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Eliadian Reflections on the Spirituality of the Romanian People

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Abstract

In his study *The Romanians. A Historical Summary*, Mircea Eliade makes reference to the material and spiritual culture of the Geto-Dacians and of the ancestors. Taking over the thesis of Vasile Pârvan, the Romanian historian of religions, believes that Zalmoxis and his cult will prepare the Daco-Romans for embracing Christianity. Characterizing the Romanian Christianity, M. Eliade shows that his specificity is given by his presence on this territory, by the Dacian-Roman heritage, by the serenity, naturalness and the absence of any excess. The Romanians are considered to be a faithful, human, natural, vigorous and optimistic people who disregard any sickening exaltation of the so-called “mysticism”, having as a dominant feature the common sense, kindness, tolerance and hospitality, which they show through the long exercise of suffering during history, these being also considered characteristics of the Romanian spirituality. A fundamental feature of the Romanian Christianity in Eliade’s vision is that of “the cosmic Christianity”, which he mentions in an early writing: “The first duty of man”, he said, “is the first parable of God: his cosmization” (*Soliloquies*, p. 20). For Eliade cosmization is the harmony of man with everything that is concrete and unique outside of him, the ordination and the matching of the human rhythm with the rhythms of nature, integrating into a hierarchy, cosmicizing all the chaotic experiences.

Keywords

Mircea Eliade, the Geto-Dacian religion, the spirituality of the Romanian people, the cosmic dimension of the Romanian Christianity

I. Introduction

Mircea Eliade has entered the scientific and academic field as one of the greatest historians of religions, if not the greatest of the twentieth century, and as one of our great writers, being successfull as a young man with the novel *Maitreyi*.

He belonged with his whole being to the people in the middle of whom he was born and formed, even though he had to live most of his life in an exile imposed by the political circumstances that followed the establishment of communism in our country. The new political regime has beheaded the Romanian intelligentsia of the interwar period, whose chief of generation he was. He was, however, a *homo universalis*, a man of the world, an open spirit to the world, to cultures and religions, “he knew everything about religions” - as his friend Emil Cioran will later say¹.

Regardless of the geographical space in which he had to live, the Romanian space will remain for him a nearly mitical space, since it is untouchable, a space of the beginnings, a space that will alwas be a true center of his existence. Remembrance of certain places in this space will often equate to a true return to the center of the being of his people and of his own being, almost a religious gesture, the geographical space acquiring for him true valences related to the sphere of the sacred.

He will preserve an admirable memory and respect for the Romanian people. He felt bound by invisible threads to the nation he was part of. It is thus that, in exile, he met the Romanians living in the diaspora or those who came from the country to meet him. He was generous with all, encouraging everyone, especially when it was about the act of creation. He was interested in what was happening in the country and suffered with those left behind the ruthless iron curtain.

A special connection was made with the Romanian language. Even if the scientific work was written in French or English, the literary work was written only in Romanian, the language in which he dreamed, which he was glad to speak with his friends and relatives.

The personal faith of M. Eliade represented for those around him a mystery well preserved by the scholar, but from the testimonies of those close to him we infer that he was an Orthodox Christian. His religiosity

¹ *Eliadiana*, ediție îngrijită de Cristian Bădiliță, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1997, p. 90.

was not obvious, because he did not want to do any injustice to the other religious traditions he wrote about and he evaluated with the instruments of the religion historian.²

II. Aspects of the Geto-Dacian religion - prerequisites for the Christianization of the Romanian people

In the work *The Romanian. A Historical Summary*, Mircea Eliade describes the main features of our Dacian ancestors, insisting on the characteristics of Geto-Dacian spirituality as they will explain the relatively fast Christianity of the Romanian people.

About the Dacians, as the Romans called them, or the Getae, as the Greeks called them, M. Eliade states that they were part of the great Thracian family, strongly related to the ancient history and archaic religions of Elade, about two thousand years before Christ³. The Geto-Dacian people are characterized by the Romanian scholar through the epithets: "healthy", "hardworking", "brave" and "faithful", the ancient authors confessing how profound and sincere their religious life was. In this respect M. Eliade supports the testimony of Herodotus⁴ and Julian the Apostate⁵. Starting from these texts, M. Eliade concludes that the

² See Caius CUȚARU, "Homo religiosus" în vizionarea lui Mircea Eliade, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, pp. 272-298.

