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## TRANSFORMATION OF PNEUMATOLOGICAL DOCTRINE IN THE THEOLOGY OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

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*The article analyzes the transformation of the pneumatological doctrine in the teachings of new religious movements and its influence on the development of structural-typological and doctrinal-institutional aspects of the theology of charismatic and Pentecostal communities. It is established that pneumatology is an integral part of the theology of new religious movements, focused on the study of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. Pneumatology contemplates the Holy Spirit and His role in the life of believers, contributing to the strengthening of their faith. It functions not only as a theoretical doctrine but also as a practical foundation of the spiritual life and mission of new movements. The presence of the Holy Spirit in various aspects of believers' lives plays an essential role, providing enlightenment, sanctification, guidance, and comfort. The Holy Spirit's key role is to enlighten, helping believers understand and absorb biblical teachings, bringing spiritual illumination. Sanctification helps believers grow spiritually and overcome sin, while guidance leads them in their lives, assisting in making wise decisions and the right choices. Comfort expresses support during trials and hardships. It is proven that the transformation of the pneumatological doctrine has contributed to the rethinking of ecclesiology, where pneumatology, which previously defined the missionary activity of those baptized by the Holy Spirit, now emphasizes the features of their identity. This focus on individual spirituality has led to a shift from the concept of a missionary community to a community of chosen saints. In this organizational model, the hierarchy has become a symbol of loyalty to tradition. For a significant portion of new religious movements, this shift marks a transition from an open model of existence, correlated with mission work, to a closed, socially isolated organization, aimed at preserving absolutized doctrinal specifics. The higher hierarchical leadership, which is no longer focused on spreading the teachings but on demonstrating loyalty to them, has become a guarantee of this preservation.*

**Key words:** new religious movements, pneumatology, theology, ecclesiology, identity, social service, spirituality.

## ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ПНЕМАТОЛОГІЧНОЇ ДОКТРИНИ У ТЕОЛОГІЇ НОВІТНІХ РЕЛІГІЙНИХ РУХІВ

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*У статті проаналізовано трансформацію пневматологічної доктрини у вченні новітніх релігійних рухів та її вплив на розвиток структурно-типологічних її доктринально-*

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інституційних аспектів теології харизматичних і п'ятидесятницьких громад. Доведено, що пневматологія є невід'ємною частиною теології новітніх релігійних рухів, яка зосереджена на вивченні Святого Духа, третьої особи Святої Трійці. Пневматологія осмислює Святого Духа та Його роль у житті вірян, сприяючи зміцненню їх віри та виступає не лише теоретичним вченням, а й практичною основою духовного життя та місії новітніх рухів. Аргументовано, що присутність Святого Духа в різних аспектах життя віруючих відіграє важливу роль, забезпечуючи просвітлення, освячення, провідництво та втішення. Ключовою роллю Святого Духа є просвітлення, що допомагає віруючим зрозуміти та засвоїти біблійні вчення, приносячи духовне просвітлення; освячення, яке допомагає зростати духовно та перемагати гріх; провідництво, веде віруючих у їхньому житті, допомагаючи приймати мудрі рішення та робити правильний вибір; утішення, котре виражає підтримку віруючим під час труднощів і випробувань. Доведено, що трансформація пневматологічної доктрини сприяла переосмисленню еклезіології, у вченні якої пневматологія, котра раніше визначала місійну діяльність хрещених Святим Духом, тепер підкреслювала особливості їх ідентичності. Останнє сфокусувало вірних на власній духовності й стало фактором зміни розуміння пневмацентризму від місіонерської общини до общини вибраних святих. У такій формі організації ієрарх став символом вірності традиції. Фактично для значної частини новітніх релігійних рухів відбувся перехід від відкритої моделі існування об'єднання, яка корелюється з місіональністю, до замкненої, суспільно відмежованої, скерованої до збереження абсолютизованих віронавчальних особливостей. Своєрідною гарантією цієї збереженості ставало вище ієрархічне керівництво релігійних об'єднань, яке дбало не про поширення вчення, а про демонстрацію вірності йому.

