

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

Faculty of History and Philosophy

A summary of the doctoral thesis

DACO-ROMAN CHRISTIANITY

AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE EVANGELICAL LENS

Coordinator for doctoral studies

Prof. Dr. Nicolae Gudea

Doctoral candidate

Daniel Chiu

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Summary

The doctoral thesis entitled *The Daco-Roman Christianity – An Analysis through the Evangelical Lens* has the purpose to put under light all the proofs from history, epigraphy, archaeology, philology, and the Bible to demonstrate that on the territory of the Roman province of Dacia a Christian Church of the Latin speaking inhabitants has been developed and organized itself according to the paradigms given to us by the authors of the New Testament. These paradigms have been kept by the Daco-Roman population until the arrival of the Slavs on the territory of Dacia (after 600 p. Chr.) when a shift happened, namely a switch from the apostolic or evangelical Christian faith of the locals rooted in the New Testament, to a priestly and ritualistic type rooted in the Old Testament, observed and practiced by the Slavs, the new comers.

In order to demonstrate the thesis we followed this procedure:

1. First, we presented a study of the individual writers of the last 150 years that have elaborated on this theme of the Daco-Roman Christianity. This analysis allowed us to establish more accurately the state of the research establishing the areas for which the Romanian historiography has offered solid solutions on one side, and to point to those areas still under consideration, on the other side. Through the analysis of the religious terms in the Romanian language historians have proved that the Christian faith has started in the territory conquered by the Romans using from the beginning the Latin language. Archaeological discoveries have demonstrated that the Christian faith has penetrated Dacia beginning with the provincial period (101-275 p. Chr.) and has experienced a continual development until the sixth century.

Regarding the beginnings of the Christianity in this territory there is a problem that has not been elucidated by the Romanian historiography, namely the nature of the faith of the Daco-Romans. The thesis of our work is that their faith has been apostolic, or evangelic, thus in agreement with the content of the writings of the New Testament.

2. In the second chapter we have described the state of the Church in the Roman Empire from its beginnings through the sixth century in order to expose the way the Christian faith has sprouted in the Empire, to establish the nature of this incipient faith, and to observe the evolution of this faith in the two halves of the Empire following the legalization of Christianity. In this description we have shown the circumstances present when the Christian faith has expanded in the Empire, the territories that have been Christianized, the primitive and then the developed ecclesiastical structures, and lastly, the aspects of theology and liturgy (doctrinal formulations of the New Testament, controversies pertaining to dogmas, the fixation of the dogmas, liturgical practices, the evolution of liturgy, etc.). We feel all these clarifications are valuable because we can establish those things that were, up to a point, universal in the Empire (including the Dacian provinces). When the Empire “became Christian” and departed from the apostolic faith, the Christians in Dacia (a territory outside the Empire since 275) remained faithful to the old way of worshiping, refusing to conform to the priestly form of Christianity imposed in the ecclesiastical structures of the Empire. These realities regarding the Daco-

Romans' faith and worship can be substantiated mainly by the archaeological discoveries and the linguistic observations offered by the religious vocabulary used by the Daco-Romans.

The model we have followed in the development of our thesis is mainly that of V. Pârvan, nevertheless, taking into consideration the information added by more than one hundred years of research since the publication of his work (*Contribuții epigrafice la istoria creștinismului daco-roman, – Epigraphic Contributions to the History of the Daco-Roman Christianity, 1911*). V. Pârvan did not do an analysis of Christianity in the Roman Empire, but in exchange he offered an analysis of Christianity in the Balkan provinces, something we have done too, but at a much greater scale. We also made the radiography of the Daco-Roman Christianity through the linguistic data we have today, much more ample than the few concepts V. Pârvan worked with.

