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BULGARIAN NEW AGEISM AND CIVIC-RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY

Yana Fileva, PhD student¹

Abstract: *The politicization of theology and religion, on one hand, and the “theologization” of politics, on the other, are fundamental characteristics of the relationship between religion and globalization. Globalization enhances, at least in the short term, religion, and religiosity. In this way, globally oriented religions are integrated into the global political discourse on the world order as a competing ideology, whose authority significantly surpasses that of the political and economic system. Globalization raises questions about the new forms, functions, and roles of religious ideologies in the global space.*

A global religion example is New Age, while a new form example is civil religion. This paper would try to answer the question of whether Bulgarian New Age could shape a civil-religious ideology, whose messages, symbols, and rituals could support the moral integration of (part of) Bulgarian society. Especially in the perspective of Peter Berger, according to whom historically, in Orthodox societies, churches have never functioned as voluntary associations based on the conscious choice of believers, unlike Protestant ones.

The analysis indicates that the Bulgarian New Ageism activates followers towards beneficial for society activities. The messages express the historical memory for right and wrong, that is, the reproduction of sacred traditions regardless of specific confessions. They are associated with a revivalist spiritual movement, a consequence of social crisis, uniting people under an ideological banner and missionary vision. They call for moral integration in society, including agnostics and atheists.

Keywords: *Bulgarian New Ageism, civic religion*

¹ South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Bulgaria, yana_fileva@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

It is known that New Age is essentially a movement of contemporary Western industrial society with roots in the USA and Western Europe, where the fundamental religion, which New Age opposes, is Western Christianity. According to Antony Giddens (2009, pp. 691-692), followers seek and discover lifestyles that help them cope with the challenges of modernity, even appearing as part of the mainstream culture, primarily with calls for autonomy and freedom of choice in personal life. It represents an active and meaningful life beyond traditional values. However, the traditional religion in Bulgaria is Orthodox Christianity. According to the last 2021 Census, Christians are 71.5% from all answered the question, from which 97.0% are self-identified as Eastern Orthodox or 4 091 780 (Национален статистически институт, 2023). A specific feature of Eastern Orthodox mentality is individuals' sense of their place in the world. It is mystical and passive, directed inward the community.

In that context and after the changes in the political system in 1989 the alternative spirituality reemerged through officially registered organizations and the promotion of books, information, etc. However, a Bulgarian "occult" tradition has existed since the late 19th century, specifically referring to the teachings of Petar Danov (1864-1944), which is the most widely recognized and has influenced the spirituality nowadays. For Kalev (Калев, 2022, pp. 51-53) he has been a messianic figure and a spiritual leader for three generations Bulgarians, since he had established "Society for Raising of the Religious Spirit of the Bulgarian People" in 1897. The purpose of his doctrine, revealed in 4 000 lectures, was to radically change the perspective of Eastern Orthodox people regarding Christ; it can be seen as an impulse of a specific Bulgarian Reformation. The connections between his Teaching and esotericism are very strong, said Toncheva (2017), visible in a number of ideas, terms, and practices.

Especially, the concepts for carma, natural laws, astrological cycles, and cultural epochs. In 1914 Danov announced the coming of the Age of Aquarius: the transition from contemporary Fifth epoch to the next Sixth – that of love, peace and cooperation between peoples of the world. His teachings are a key part of the messages of many contemporary spiritual communities, even reinterpreted in modern manifestations, known today as New Age spirituality. The purpose of this text is to explore whether the manifestations of the New Age spirituality can manifest itself as a civic religion within the described local Bulgarian context.

2. Portal 12 – "church-as-community"

According to its founders, the online platform "Portal 12" is an informal organization of professionals, collaborators, and volunteers, whose efforts are directed towards building spiritual and cultural bridges by promoting the principles of personal responsibility. All the publications are based on the essential values of all teachings and religions from ancient times to the present day². Nowadays we live in the so-called "end times – of distinction" (by Konstantin Zlatev³) when people have to distinguish evil and make rational choices in daily life. The activities of the platform's team are various: organizing the forums "Bulgarian Spirit through the Centuries;" the search engine "Besedi BG" about the Danov's Teaching; "Portal 12 Publishing;" online training platform "Solaris;" "Brotherhood – Portal 12" for micro-circular economy; campaign "Created with Soul" about artificial intelligence; application "Portal12 – Formulas" for formulas and prayers for practical spiritual awakening. "Portal 12" does not organize paid events; however, it shares information for yoga seminars, retreats, courses on sustainable building, bio agriculture, herbal gathering festivals, etc. The wish for 2025 is for the

² See more on: <https://portal12.bg/Za-nas.c154>.