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**Ключові слова:** новітні релігійні рухи, пневматологія, теологія, еклезіологія, ідентичність, соціальне служіння, духовність.

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#### **Formulation of the problem.**

Domestic religious studies, while exploring the evolutionary development of religion, its spiritual and social potential, confessional diversity, and socio-historical significance, faced the problem of the mass spread of non-traditional religious organizations. Research on this phenomenon, using modern methodological and theoretical approaches, has become an important task of science. Non-traditional religious movements, formed by deep societal processes of the past century, were aimed not only at restoring orthodox religious traditions but also at searching for new values and spiritual orientations. Their emergence was conditioned by the systemic crisis of Ukrainian society, which deepened in the 1990s and early 21st century, creating a spiritual vacuum in the country and a fertile ground for the spread of non-traditional religious organizations. Additionally, achievements in the scientific field have solved many problems that the official church was unable to address.

Part of Ukrainian society expresses uncertainty about the possibility of preserving the age-old religious tradition,

characteristic of the majority of the population, under the spread of non-traditional religious organizations. Not surprisingly, scholars and representatives of traditional denominations voice concerns about the growing threat of division in Ukrainian society and interreligious conflicts.

The new religions that gave rise to non-traditional cults were quite specific to the parishioners of traditional Christian churches. Typically, they did not have a well-developed system of beliefs, and their structure was hierarchical and authoritarian. Worship in these religions is predominantly collective, characterized by the use of psychological manipulation techniques and psychotherapeutic methods, with a strong focus on proselytizing.

Non-traditional cults are characterized by the presence of a central figure – a leader who considers themselves to be a messenger of God with a unique connection to the Almighty. Since the leader of the organization communicates directly with God, they can dictate theology and behavior to all members of the cult. As a result, the leader gains unlimited power over the group. This

leadership places the followers of the religious organization in complete dependence on the cult regarding matters of faith, behavior, and lifestyle.

All this indicates the urgent need for a deep study of non-traditional religions, the specifics of their influence on individuals, their relationships with Ukraine's spiritual and socio-political traditions, and an assessment of their future impact on domestic socio-political processes. However, non-traditional religions in general and the religious organization The Way International in particular have not become subjects of deep and comprehensive philosophical research. The article uses a systematic-analytical approach to examine the doctrinal foundations of The Way International, allowing us to trace the features of the structure and internal organization of this new religious organization in Ukraine.

**Discussion and results.** To date, The Way International has not been the object of thorough scientific analysis in Ukraine. Comprehensive research on this religious community, uncovering its features and connections with cultural and confessional processes in Ukraine, and assessing its development prospects during the period of independence has not yet been carried out. The rapid spread of new religions has caused significant concern among religious scholars, especially those belonging to traditional confessions. However, their confessionally-oriented approach sets a predetermined negative attitude toward the cult's teachings. In this context, the works of Protestant theologians are most well-known: U. Martin, J. McDowell, T. Gondo, P. Robertson, and others. These authors often reduce the reasons for the spread of non-traditional religious movements to subjective personal factors. At the same time, these works help to navigate the determination of the specific content of the beliefs and activities of new religious movements.

A significant stage in understanding the phenomenon of The Way International and its doctrinal content was the scientific work of American researchers

Barry Harold, J. Kenneth, and U. Martin. However, the self-sufficiency of this community in Ukraine remains unexplored to this day, as does society's attitude towards it.

The religious organization The Way International was founded by Victor Paul Wierwille in the 1960s in the USA as a biblical research and educational society. Wierwille was raised in a family of members of the Evangelical Reformed Church. He earned his bachelor's degree at a college and seminary in Plymouth, Wisconsin. Afterward, he received theological training at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Princeton Theological Seminary [1: 242]. After graduating from the seminary in 1941 and receiving a Doctor of Theology degree, Wierwille was ordained and served as a pastor in the Evangelical Reformed Church for 16 years.