3. The third chapter is dedicated entirely to the Daco-Roman Christianity and is based on a repertory of the Christian artifacts of the three Dacian provinces, a very complex and complete repertory that allows us to reconstruct in general lines the faith and the religious life of the Daco-Romans converted to Christianity. This repertory is compared to the one construed with the same criterion for the Christian artifacts gathered from the provinces south of the Danube River neighboring Dacia (Noricum, Pannonia Superior, Pannonia Inferior, Moesia Superior, and Moesia Inferior). The repertory of the Christian discoveries in the provinces set along the Danube River from Noricum to Crimea show that at the time of Dacia's conquest in these provinces there were strong Christian communities evidenced by the existence of martyrs, presbyters, and bishops (information offered by the literary sources) on one hand, and by the many Christian artifacts (produced by archaeological diggings), on the other hand. Even though the literary information about these provinces has no strong parallel in the literary information we have about Dacia, the archaeological discoveries are similar, establishing a clear parallelism.

So our work proves in a simple and direct way that the image of the Daco-Roman Christianity in the second and third centuries is the same as the image of the Christianity south of the Danube River, where until the end of the third century people kept the apostolic or evangelic character of their religion. Thus we arrive at the conclusion postulated in chapter II, namely that until the end of Roman control of Dacia this province had a type of Christianity identical with the one of the rest of the Empire, identical in dogmas and liturgy, and similar in regard to its social extension. If the Christian faith has become predominant in all the regions of the Empire at the end of the third century, it was predominant in the Dacian provinces too. Again, if Christianity in the Empire has generally kept its apostolic characteristics, it had to retain the same characteristics in the region inhabited by the Daco-Romans, formerly part of the Empire.

We find in Dacia almost all the artifacts typical for early Christianity (objects with the IXΘYC logo, with the image of the Good Sheppard, bread and fishes, cross, chrismon, dove, the tree of life, the vine with grapes, the lamp, palm branches, the crown, etc.) confirming the essence of the apostolic or evangelic faith of the Daco-Romans. This early type of Christianity has spread to all the areas of the three Dacian provinces, mainly in the cities, but archaeological discoveries do

not lack from the villages and military settings. A special role in Dacia's Christianity was played by the recognizing signs marked on rings, gems, and other objects, suggesting that the Christians had motives to represent their religion in a cryptic way. On the other hand, the great number of cross signs that appear (second and third centuries) first on home pots (showing that the dedication in the Christian faith begins at home), and then the appearance of the chrismon at an early date in the third century, prove both the presence of the Christian faith of those incising it, and the knowledge of the content of the Christian faith centered in the person of Jesus (His identity as the Son of God, and His work, the sacrifice on the cross). If the sign of the cross could be doubtful (first as a sign - the possibility of being just a decorative motif, and then as a superficial symbol of faith when it is used as an apotropaic - warding off evil spirits effect), the use of the chrismon in the third century could not be accepted but as a mature sign of faith.

The archaeological artifacts prove in many cases the content of the Christian faith. This is true also for the case of the Daco-Romans. For example, the chalice (or plate?) of Moigrad is using both popular formulas of the Christian faith (VTERE FELIX or VIVATIS IN DEO), and elaborated formulas belonging to the dogmatic corpus (IN CHRISTUM UNUM VICTORIA), showing the theological education of the Christian population in the territory of former Dacian provinces in the fourth century. That same fragment is making use both of words with Christian relevance or doctrinal significance, and images that are not less suggestive from a dogmatic stand point (the chrismon with seven branches, the tree of life with seven branches, the dove, etc.). The tree of life having seven branches mimics the Jewish menorah, showing that the Christians in Dacia considered themselves to be the new people of God. The fact that the phrase VTERE FELIX is inscribed in the branches of the tree of life proves that the Christian practitioners from Prolissum community were conscious that the joy of life exists in a real sense only for those that have eternal life by faith in Jesus, who gave them the right to the tree of life. These pieces of information also prove familiarity with the text of the new Testament, including the Book of Revelation, which uses extensively such symbols. The multiple messages used on the chalice of Moigrad prove that the Daco-Roman population was not illiterate one hundred years after the abandonment of the provinces by the Roman administration, but continued to read the New Testament. All these are indications that the Daco-Romans have remained inside the parameter of the apostolic faith.

