.

Criticism of the political elites (corrupt, subservient to foreign powers, incompetent, parasitic) and their activities, promoting the need for the masses, to return to the forefront of political decision-making and action.

Criticism of public policies on issues of general interest, with the promotion of topics such as conflict resolution and global peace, the elimination of tensions between states, and environmental protection.

5. Conclusions

At the end, we conclude that the willingness of the new religiosity to generate political discourse with anti-system connotations can be satisfactorily explained if we take into account its belonging to post-modernity, that is, to a global phenomenon dominated by the imperative of reversing the “fundamental ontological postulates” of the era (modernity) that preceded it. This type of process (reversal), fueled by the Gnostic logic of “manic oppositions” (I.P. Culianu, H.-R. Patapievicu) that the very genesis of post-modernity followed, has spread beyond the sphere of religious consciousness, reverberating throughout social consciousness and interfering with its representations and manifestations in the political sphere. Thus, the political ‘vocation’ of the new religiosity finds a predictable expression in anti-system discourse.

In fact, the “appeal” to the “generation mechanism” developed by Eric Voegelin reflected our concern to understand (and explain) why the new religiosity is tempted, in addition to criticizing traditional beliefs, to challenge authorities, institutions, and public policies from a perspective

completely different from that of mainstream political formations. In other words, by invoking the “mechanism” in question, we have attempted to understand what makes the anti-system political discourse sometimes used by practitioners of the new religiosity possible and why it reflects with a certain accuracy the “metabolism” of these movements, the answer being, we hope, a satisfactory one.

Acknowledgement: Project financed by Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu through the research grant LBUS-IRG-2022-08

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