³ Константин Златев (1958-2022) is a Bulgarian economist and theologian, a researcher of the life and work of Petar Danov.

community to become stronger, to become a core that radiates light in the world. “May God be with us, among us, and may everything be realized according to His will.”⁴

The Facebook group of “Portal 12” is created on September 18, 2015, and as of: March 2023 the followers are 76 000; November 2023 – 82 000 (+7.9%); December 2024 – 88 000 (+7.3%); September 2025 – 91 000 (+3.4%). The platform also has a YouTube channel⁵, created on December 9, 2015, and as of: November 2023 the subscribers are 84 000; December 2024 – 96 000 (+14.3%); September 2025 – 104 000 (+8.3%). If a rough calculation is made of what share the subscribers on YouTube represent from the population of Bulgaria aged over 15, for 2023 it is 1.5%; for 2024 – 1.8%; as of September 2025 – 1.9% (Национален статистически институт, n. d.).

Viewed through the concepts of Talcott Parsons, “Portal 12” community represents the 4th type of informal church organization in the pluralistic Bulgarian society. According to Parsons’ definition (cited in Лункин, 2020, pp. 36-41), it should be a real network structure, which participates in social and creative projects, in missionary and political strategies. It is expected for the community to expand its audience, as its activities engage not only the followers but also those who identify culturally and ethno-confessionally, i. e., agnostics and atheists. In a European context the church organizations themselves emerge from civic society within the liberal democratic political system. And although religious values are currently replaced by “universal human values,” church structures are woven into civic society.

From other side and viewed through the lens of Peter Berger, it can be said that “Portal 12” appears as a voluntary association – as a new form of the church as a civic institution within the context of traditional for Bulgaria Orthodox religion. However, nothing in the history of Orthodoxy, said Berger, suggests that it can function as a voluntary association (Лункин, 2020, pp. 54-56). Therefore, the question arises whether Bulgarian New Age spirituality as a rational choice can create a civic-religious ideology, whose messages, symbols, and rituals could support the moral integration of (part of) Bulgarian society.

3. Forums “Bulgarian Spirit through the Centuries”

The forums “Bulgarian Spirit through the Centuries”⁶ are one of the organized events by “Portal 12” community. They have been held under this name for five years so far with leading themes as follows: “The Sacred Glagolic and Bulgarian Alphabets” (Plovdiv 2019); “The Legacy” (Rayuvtsi 2022); “The Epic of the Forgotten” (Rayuvtsi 2023); “The Power of Bulgarian Roots” (Rayuvtsi 2024); and “The Three Pillars” (Rayuvtsi 2025). Attendance was free; the three-day programs included lectures and practical activities in craft workshops: basket weaving, pottery, icon painting, wood carving, wool felting, making dolls from corn husks, herbalism, embroidery, kneading ritual bread, Glagolic writing, working with family trees, and bio agriculture. Paneurhythmy was danced in the mornings, and in the evenings, there was a musical program.

Of the 80 lectures scheduled across the five Forums, a content analysis has been conducted on 60 published on the YouTube channel of the platform, which amounts to 75%. It can certainly be concluded that all lectures figure a “cultic milieu, having become conscious of itself as constituting a unified movement” with Colin Campbell’s terminology (see Hanegraaff, p. 97). 2.4% of the messages refer to the individual; 22.9% concern all people; while 74.8% specifically refer to Bulgarians. To make a comparison, a content analysis was also conducted on the 20 most popular videos (from April 2023 to June 2025). The goal of the analysis has been to precisely figure the manifestations of Bulgarian

⁴ See more on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jtvp-J305IU>.

⁵ See more on: <https://www.youtube.com/@portal12>.

⁶ See more on: <https://forum.portal12.bg/>.

New Ageism. Well, the most challenging task for the researcher is to determine “what is” New Age, and it remains a judgment based on his/ her “common sense,” as Hanegraaff also articulated.

3. 1. New Age framework

The first part of the codebook questionnaire includes indicators about the overall framework of the New Age theology, as outlined by Wouter Hanegraaff in “New Age Religion and Western Culture” (1996; 1998). Initially, it should be said that many branches of the so-called New Age movement fall into the category of “world-affirming,” which emerged from the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s and now it encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices. Hanegraaff (1998, p. 94) identifies four main trends in New Age religion: 1. channeling; 2. healing and personal growth; 3. natural philosophy; 4. neopaganism. However, he also differentiates between a narrow and a broad understanding of the New Age, where it is regarded as a specific issue. New Age *sensu stricto* focuses on the expectation of the coming Age of Aquarius – a vision of a transformed or significantly improved world as a future epoch. In contrast, New Age *sensu lato* can be described as an innovative contemporary movement.