The conclusion is that immediately after the conquest, as a result of colonization the Christian faith penetrated the province of Dacia. This faith developed in the same way and at the same level in the second and third centuries as in the other Roman provinces. The Christian symbols that appear in the Dacian provinces until their desertion are similar to those identified in the provinces that have been intensely Christianized like Syria, North Africa, Southern Gaul, even if the number of discoveries in Dacia is not that numerous. The spread of the Christian artifacts in Dacia follow the same pattern as in the other provinces. Dominant are the discoveries in the big cities and the commercial centers where the population is very mixed racially and socially. Taking into consideration that Dacia was abandoned by the Romans when Christian faith has come to its zenith in the Empire, this means that at the time of its desertion there was in Dacia a

solid Christianity, a well established society of Christians, with practical no chances to be rooted out or modified by the harsh circumstances following the abandonment (migrations, the constant change of the dominant political factor in the area passing from the Goths to the Hunns, from the Hunns to the Gepides and Avars, etc).

For a few centuries the Christian faith of the Daco-Romans remained faithful to the apostolic dogmas with Churches having a simple liturgy and a primitive hierarchy, all these being characteristics of an evangelic faith. Only the arrival of the Slavic people after the sixth century and their setting in Dacia (bringing a political, social and religious domination) have affected the character of the faith of the Daco-Romans. Only then the Daco-Roman Christianity became liturgical, priestly, and ritualistic copying the worship of the Eastern Roman Empire. This reality is certified not only by the archaeological discoveries, but also by the stratification of the religious language of the Romanians.

4. Chapter IV demonstrates that the adoption of the Christian religion, solidly assimilated by the population of the three Dacian provinces, has brought with it the formulation of all the dogmatic and liturgical concepts that are biblical, and fixed them in the language spoken by the Daco-Romans (the Latin language enriched with borrowings from the Thraco-Getic idiom). To this religious vocabulary of the Daco-Romans (of biblical source) another component has been added after the arrival of the Slavs. This is the religious non-biblical vocabulary of Slavic origin consisting mainly of "Christian" terms describing the ritualistic and monastic life of the Slavo-Bulgarians. Such vocabularies, be it the one composed of Latin terms, or the one of Slavic terms, express the essence of the religious life of the Daco-Romans, or of the Slavs, respectively. By a listing of all the terms with religious connotation in the Romanian language, we established the contribution of each ethnic group to the formation of the actual Romanian religious vocabulary.

Thus, we have approximately 170 terms of Latin and pre-Latin origin, distributed in the following way: About 100 terms are dogmatic, out of which only one is non-biblical; 30 liturgical-ritualistic terms, out of which 20 are New Testament terms, and the 10 that are not found in the New Testament, though not-biblical, yet they do not have a pagan content; 7 hierarchical terms, all being used in the New Testament describing offices in the apostolic Churches. Out of the 170 Latin terms only 15 are terms not found as concepts in the Scriptures. None of these is reminiscent of the monastic way of life, or of a priestly clergy with special clothing or raiment. Over 90% of the Latin and pre-Latin terms are biblical, meaning that they express concepts found in the Bible.

By comparison, we have in the Romanian language approximately 200 terms from the Slavic language. Out of these less than 30 are dogmatic, but approximately 100 belong to the liturgical-ritualistic realm. If we add the 40 terms describing monkish life, we have 140 Slavic terms belonging to the liturgical-ritualistic-monastic realm. Out of these 200 Slavic terms only 50 are biblical (25%).