Determining the exact date when Wierwille founded the religious organization "The Way International" is difficult. Some sources suggest 1957, when Wierwille left the Reformed Church. Others associate the creation of the organization with the spread of the "Jesus Movement", whose followers were disillusioned with the official church and sought new spirituality.

The Way International has a clearly structured and widespread organizational structure. The organization is managed by a specially selected Board of Directors. On the national level, the management is carried out by the "Association of National Organizations". Local urban organizations are responsible for organizing branches in residential areas and student campuses, where members regularly meet for discussions, singing, and fellowship. Discussions and prophecies are important aspects of these gatherings. Novices who complete a special course called "How to Achieve Abundance in Life," consisting of 12 lessons, are initiated into the teachings of the "Way" [2].

The Way International actively engages in missionary activities through its messengers, "Word Over the World", spreading its teachings in various

countries. According to statistics, in more than 50 countries, The Way International messengers are actively working to create local branches and attract new followers. The organization has its own publishing house, "Christian Press", located at the headquarters in New Knoxville, Ohio [3]. Followers also hold an annual congress under the slogan "Rock of Ages" and organize summer camps with the support of the Institute of Perfect Health to introduce people to Wierwille's theology.

Wierwille positions The Way International as a Christian religious organization, but his teachings reflect an anti-Trinitarian stance in interpreting the person of the Holy Spirit. Wierwille employs a method typical of many neo-Christian denominations, rejecting orthodox tenets by referring to the Bible. In particular, he argues that the Holy Spirit is not the third person of the Godhead but merely a mode of God's manifestation [4]. Wierwille's interpretation of the Holy Spirit stems from the anti-Trinitarian doctrine of monarchian modalists, who denied the unified essence of the three Persons of God. According to their teachings, the Father created the world, the Son incarnated and lived among people, and since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has inspired and governed the Church. However, in all these three modes, which follow one another sequentially, a single Logos is at work. The mode of the Holy Spirit is also not eternal. It, too, will have its end. Afterward, the return of the monad to its original unity will occur, which is equivalent to the cessation of change, and thus, the end of the world [5: 157–158].

When interpreting his own understanding of the place and role of the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of the Trinity, Wierwille turns to a linguistic analysis of how the Holy Spirit is treated in the Bible. Greek manuscripts were often written either entirely in lowercase letters or entirely in uppercase, which Wierwille claims led to difficulties in interpretation and subsequent application of certain concepts and expressions [4]. Drawing attention to this, Wierwille notes that the word "pneuma", which is translated as "spirit", in Greek is never written with a

capital letter. Some nouns in the Bible can be written with either lowercase or uppercase letters without affecting the meaning of the text. However, according to Wierwille, whether "spirit" is written with a lowercase or uppercase "s" carries different meanings and interpretations [4]. Despite the relevance of studying this issue, Wierwille unreasonably altered the usage of lowercase and uppercase letters, thereby interpreting the text at his discretion. This method is typical of many neo-Christian religious organizations that declare their interpretation as the only true one.

Wierwille also focuses on the semantic meaning and use of the phrase "pneuma hagion" (Holy Spirit) in the Greek texts of the New Testament. Analyzing this phrase, he explains two aspects of its use. If "pneuma hagion" is associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit received by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, it should be written in lowercase as "holy spirit". However, when the phrase is used to refer to the spiritual enlightenment of a believer, it is interpreted as the gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, of God. From Wierwille's point of view, the Holy Spirit is God, while His gift is "spirit". The fact that people do not see the difference between the Holy Spirit and His gift, according to Wierwille, always causes disputes regarding the doctrine of the Trinity [4]. Thus, Wierwille denies the existence of the Holy Spirit as a separate Person of the Godhead, identifying it with God, while referring to the "holy spirit" as "innate spiritual abilities" sent by the Almighty.