Based on the content analysis of the messages and field studies, it can be stated that the Hanegraaff’s historical sketch of New Age does not entirely fit within the Bulgarian context. For this reason, the following historical framework, as shown in Table 1, appears to be more suitable and correct. The analysis reveals the historical development of messages in the direction of apocalypticism → millenarianism → post-millenarianism is present; however, the difference in the historical framework is structural. It concerns messianism – while messianism as a social phenomenon is not a characteristic of the Western New Age, in the Bulgarian context it is an integral part of New Age *sensu stricto*. It is about the figures of Christ and the Bulgarian prophets and teachers – Petar Danov, Vanga, grandpa Vlaycho, Veselin Oreshkov, Vaklush Tolev, Slava Sevryukova, and reverend Stoyana. Their presence is linked to predictions about the future of humanity, which in turn presuppose a radical vision for the New Age and post-millenarianism with external interventionism. The “New Age” will come, and a “new humanity” will emerge, bearer of a “new culture,” but only after some event – extraterrestrial or planetary.

Therefore, while messianism as a spiritual phenomenon in the Western historical framework is present only in the New Age *sensu stricto*, in the Bulgarian context it is derived as an element of the New Age *sensu lato*, because there is no longer a need for prophets. It pertains to transpersonal phenomena – the Bogomil impulse, tribal energy, the sacralized Bulgarian spirit, the sacralized alphabets – all manifesting as a “divine spark,” through which people will independently create the “new culture,” leading to the emergence of the “new humanity.”

Table 1. Framework of the Bulgarian New Age religion (in %)

Indicators	Proto-New Age		New Age <i>sensu stricto</i>		New Age <i>sensu lato</i>	
	Forums	Videos	Forums	Videos	Forums	Videos
Theosophical influence	59.1	90.0	59.1	90.0	-	-
Apocalypticism	3.6	55.0	3.6	55.0	-	-
Pre-millenarianism	0	10.0	-	-	-	-
Post-millenarianism	-	-	-	-	37.1	20.0
Post-millenarianism with external interventionism	-	-	8.8	40.0	-	-

“Macro-historical” frames	4.2	40.0	-	-	-	-
Messianism as a social phenomenon	-	-	58.2	75.0	-	-
Messianism as a spiritual phenomenon	-	-	-	-	76.0	60.0
Radical vision	8.0	60.0	8.0	60.0	-	-
Moderate vision	-	-	-	-	61.7	25.0
Passive attitude	3.4	5.0	-	-	-	-
Social activity “here and now”	-	-	68.5	80.0	68.5	80.0
Correlation between messages from the forums and most popular videos	0.76		0.88		0.74	

Further analysis reveals what historical type are the messages from the forums and from the most popular videos. For this purpose, a quantitative assessment index can be used, that is, how many messages out of 10 discuss the certain characteristics⁷. According to the included elements in Table 1, the index for proto-New Age messages on the forums is 1.3; for the most popular videos – 4.3 with a correlation of 0.76 between these messages. The index for New Age *sensu stricto* messages is respectively 3.4 and 6.7 with a correlation of 0.88. The index for New Age *sensu lato* messages is 6.1 and 4.6 with a correlation of 0.74. Therefore, it is evident that the platform’s followers seek messages which are historically still in the second historical stage – *sensu stricto*, while the forums calling is *sensu lato* – for awareness as a “unified movement,” which is the third historical stage.

In all lectures the theosophical elements, post-millenarian, and messianic aspects remain constant in all five forums. This stable structure demonstrates a solid foundation for subsequent development with a civil-religious ideology. Furthermore, it brings forth the function of lectures – through messianic examples from the lives of historical figures (the prophets) or sacralized phenomena (astronomical laws, natural laws, social movements, and folklore) to structure messages aimed at creating a collective *egregore* among the audience. This should provoke the post-millenarian individual effort in everyday lives; the combination of all individual efforts is capable of transforming matter and achieving the pre-determined.

3. 2. *New Age ideology*

The second part of the codebook is based on the book “New Age Politics: Our Real Alternative” by Mark Satin (1975; 2015), which outlines the path to a “new humanity” through the opposition of the “old-new” paradigm. The question for “cultural homogeneity” is the only one from the “old” paradigm that is noted in the lectures. It is oriented towards collective identity rather than individual identity – one of the key differences from the Western New Age. The structural elements of the “new humanity,” found in lectures, are: the understanding that people’s lives should follow the path of enlightened personal interest; living in cooperative individualism; living reasonably and intuitively; a balance between the secular and the spiritual; call for small and simple living and working conditions; simplification of material requirements; usage of appropriate technology in life; integrated professional roles; use of handmade and unique products; and a peaceful life.