The Latin language has furnished all the dogmatic (about 100) and liturgical (about 20) terms that have biblical presence, meaning they are found in the text of the New Testament. This vocabulary is a proof of the fact that the Christianity practiced by the Daco-Romans was a vigorous one from a dogmatic standpoint, but simple from a liturgical and hierarchical standpoint. So was the primitive Christianity named apostolic or evangelic. The Slavic language offered ritualistic terms describing a priestly type of Christian worship, such as was developed in the Empire after the legalization of Christianity. The Slavic vocabulary shows that the ritualistic worship and the monastic life that presently characterizes the Romanian national Church has come to us with the settlement of the Slavs on the territory of the former Dacian provinces.

5. The Annexes of the work (I-IV) are meant to complete the argumentation of the thesis bringing a plus of information from diverse areas. The first Annex shows the superiority of the Christian faith when compared to the pagan religions that were predominant in the Empire when the Christian religion was born. The apostolic Christianity (as it was disseminated by the Lord's apostles and by the disciples of the apostles) has soon conquered the Empire and eliminated paganism due to its superiority – uniqueness in its theological expression of the doctrine of incarnation (God becoming man and propitiating our sins by His death), liturgical simplicity, high ethics, and serious social implication.

Next Annex presents the liturgical and priestly system of the Slavs that has been imposed over the evangelic liturgy of the locals. The study analyses the priestly elements of the Old Testament worship that were incorporated into the religious practice of the Slavs. That the Daco-Romans did not have such a priestly worship is proved by the fact that their Latin vocabulary does not have such terms. In the Romanian language all the terms that describe the priestly liturgy come from the Slavic language.

Last Annex expounds the content of an old Romanian Carol (*Oh, What A Wonderful Good News*) that demonstrates the correct theology of the Daco-Romans in regard to Jesus' identity (Son of God), His incarnation, the proper place of Mary, the Virgin (not even one hint to justify the adoration of Mary, which became a reality after the arrival of the Slavs), the Trinitarian position (the Father sends His Son into the world, and He becomes man by the agency of the Holy Spirit), the sufficiency of faith for salvation, etc. This old Romanian Carol proved that the theology popularly kept through the centuries has conserved the biblical Christian doctrines of the Daco-Roman population.

Conclusions

On the basis of archaeological discoveries from the territories of Dacian provinces and from the territories of the provinces located south of the Danube River, we can conclude that until the third century the Daco-Roman Christians made a common body with the Christians of the rest of the Empire, having the same apostolic faith. After the fourth century, during the time that Dacia was outside the Empire, the Daco-Roman Christians kept their relations with the Empire (the importation of Christian

artifacts proves this) and are informed about the dogmatic formulations of the Councils, but when the Christianity of the Empire became priestly and monastic, the Daco-Roman Christians continued to cling to their evangelical faith being unaltered by the ecclesiastical developments within the Empire. The proof for this is the Daco-Romans' theological terminology of Latin origin, which is totally different from that of the other Latin speaking peoples in the West regions of the Empire. Those peoples have a Latin religious vocabulary imposed after the Vulgate was translated by standardized theological terms, very different from those used by the Daco-Romans. In the West we have *Dios, Ecclesia, Trinitas, Virgo, etc.*, while in Dacia we have *Dumnezeu, Biserica, Treime, Fecioara etc.* Thus, Dacia remains a citadel of the apostolic faith in the IV-VI centuries when transformations that affect the content of the Christian faith take place in the Empire.

The character of the Daco-Romans' faith was changed after the arrival of the Slavs in the region, for they imported the priestly and monastic system from Byzantium. The Slavic vocabulary (that is centered on priestly ritualistic and monastic concepts) was added to the Latin vocabulary (that is mainly dogmatic). So the Romanian vocabulary is formed by these two most important contributions. The two linguistic strata (Latin and Slavic) describe very well the two types of Christian worship that was characteristic for each one of those two communities before they came together: apostolic or evangelic for the Daco-Romans; priestly and ritualistic in the case of the Slavs.

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