A significant place in the theology of The Way International is given to the possibility of every believer speaking in tongues. This topic is specifically addressed in Wierwille's book *Receiving the Holy Spirit Today*, where the author justifies the importance of this gift in the spiritual development of a person. A detailed analysis of this issue in the doctrines of The Way International reveals similarities with the teachings of Pentecostal religious communities. Spiritual salvation, in both Pentecostalism and The Way International, is directly linked to speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Glossolalia refers to speaking in

foreign languages or incomprehensible utterances, but it is always viewed as a "supernatural gift given to man to glorify God and the utilization of which comes not from the mind but from the Spirit" [6: 280–281]. Though they emphasize that glossolalia itself does not bring salvation, the Pentecostals assert that salvation, which always comes through the baptism of the Spirit, is inconceivable without the gift of speaking in tongues. According to them, Spirit baptism without speaking in other tongues is not a biblical concept, and whenever such baptism occurs, it must be expected that the person will speak in a foreign language. If this does not happen, the very fact of Spirit baptism and salvation is called into question. Therefore, Pentecostals believe that Christians must receive the gift of glossolalia as confirmation that they are baptized by the Spirit and saved.

Wierwille, in particular, emphasizes the ability of a person to speak in different tongues, stating that the power of the Spirit has nine manifestations. Every person who receives the Holy Spirit gains the gift of speaking in tongues at will. A believer who does not speak in tongues has not fulfilled their mission in receiving such a gift [4]. Only through their faith will they attain this supreme blessing of spiritual rebirth. Contrary to orthodox theology, Wierwille, in discussing the Spirit, denies His presence as a Person within an individual. Furthermore, he limits the Spirit's activity solely to the ability to bestow the gift of tongues, shifting this aspect of teaching into the realm of soteriology. "The Holy Spirit, as the power of God, is available to every believer. However, if the Holy Spirit is not accessible to the believer, then the gift of salvation is also inaccessible to them. When God grants a gift, which is part of the believer's spiritual rebirth, it remains available until the end of the Church Age. The gifts of God are available to every believer who seeks to receive them" [4].

A distinctive feature of The Way International's theology is its peculiar linguistic interpretation of key Christian dogmas, particularly concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox theology interprets the gifts of the Holy Spirit as

divine power, which not only sanctified the apostles but through them, sanctifies all humanity corrupted by sin. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, eternally dwells in the Church of Christ and is granted to all the faithful through the sacraments established by God, strengthening believers in their faith. Wierwille, on the other hand, offers his interpretation of the significance of these gifts based on translations of New Testament texts from Greek. The Greek word "dunamis", which translates as "power", does not mean visible power. "Dunamis" refers to inherent potential power, a spiritual ability given to the believer. Another Greek word, "exousia", means the authority given to us as God's children, born from above, to use and control "dunamis". "Exousia" is our right to apply the power we possess. However, the degree of manifestation of this power depends on the degree to which our mind is renewed and how we act according to the knowledge we have received. "Dunamis" can be understood as the potential energy we receive with the Holy Spirit. It is power hidden within a person, which does not manifest on its own [3].

Another word is "energemata", which translates as "action" or "working of action". It transforms "dunamis" into kinetic energy, manifesting it. Scripture lists nine actions, or "energemata", that are the results of the manifestation of this potential power. When a believer exercises their "exousia" (right) as a child of God, "dunamis" – potential power – is brought into action and manifests in the external world, in the realm of feelings [4]. Thus, the Holy Spirit, the "heavenly power", begins to act according to a person's will, and as a result, the manifestations of the Spirit are produced. These manifestations occur through the energy received from the Holy Spirit, who is God.

Justifying his position on glossolalia, Wierwille points out the difference between two Greek words: "dechomai" and "lambano", both translated as "receive". According to Barry Harold, they carry the same meaning, except for a slight nuance – "dechomai" implies receiving with pleasure or joy [7]. Wierwille believes that the main

problem arises from the different meanings of these words, as they can be used both in the sense of "receiving something spiritual" and in the sense of "receiving something manifested in the world of feelings" [4].