The calculation shows that index for “new humanity” from the messages in the forums is 3.4; while for the most popular videos it is 3.9. In general, it can be concluded that there is a lack of a clear vision; general formulations are present, but specific recommendations (economic, labor, education, trans-

⁷ All indicis in the text are calculated as the arithmetic mean of the included indicators, divided by 10.

portation, etc.) are entirely absent. This can be interpreted as a recollection of the “old” in the sense of people’s collective knowledge, i. e., folklore traditions, adapted to contemporary life conditions. However, the calculations show a correlation coefficient of 0.97; thus, a strong direct dependence between the characteristics of the “new humanity” and the New Age sensu lato type of messages is observed.

3. 3. Civic-religious ideology

The third part of the codebook includes characteristics of civic-religious ideology, as formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Robert Bellah, summarized by Maxim Mizov in “Civic Religions” (2021). To systematize the information from the content analysis, we can introduce an index of civil-religious ideology, according to characteristics presented in Table 2. Additional indicators are introduced, as they are widely proclaimed in the messages. The data indicates an overall index of forums at 5.7 according to Rousseau’s concept; 5.2 according to Bellah; and 4.7 based on the additional indicators. Accordingly, the values for the most popular videos are as follows: 5.0 for Rousseau; 4.7 for Bellah; and 6.2 for the additional indicators.

Table 2. Civic-religious ideology (in %)

Characteristics	Rousseau’s concept	Bellah’s concept	additional indicators
Prioritize the individuals over their nationality	29.7	-	-
God is presented as a central symbol	-	66.7	-
Christianity is presented as a foundation	16.6	-	-
Establish an organic connection with the Old Testament (emphasizing order, obligations retribution, the power, and dominion of God over human beings)	-	1.8	-
Establish an organic connection with the New Testament (emphasizing goodwill, trust, love among people, mutual respect, and the equality of human beings)	66.8	-	-
Messianism and historical mission of the nation	-	53.4	-
Link the salvation of individuals with the salvation of the state and society	44.5	-	-
Call for global interventionism	-	8.6	-
Call to remember the ancestral memory and to return to the ancestral traditions	-	58.4	-
Contain pre-Christian archetypes and attributes (pagan)	-	61.0	-
Contain elements of theological metaphysics, mythology, and cultic-ritual practices	50.3	50.3	-
Mentions about political doctrines, antimilitary	-	-	24.4
Historical narratives	65.4	65.4	-
Mythological narratives	-	32.3	-
Emphasis in the ritual system of the religious over the secular	-	46.2	-

Secular sacrality (ecology, health, history) and out-of-church religiosity	-	79.5	-
Holistic medicine	-	-	21.2
“Intuitive sciences” (astrology)	-	-	9.0
Functionally autonomous to different confessions	74.3	74.3	-
The symbolic patterns, techniques, and practices are derived from “the will of God”	-	-	65.4
The symbolic patterns, techniques, and practices originate from “the general will”	31.7	31.7	-
Monistic (the ethnic differences have been overcome, i.e., there is a general reference to “Bulgarians” or to “the people”)	85.4	-	-
Pluralistic (various ethno-religious groups are mentioned)	-	7.6	-
Focused on secular issues only	-	51.3	-
Focused on overcoming differences between this world and the other world	48.8	-	-
Cultural ideology (Bulgarian alphabets and traditions, and Slavic heritage)	-	-	74.6
Activate believers towards activities beneficial for the state and society	80.2	80.2	-
Express historical memory of right and wrong, i.e., reproduce sacred traditions regardless of specific denominations	91.3	91.3	-
The relationships between citizens and the state are seen as a priori (defined and controlled by God)	-	-	41.1
The relationships between citizens and the state are seen as a posteriori (regulated according to the interests of the state and citizenship)	15.9	15.9	-
Associated with a revivalist spiritual movement, due to a social crisis	55.2	55.2	-
Mobilize and unite people in a missionary vision	86.2	86.2	-
Legitimize the state and the nation by forming stable attitudes in society through religious-secular images and narratives	76.9	76.9	-
Cultivate citizenship of the state	50.8	50.8	-
Refer to agnostics and atheists (as they mention more general concepts such as “creator” and “origin”)	-	-	92.6
Call for moral integration within society	59.0	-	-
Correlation between civic-religious messages from the forums and from the most popular videos	0.72	0.87	0.78

Additional calculations can be made regarding a correlation between the growth of followers of “Portal 12” on Facebook on one hand, and the historical types of New Age messages and civic-religious

gious ideology on the other. The data is compared only for the three monitored years – 2023-2025; therefore, they should be considered as “conditional” and for a basis for further research. Nevertheless, it is evident from Table 3 that there is a strong direct correlation between the growth of followers and the types of civic-religious ideology, which indirectly supports the initially intuitive shaping of an original Bulgarian New Age ideology that aligns more closely with Bellah’s concept than with Rousseau’s one.