³ Mircea ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Brevario histórico*, Ed. Meridiane, 1992; cf. Mircea ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole. Studii de etnologie și mitologie. Antologie*, A selection of texts and notes by Magda Ursache and Petru Ursache, Editura Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 73.

⁴ HERODOT, *Istoriile* IV, 93: "Getae are the bravest and most righteous of the Thracians". For this, see HERODOT, *Cele mai frumoase istorii*, transl. by Adelina Piatkowski and Felicia Vanț-Ştef, Editura Humaitas, Bucureşti, 2018, p. 204, and G. POPA-LISSEANU, *Dacia în autori clasici. I. Autorii latini clasici și postclasici. II. Autorii greci și bizantini*, edition by I. Oprișan, Editura Vestala, Bucureşti, 2015.

⁵ IULIAN APOSTATUL, *Συμπόσιον ἡ κρόνια ἡ καίσαρες*, 327: "the Getics, who were more warior than any of the people that have ever lived before- and this due not only to the strength of their body, but also because the mighty Zamolxis had convinced them to believe that they don't die, but they change their dwelling, they are more fit to fight than start a journey". See also Emperor Julian, "Împărații", pp. 30-31, in: *Izvoarele Istoriei României. De la anul 300 până la anul 1000*, vol. II, published by Hărălambie MIHĂESCU, Gheorghe ȘTEFAN, Radu HÎNCU, Vladimir ILIESCU, Virgil C. POPESCU, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, Bucureşti, 1970.

contempt of death and sufferings, as well as the belief in immortality, were the characteristic elements of the Geto-Dacian religion. The ancient world was deeply impressed by the predominance that the Dacians gave to the religious aspect of life, Plato being one of the great personalities of Antiquity that emphasized this aspect in the *Charmides* dialogue, quoting a recommendation that Zalmoxis would have done to his disciples: "... as we should not try to heal our eyes without healing our head or head without taking into account the body, so the body can not be resuscitated without the soul" (*Charmides*, 156). Even if the specialists did not agree that Zalmoxis was a god of Heaven or Earth⁶, they all agreed to the high spirituality of his cult. Even the process of Romanization did not mean "the radical change of the native substance" in the Eliadic view, but the learning of the Latin language went in parallel with the preservation of the previous customs, of the ancestral virtues.

"All the gods of the Empire were revered in the new cities, but in the villages and mountains the Zalmoxis cult continued, even when later changed its name. Thus, when the first Christian missionaries brought the new Daco-Romans faith, they immediately embraced Christianity before others: Zalmoxis had prepared them centuries ago for the new creed"⁷.

M. Eliade shows that elements of the Dacian continuity can be found even in the present national costume of the mountain peasants. This is because

"for almost two thousand years, the Dacians remained bound to their homeland without ever emigrating: it could be said that I am a product of this soil that fed them and for whose defense they were always ready to give their life"⁸.

⁶ For some important information see also Hadrian DAICOVICIU, *Dacii*, Editura Științifică, București, 1965.

⁷ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario histórico*, cf. M. Eliade, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 81. M. Eliade takes this idea from Vasile Pârvan, idea confirmed by the further historical and archaeological research, after being previously contested .

⁸ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario histórico*, cf. M. Eliade, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 75.

These elements of this uninterrupted continuity in this territory not only come to contradict the Roslerian theory, but also bring precious information about the connection between the Romanian peasant and the ancestral land, the connection with nature, the fact that up to the present, the peasant rhythms his life with nature and ties even the Christian feasts to the rhythms of nature. “The Dacians have never emigrated” - here is an important statement that speaks of the indissoluble link between the people and their native land .

Due to their superior material and spiritual culture, the Dacians managed to assimilate all the migratory peoples who crossed these territories in the first millennium BC. The Dacian culture has gained a lot from the fertile contact with these inferior cultures. Based on these findings, M. Eliade concludes with regard to the Romanian people:

“Like their Geto-Dacians, the Romanians have suffered from their birth a series of invasions, far wilder than those of their prehistory... But the Romanian people remains faithful and tied to his land without abandoning it even in the most tragic surroundings, accepting influences and invasions without losing his ethnic substance, his style, the tone of life, his authentic physics and moral personality”⁹.