The manifestations of the Spirit in a person, according to Wierwille's teachings, include the ability to speak in different tongues, interpret tongues, and prophesy. These manifestations are called verbal because the believer utters them through the inspiration of inner spiritual forces. The manifestation of tongues is the ability of God to show that a person can externally express the power of the Holy Spirit.

These three signs of the Holy Spirit in a believer are performed through inspiration. A believer never knows in advance what the ability will be. Prophecy is never premeditated; it is not the result of intellectual exercises. Prophecy always runs parallel to Scripture, and sometimes it consists of parts of Scripture.

As mentioned earlier, the manifestation of tongues means delivering a message from God, which must always be interpreted in a gathering of believers. However, when a believer speaks in tongues and prays in the spirit in their personal prayer life, it is never interpreted. The interpretation of tongues, following speaking in tongues, is meant to teach the Church [3]. Without interpretation, the manifestation of tongues is meant solely for use in personal prayer life and spiritual instruction of the one who manifests it.

Analyzing the use of the words "dechomai" and "lambano" in the New Testament, Wierwille formulated their meaning: "dechomai" is subjective receiving, when something spiritual appears in a person's life according to their decision, while "lambano" is objective and evident receiving of a visible gift, enabling the person to manifest what they have received internally at will. To confirm his position, Wierwille refers to Acts 8:14, noting that both Greek words are used in the sense of acceptance [4]. In this example, Wierwille argues that to avoid manipulation of meaning, it is essential to know exactly which Greek word is used in a particular context.

According to Barry Harold, "the linguistic analysis between the two Greek words was conducted to support Wierwille's theology and impress his followers who had not studied Greek. However, anyone who seriously studies the Bible and checks the actual meaning of the Greek words in the text will find that Wierwille's definitions are unfounded" [7].

The use of vague terms in theology and their ambiguous interpretation leads to the distortion of established doctrine and its criticism. Therefore, the correct use of various concepts in a specific contextual framework is extremely important when interpreting the person of the Holy Spirit in the history of Christian polemical theology. Even Patriarch Joseph Slipyj noted that the root of the Greek-Latin controversy about the Holy Spirit lies in the divergent understanding of key terminology. Despite the general difficulties in translation that Latin theologians faced in understanding the Greek Fathers, the founders of various religious organizations, when interpreting the texts of Holy Scripture, use their own terms, creating the impression of their interchangeability.

In the confessional literature of The Way International and in Wierwille's translations, we increasingly encounter the expression "the origin of the Holy Spirit" instead of the traditionally used term in Christian theology "the procession of the Holy Spirit". Specifically, in the work *Receiving the Holy Spirit Today*, Wierwille emphasizes that "at the first descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, only twelve apostles received a gift from Him with manifestation" [4]. In this context, Wierwille uses the term "descent" to mean "the origin", as an explanation or synonym for the term procession. From the perspective of Christian theology, this interpretation is incorrect because "descent" and "origin" can be synonymous with "descent", referring to the historical event when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles on Pentecost, or continues to descend on believers and the Church in response to the Church's prayer. All of this pertains to the historical (economic) plan in which

the actions of the Divine Persons concerning creation are not always identical to how they are in the plan of eternity. Although the historical plan is closely related to the eternal, the eternal is not determined by the historical.

The term "origin of the Holy Spirit", often used in the literature of The Way International, refers to the general concept that the Holy Spirit, like the Son, does not exist of Himself but from the Father. According to J. Slipyj, "the Greek Fathers envisioned the activity outside of the divine nature as a joint action of the divine nature, but it comes from the Father and exists through the Son in the Holy Spirit. We find it as a whole in each individual person. Conversely, the path from creation to God follows the same order: when the Holy Spirit enters the soul of a person, He comes together with the Son, and when the Son visits the person, the Father comes through Him" [9: 18].

Christianity acknowledges the importance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, proclaimed in Greek at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 AD, as an expression of the common faith of the Church and all Christians. No Christian confession or liturgical tradition can deny the expression of faith taught and professed by the undivided Church.