Table 3. Correlation between the growth of followers of “Portal 12” according to civic-religious and type of New Age messages from the forums

Civic-religious messages	Rousseau’s concept	Bellah’s concept	additional indicators
	0.83	0.97	0.96
Type of New Age messages	Proto-New Age	New Age sensu stricto	New Age sensu lato
	-0.99	-0.99	0.21

The strong potential of the civic-religious ideology by Bellah’s concept to attract agnostics and atheists (correlation 0.72) is demonstrated, in contrast to the moderate potential by Rousseau’s concept (correlation 0.52). This supports the widely accepted assertion of civil religion as an enhancement of traditional one, regarding the normal functioning of society. Furthermore, the less it resembles a traditional religion, the more widely accepted it is expected to be among society.

According to the lectures on the platform “Portal 12,” as well as on the forums “Bulgarian Spirit through the Centuries,” the emphasis on national identity is not associated with political dimensions – borders and land, but rather with the culture of all civilizations that have lived on the territory of contemporary Bulgaria. They assert that Bulgarians are the inheritors of the knowledge and have a duty to pass it on to next generations. There is a lack of messages suggesting that Bulgarian identity is superior to others, as according to the Danov’s Teaching, each nation is created by God in its specific habitat on Earth; each nation has its own function. The planet is a unified organism, and each nation is an organ with a specific function – Bulgarians are compared to the liver, as they purify the planet. Ethnic groups are rarely mentioned in the messages, and there is no indication of ethnocentrism. However, a distinction is made between “Bulgarians” and “blagari”. The first define their identity by passport, while the second adhere to the principles of the Danov’s Teaching – they are “the kind” and “the blessed.”

Political engagement of the organization is absent. This is due to Danov’s ideas that it is not worthy of a person’s time to engage in politics, as it is merely a temporary and transitory endeavor. Furthermore, according to the messages, society is excessively divided, therefore, unity is needed, because God has created all people on earth equal and significant. Everyone has their place in the world, and through manual labor (even as a hobby), individuals should contribute to the whole society. The society is compared to nature, which embodies divine wholeness. In practice, all messages call for a life in harmony with nature, reasonable and peaceful, close to the earth. It is a manifestation of the “culture of conscience” (see Cherng, 2025), which is a universal value and inner moral guidance. transcending borders and ideologies, a vital force for promoting peace and sustainable development.

Conclusion

It is possible to draw a framework of the Bulgarian New Age civil-religious ideology. The more cultural-ideological messages exist – such as a return to ancestral traditions, Bulgarian alphabets, Slavic identity, etc. – the more followers it attracts. The messages are pluralistic, as they are directed towards all who feel “Bulgarian at heart;” the passport does not matter. They are functionally autonomous concerning different faiths because they derive human laws from the nature laws, which provides space for all living beings, which is the foundation of all religions. In this sense, the messages of secular sacrality encompass ecology, history, and health (holistic medicine and “intuitive sciences” are part of the sacralization of health). The sacralization of history is manifested in historical and mythological narratives, ideologically traversing the messages as a spiritual phenomenon. Hence, there is reference to pre-Christian archetypes and attributes and theological metaphysics. Above all, as the central figure, is standing God, who established the state and regulates the relationships with the Bulgarian people, who are expected to fulfill the mission entrusted by God – “to lead progressive humanity towards the Age of Love.”

Content analysis reveals that the community, although politically inactive, projects itself into broad spheres of social life – healthcare, education, agriculture, and the opposition to dehumanizing technologies. Consequently, it shapes normative frameworks, and although it still manifests as a “cultic milieu,” it carries the potential to expand its moral influence. The ability of a people to draw from their inherited memory and sacred cosmology to maintain their cultural vitality in the “end times” is referred to as “cultural resilience” (by Jason Cherng). The analysis concludes that community messages for common moral values for the behavior and education of next generations, common national holidays, common folklore forums and festivals, a shared Orthodox religion, a common language, life in a physical and virtual community are the most important. The leading aspect is the collective – the “common” or “communion” – living and working as “we are one.”

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