Evidence of this material and spiritual culture has been found in the archaeological excavations, but the historian of religions does not deny himself when he states that incomparably more important are the proofs of the spiritual and cultural life of an entire people. “A symbol, a myth, a certain way of life reconstituted with the help of vessels and domestic tools are infinitely more significant, because these impersonal documents can bring a culture back to life and decipher the meaning of a people’s spirituality”¹⁰. So, for Eliade, the elements of spiritual life were much more meaningful than the elements in the other spheres of human activity.

⁹ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. Eliade, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 76.

¹⁰ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 77.

III. The role of Christianity in the spirituality of the Romanian people, in Eliade's vision

3.1. Christianization of the Daco-Romans

M. Eliade was preoccupied with the spirituality of the Romanian people. Therefore, in his work *The Romanians. A Historical Summary*, he makes a brief presentation of the historical past and spirituality of the Romanian people, recalling the historical¹¹ and cultural personalities that the only Latin people of Eastern faith gave them.

In this synthesis of Romanian history and spirituality, the historian of religions highlights the role that Christianity has played over time for the spirituality of the Romanian people. He showed that the Christianization of the Dacian-Roman population in this space was due to a natural process, after all, naturally, our ancestors being converted by missionaries and not by threats. The process of Christianization was facilitated by the Zalmoxian religious system, which for centuries was characterized by a high spirituality, an idea taken over from the Romanian scientist Vasile Pârvan. Our ancestors were the first to be Christianized in this area of Europe, the neighboring peoples going through the process of Christianization much later.

To sustain the age of the Dacian-Roman Christianity, he refers to the Romanian Christian vocabulary as there are many Christian terms of Latin origin¹² in the basic vocabulary. Moreover, the Orthodoxy of the ancestors strengthened and supported the peoples of the northern Danube during migration, representing an element of stability in a great population instability generated by the incessant succession of migratory peoples. Barbarous invasions will have a special role in shaping the specificity of Romanian Christianity in the sense that they have cut Dacia's relations with the Latin West, and the inhabitants of this province sought support in the other part of the Roman Empire, in Byzantium, which now represented Romania. Therefore, M. Eliade concludes that even in those times, a secret rhythm in the history of our ancestors was seen: "These two poles,

¹¹ Among the historical personalities M. Eliade includes Mircea cel Bătrân, Ioan Corvin, Ștefan Cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, etc.

¹² Examples of Christian terms of Latin origin: "biserica", from "basilica", "Dumnezeu", from "Dominus Deus", "a boteza", from "baptizare", "creștin", from "christianus", "cruce", from "crux", "păcat", from "peccatum", etc.

the Latin West and the Hellenic East, were the ones which alternately exercised their spiritual and political influence in the formation and destiny of this people”¹³. These cultural factors have made it possible to speak of the “historical miracle” of this Latin people that has survived in great glory in the East of Europe, preserving unaltered the characteristics of their forefathers .

Beyond the linguistic arguments highlighted many times, Eliade brings the folk costume to support the ethnic continuity, showing that

“Romanian peasants dress today just like the Dacians on Trajan’s column. In no part of Europe the rural population has preserved a costume of two thousand years old as in Dacia. There are types of prehistoric houses, and some villages in Transylvania still preserve the structure of the pre-Roman era”¹⁴.

3.2. The specificity of the Romanian Christianity

To explain the miracle of the survival of the Romanian people in the midst of so many threatenings of history, M. Eliade resorts to several arguments, including the love for the earth, the Christian belief, the fact that the forces of the Romanians did not weaken because the struggle for nation and faith were seen together. The identity that he then establishes between the people and the faith is explicable if we relate the text to Eliade’s preoccupations always related to the destiny of his people. And the arguments in this regard continue: “the first political and administrative institutions were born in the church, the Christian faith always constituted for the Romanians the point of support of their moral and physical existence”¹⁵.

Eliade gives us a description of the Romanian Christianity seen in comparison with other Christian manifestations of Orthodox origin of the peoples around. What are the distinct notes of the Romanian Orthodoxy in Eliade’s vision? He appreciated that neither the Romanian soul nor the history of the Romanian people can be understood without knowing its

¹³ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. Eliade, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 86.

¹⁴ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. Eliade, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 88.

¹⁵ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 119.