This Creed professes the Holy Spirit as "proceeding from the Father". Only the Father is the source of the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity, the sole origin of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit originates only from the Father—eternally, essentially, and directly.

The Greek Fathers of the Church and the entire Christian East speak of the "monarchy of the Father" concerning this. For example, Gregory of Nyssa considers first the person of the Father and views the process of origin as the transmission of His Essence. The Son's role is only to transmit the divine nature He received from the Father to the Holy Spirit [9: 22]. The Spirit's origin from the Father alone as the source of the entire Trinity is described in the Greek tradition as "procession" following the Cappadocian Fathers. A theologian describes the derivative relationship of the

Spirit concerning the Father with the term "procession", distinguishing it from the term "origin", which applies both to the Spirit and to the Son: "The Holy Spirit truly proceeds from the Father—not through sonship, for this is not birth but procession".

At the same time, the Western tradition, following Augustine, also defines that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father initially. Since Augustine starts from the nature that is characterized by activity, the Father and the Son are the principle, based on a shared substance [9: 22]. In this sense, both traditions acknowledge: "the monarchy of the Father" means that the Father is the sole Cause in the Trinity or the Source of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

These approaches convey different interpretations of one doctrine. The polemic between the Western and Eastern Christian churches, which remains relevant today, revolves around the explanation of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit from two Persons. Most theologians, like the followers of The Way International, only note the immediate execution of an action with a clear process of mutual interaction, neglecting the definition of the content of equality and the identity of the active power.

According to J. Slipyj, this understanding is linguistically grounded and directly related to the terminology of verbs [9: 23]. Specifically, to describe the procession of the Holy Spirit, the Greek Fathers use terms that reveal phenomena caused or generated by other events. This feature is often used by representatives of various religious organizations, including Victor Paul Wierwille, in their confessional literature for their interpretation or refutation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Wierwille's use of various terms in his works is based on a cosmological interpretation of the dogma. The identical application of such terminology does not allow for a rational explanation of Christ's mission and the procession of the Holy Spirit, nor does it allow for the identification of the two Persons. Despite all the terms that Wierwille attributes to the immanent procession of the Holy Spirit, he does not use the term "procession" in relation to the

appearance of the Holy Spirit from the Son, although he does not deny this phenomenon.

Thus, as theologians note, we can speak of the origin of both the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity, but not necessarily about the origin of the Father. The way in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father differs from the way the Son proceeds. This difference is essential, and according to the teachings of the holy Fathers, it forms the basis of the hypostatic distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Trinity (regardless of their relationship to the world), the Holy Spirit differs from the Son in the way He proceeds from the Father. The manner in which the Son proceeds from the Father is referred to, according to Scripture, as birth; the way the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father is called, according to Scripture, procession. The Holy Spirit does not come from the Father by birth, but by procession; the Son does not proceed but is born. [10: 30–31].

The Father begets the Son only by breathing the Holy Spirit through Him, and the Son is begotten by the Father only insofar as this breathing passes through Him. The Father is the Father of the only-begotten Son only by being, for Him and

through Him, the source of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not precede the Son because the Son characterizes the Father as the one from whom the Spirit takes its beginning, which forms the order in the Holy Trinity. However, the breathing of the Spirit from the Father occurs with the help of and through the Son, characterizing Him trinitarily. In this sense, St. John of Damascus says: "The Holy Spirit is the essential force, seen in its unique and distinct Personhood (Hypostasis), proceeding from the Father and resting in the Word" [9: 24].

**Conclusions.** Thus, the state and dynamics of the contemporary The Way International movement testify to the presence of the sociocultural potential of the movement. It seeks to expand the boundaries of its activities in the social, spiritual, national, and inter-confessional life, considering such activities as an integral part of its worldview. There is a conscious trend towards strengthening the positions of its centers worldwide, aiming for maximum adaptation to new life realities, diversification of forms and methods of evangelization, enhancing the level of theological education of believers, and adopting a flexible inter-confessional stance.

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