Christianity and brings here a theological and cultural argument in favor of the religious diversity within the Christian world, with which we are not totally in agreement,¹⁶ because it induces the idea of the necessity of religious diversity which was not wanted by Christ the Savior (cf. John 17:21). M. Eliade does not make the necessary distinction between doctrinal diversity (unwanted by the Savior) and absolute cultural diversity, given the different cultural circumstances in which the Gospel is implanted through missionary work:

“The Logos is one and indivisible, but the human condition interprets it properly with its means, which are also variable. The mystical body of Christ is His church; but the Church belongs to History, which is always on the way, which constantly changes its forms”¹⁷.

However, we agree with the explanation given to cultural diversity when explaining the difference between Romanian Christianity and Russian, Greek or other Gentiles. What distinguishes the Romanian Christianity is its age in these places, the Daco-Roman heritage,¹⁸ serenity, naturalness and the absence of any excess. The Christianity of Romanians is not confused with fanaticism, nor does it slip into the “dark currents of nebulous mysticism”.

“Being Orthodox, the Greeks and the Russians have never known the theological disputes of the Byzantines, nor the mystical sects derived from the spasmodic chaos of the Slavic soul. Their Christian faith has also avoided the excesses of abstract casuistry and the monstrous tide of «too concrete» heresy, which often have notorious forms of repentance”¹⁹.

¹⁶ See C. CUȚARU, “*Homo religiosus*” în *viziunea lui Mircea Eliade*, p. 289.

¹⁷ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 120.

¹⁸ M. Eliade identifies what the Romanian Christianity has taken from the Geto-Dacian and Roman spirituality. The contempt in front of death, the belief in the immortality of the soul and the serenity in front of suffering come from the Geto-Dacians, as the “Miorița” balad shows, and the sense of order and of the hierarchy, spiritual equilibrium and the lack of fanaticism come from the Romans.

¹⁹ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 121.

The religious life of Romanians is characterized by naturalness, having

“a faith that transfigures the Cosmos without destroying it, nor repudiating. A global vision of the Universe that is not pessimistic, because the good will eventually succeed in triumph over evil. Everything that lives in the Cosmos is part of the drama of Salvation through the sufferings of Christ”²⁰.

The history and life of the Romanians were under the constant care of God, that is why the Romanian has never fallen into the sin of despair, in his historical past full of drama, always living with the hope that, eventually, the good will triumph.

Other features of the Romanian spirituality are mentioned by M. Eliade when referring to the two myths that define it: *Legend of Manole Craftsman* and *Miorita Ballad*. In this context, the Romanians are said to be a faithful, human, natural, vigorous and optimistic people who disregard any sickening exaltation of the so-called “mysticism”, having as a dominant feature common sense, kindness, tolerance and hospitality, which he argues through the long exercise of the suffering to which this people has been subjected during history. Eliade’s life can be included within the frames of the features of the Romanian soul, as he was known for his kindness, hospitality, love of the fellow, tolerance and common sense which he manifested during his exile. M. Eliade’s portrait can be perfectly superimposed on the portrait of the Romanians.

IV. The cosmic dimension of the Romanian Christianity

The Romanian scholar particularly appreciated the primary cosmic dimension of the Romanian Christianity, a Christianity specific to the South-East Europe, which thus retains a forgotten dimension in Western Christianity.

In a youthful writing, M. Eliade showed that “the first duty of man is the first parable of God: his cosmization”²¹. Through cosmization, Eliade understood the harmonizing of man with everything that is concrete and

²⁰ M. ELIADE, *Los Rumanos. Breviario historico*, cf. M. ELIADE, *Meșterul Manole...*, p. 121.

²¹ M. ELIADE, *Solilovii*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1991, p. 20.

unique outside of him, the ordination, rhythm of creation with the human being, which thus integrates into a hierarchy, cosmizes all the chaotic experiences²². The phrase “cosmic Christianity”, specific to the Romanian peasant, will be used by M. Eliade for the first time in 1931, in a letter he sends to Vittorio Macchioro, in which he shows that Romanians are “naturally inclined towards a cosmic Christianity”²³. This explains why the peasant has “personality” and “style”, meaning a harmonious, non-chaotic, inert soul life, has a cosmic existence. The peasant has an organic conception of the world, life and soul. What he thinks about God and man, but also about nature, integrates into an organic, harmonious whole. Hence the peasant’s style, his dignified attitude to the trials that he puts before his life and finally the peace and quiet before death, the reconciliation with destiny (Miorita Ballad). “The peasant’s style and life, Eliade said, are proved here: By finding that everything he thinks about the world, life and man is organically combined. The peasant has a certain cosmogonic and theological conception - but this conception corresponds to his artistic intuition, his passionate experience, his ethical, social and economic conception”²⁴. But the peasant does not only have a reasonable conception of integration into the rhythms of nature; he lives together with these rhythms.²⁵ This is not the case with the people of the city, lacking in style, that is, the organicity of their culture, being at different levels of soul experiences. In them, life experiences are not integrated into a unitary whole.

²² Eliade speaks about the necessity to integrate into the cosmic rhythm in his novel *Noaptea de Sâniene*: “- I have to integrate myself into the cosmic rhythm, he said (Ştefan Viziru, n.n.) passing by Ioana. This is a great secret, too. I learnt it from Anisie. I have to choose a suitable outfit proper for the cosmic rhythm, he added smilingly”. Cf. M. ELIADE, *Nopatea de Sâniene*, Univers enciclopedic, Bucureşti, 1998, p. 63.

²³ Cf. Eliade’s letter to Vittorio Macchioro, 15th March 1931, in: M. ELIADE, *Europa, Asia, America... Corespondență I-P*, vol. II, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2004, p. 175.

²⁴ M. ELIADE, *Singurătatea*, a conference at Radio Bucureşti on 15th September 1935, cf. M. ELIADE, *Taina Indiei – texte inedite*, an edition of Mircea Handoca, Editura Icar, Bucureşti, 1991, p. 111.

²⁵ “We cannot neglect the fact that in the agrarian societies, the feasts start when the sun is close to the equinox, they last till the feast of St. John, midsummer, this being the time of the engagement of the couples. The life of man goes with the sun. Love grows with the growth of the moon ...”, cf. M. ELIADE, *Vacanța intelectualului (II)*, conference at Radio Bucureşti on 3rd July 1937, cf. M. ELIADE, *Taina Indiei – texte inedite*, p. 173.

Until the Renaissance, man lived with the cosmos he assumed. The various

“existential ways were then lived on a cosmic level; for the modern man, such experiences may seem «alienated», «objectified», but for the man of the traditional societies there is a perfect porosity among all cosmic levels; the experience of a starry night, for instance, equated to a very intimate personal experience of a contemporary”²⁶.

Even from the period of the University of Bucharest (1934-1936), M. Eliade will often refer to the cosmic Christianity of the Romanian people, to those religious symbols that inspired the popular genius and represent a replica at the macro-social level, of a reality that must also be manifested on a personal level²⁷. This issue is extensively dealt with by the scholar in the *Aspects of the myth*, where he has even a special subchapter. Here he talks about the challenges that primary Christianity had to respond to, especially when it met the living popular religions. The result of this meeting was that some of the divinities and pagan myths, which were not left out, had to be revealed. This has come to the fact that “a part of the pre-Christian Europe’s popular religion has survived, camouflaged or transformed in the calendar holidays and the cult of the saints”²⁸. Although the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church were accused of having proclaimed many pagan elements, these criticisms were not always justified, because pagan elements could not be definitively eliminated and could not survive alongside Christian ones only if Christianized. On the other hand, the peasants, by their own way of reporting to the cosmos, were not attracted by the “historical” and moral Christianity. The cosmic symbolism present in pre-Christian religions will not be denied by Christianity, because the Judeo-Christian symbolism does not contradict the universal symbolism.

For the Romanian peasant, Christianity was a cosmic liturgy, and the mystery of Christ engaged the whole cosmos. The mystical solidarity with

²⁶ M. ELIADE, *Jurnal. Volumul I (1941-1969)*, edition by Mircea Handoca, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1993, p. 79.

²⁷ See Mihaela GILGOR, Mircea ELIADE. *Anii tulburi 1932-1938*, EuroPress Group, Bucureşti, 2007, p. 102.

²⁸ M. ELIADE, *Aspecte ale mitului*, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1978, p. 160.

the cosmic rhythms, explained by the specificity of labor, was strongly attacked by the Old Testament prophets.²⁹ In Orthodox theology there is a strong valorisation of the cosmic dimension of salvation. This solidarity is the center of religious life in rural populations, especially in Eastern Europe. Even if some people reproach Eliade his preference for the natural religions and his reservation regarding the moral “historical” religions, in this case the observation is not valid, because the preference of the Romanians for the cosmic Christianity has another connotation.

For the peasants in this area, the cosmicisation of faith is not equivalent to a paganization of it, nor to the realization of a pagan-Christian syncretism, but to a Christianization of the ancestral religion, further preserving the Christian specificity. M. Eliade brings several arguments in this respect:

“Without ceasing to be the Pantocrator, Christ descends to the earth and visits the peasants, as in the myth of the archaic populations the Supreme Being before transforming himself into a *deus otiosus*; this Christ is not «historical», since popular consciousness does not bear an interest in the chronology, nor the accuracy of the events and the authenticity of the historical characters”³⁰.

However, the simple man’s Christ is not a goddess borrowed from the pagan pantheon, nor is there a contradiction between the Christ of the Gospels, the one of the Church on the one hand, and the Christ of the popular traditions, on the other hand. Salvation also represents the centerpiece of the teaching of faith in the popular creation.

In this way, one of the features specific to the Romanian Christianity is its cosmic dimension, the Orthodox faith speaking of the transfiguration of the cosmos rather than its destruction. The vision promoted by this Christianity is not a pessimistic one, the good always triumph over the evil. The whole cosmos is transfigured by the saving Sacrifice of Christ, and by virtue of this sacrifice all that is alive in nature lives: fruit trees,

²⁹ Eliade explains the tough reaction of the biblical prophets against the sacred in nature, especially, due to the idolatry, due to the recurring cults of fertility of Baal and Be-lit. Nevertheless, he appreciates the positive role of the prophets in the biblical history, in the preservation of the revelation of Yahweh.

³⁰ M. ELIADE, *Aspecte ale mitului*, p. 162.

animals feed their little ones, mother swings her baby, etc. That is why both Christ and the Church “were loaded with so many cosmic symbols” - says M. Eliade³¹. This cosmic dimension of faith, as well as the strong belief in the care of God, made the Romanians never fall into the sin of despair during their troubled history.

The masterpieces of Romanian spirituality can be found in the folk creation, in folklore, and folklore does not take into account history, sabotages it, devalues it, because the Romanian people have been permanently under the terror of history. Being unable to manifest itself in the field of material creation, because of the invasions, the genius of the Romanian nation leaned upon those realities on which history had no power: the cosmos and the cosmic rhythms. But, being already a Christianized people, he will not refer to the cosmos as a heathen does, dressing him in a sacrality *ens a se*, but seeing in him the work of God, “the making of His hands”. These religious realities are explained by Eliade with much clarity in the article *The Destiny of Romanian Culture*, shattering any accusation of the existence of pagan residues that would have been preserved in the faith of our ancestors or the accusation of partisanship with the natural religions that Eliade would have contracted

“So that the sympathy for the Cosmos, so specific to the Romanian genius, does not present itself as a pagan sentiment - but as a form of the Christian liturgical spirit. For a long time it has been thought that the feeling of Nature and solidarity with cosmic rhythms betrays a non-Christian spirituality. This prejudice was due to insufficient knowledge of Christianity, and especially of Eastern Christianity, which preserved the entire liturgical spirit of the first centuries. In reality, archaic Christianity has not devalued Nature - as has been the case with certain aspects of medieval, ascetic, and moralizing Christianity, for which nature was often «demonia» in excellence. For the archaic Christianity, as was especially understood by the Oriental Fathers, the Cosmos did not cease for one moment to be the creation of God, and the cosmic rhythms were always conceived as a cosmic liturgy”³².

³¹ M. ELIADE, *Aspecte ale mitului*, p. 161.

³² M. ELIADE, “Destinul culturii românești”, in: *Destin. A review of Romanian culture*, nr. 6-7, August 1953, Madrid, pp. 19-32, cf. M. ELIADE, *Profetism românesc. I. Itinerariu spiritual. Scrisori către un provincial. Destinul culturii românești*, Ed. “Roza Vânturilor”, București, 1990, pp. 146-147.

This explains why Romanian Orthodoxy, when valuing nature, can not be accused of pagan contamination, but to be preserved in the framework of Patristic Christianity, from which Western Christianity has deserted during the Middle Ages. The author of the article *The Destiny of the Romanian Culture* expresses the hope that with the revival of the liturgical spirit and the preoccupations for the patristic spirituality (it was the period of the translation of the Philocaly) it will be understood that for the archaic Christianity the Cosmos participates in the divine drama and the nature suffers and sighs awaiting salvation through the Resurrection of the Lord.

The cosmic liturgy can be found in the Romanian folklore, which saved from the destruction by the barbarian peoples what belonged to a universal Christian patrimony, namely the Christian vision of nature. The example in this sense is the most representative creations of the folk genius, *Miorița* and *Legend of Manole*, both presenting the ritual of death as a supreme value, as the absolute fulfillment of a human existence. The legend of Manole focuses on the myth of the sacrifice for creation, the sacrifice of a human life, which thus fulfills its purpose: the transfer of life, the animation of the new construction, while Miorița reveals a myth of death, a death regarded “as a voluntary sacrifice by giving it the meaning of a cosmic wedding, that is, giving it the ultimate value of reconciliation with destiny and reintegration into a Nature that is no longer a «pagan» Nature, but a liturgically sanctified Cosmos”³³.

From these masterpieces of the Romanian folk creation, expressing the simple man’s mentality,

“we deduce the significance of death in the vision of the faithful people: death means the supreme sacrifice, a mystery by which he participates in a superior reality, but through which he can also be perfected, death does not mean extinction or shrinking of existence, but rather a potentiation of it, a way to be closer to God. This conception that has crossed the centuries, overcoming the long terror of history, is still present for the Romanians - noticed M. Eliade in the 1950s. It is well known that the

³³ M. ELIADE, “Destinul culturii românești”, in *Destin. Review of Romanian culture*, nr. 6-7, August 1953, Madrid, pp. 19-32, cf. M. ELIADE, *Profetism românesc. I. Itinerariu spiritual. Scrisori către un provincial. Destinul culturii românești*, p. 148.

valorization of death and the attitude in front of it are some of the most important victories of Christianity in its confrontation with the Greek-Roman paganism”³⁴.

M. Eliade felt the need to talk about the cosmic Christianity of the Romanians (but also about the cosmic dimension of some archaic religions) and to confess it in that cultural environment where this dimension of Orthodox theology was unknown or barely sketched in the theological creations that were put at an index by some ecclesiastical authority, such as the work of the Catholic theologian Teilhard de Chardin, who has a statement like, “To bring Christ... into the hearts of realities that have the reputation of being the most dangerous, the most natural, the most pagan, here is my gospel and my mission”. Eliade showed that the peasant believed that “the world is good”, that it has become so after the Savior, the death and resurrection of the Savior. In this sense, he said,

“My fundamental optimism has probably the source in this certainty. If one would intelligently study my theory of progressive hierophans and progressive hierophanization of the World, Life and History, I could be compared to Teilhard de Chardin. With this distinction: that he came to these conceptions by discovering Cosmogenesis, and I by understanding the cosmic religions (in which I must include, with all the differences, the peasant Christianity of Eastern Europe, which is actually a cosmic liturgy)”³⁵.

V. Conclusions

Throughout his life, M. Eliade felt a strong and constant attachment to the cosmic Christianity of the Romanian peasant, in which man simply saw nature as the environment of the Creator’s presence, as a medium of dialogue between man and God. Even if he understood the value of the cosmic sacred when being in India, he did not leave Christianity to embrace one of the Oriental spiritualities because he found in his own

³⁴ C. CUTARU, “Homo religiosus” in viziunea lui Mircea Eliade, pp. 294-295.

³⁵ M. ELIADE, *Jurnal. Volumul I (1941-1969)*, p. 457.

country a type of Christianity which was lost in the West, a Christianity that did not reject the presence of God from nature but rather, on the thread of the uncreated divine energies that penetrate the whole being, God is present in the world alongside the other form of divine presence made by the incarnation (Eliade's theory of hierophans).

Even from the age of youth, as he will in fact do throughout his life, Eliade will be preoccupied with cosmic Christianity. He will use the expression “cosmic Christianity” for the first time in 1931, in a letter he sent to Professor Vittorio Macchioro from India, in which he expresses his admiration for the Latin spirit and sees the Romanians inclined naturally towards a “cosmic Christianity”. “Cosmic Christianity” will be a major preoccupation with Eliade, and he makes frequent references to religious symbols that have as inspiring source the people’s genius.

According to the same Eliade, the Orthodox Christian lives starting from here with the nostalgia of eternity, and he is tending to an eschatological future, not to a historical one, and this fact fills him with joy, with hope, even in the most difficult historical situations. The joy and communion of man with nature, as evidenced by the literary works, are the main elements that Eliade finds in the cosmic Christianity