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## **The place and role of religion in the thought of the French New Right. Ideo-political concepts of Alain de Benoist (1968-2006)**

### **Problematic aspects and goal of research:**

The goal of this doctoral thesis is to examine the role of religion in the ideology of the *Nouvelle Droite* (ND, European New Right), especially in the oeuvre of Alain de Benoist. Concentration on de Benoist's thought is determined by the fact that 1) he is the main ideologist and *spiritus movens* of the movement, 2) the vastness of ND's legacy.

To define exactly what is the *Nouvelle Droite* is not an easy task. Beside it being, it is also a multi-faceted current. It's not strictly a political, religious or (counter-)cultural movement, as it consists of philosophical, sociological, sociobiological, political, juridical elements. The ND could be described as a "(multi-faceted) ideological bloc". One could, of course, try to indicate a main, constitutive element or field. If one is to see the ND from that kind of perspective, then one could describe the current as "neo-Pagan". The term "New Right" clearly implies a political tone, but it's worth to notice that it was not coined by the New Rightists themselves, but by their contestants.

The creator and simultaneously the most important person of ND is Alain de Benoist, born 11 December 1943. He comes from an aristocratic family. He studied law, as well as philosophy, religious studies on the Parisian university, Sorbonne. He's the author of many books and articles ranging from philosophy to religious studies as well economy. To this day he remains the most prominent personality of the ND.

If one wanted to pinpoint a date of birth of the ND, it would definitely be the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1968, when the GRECE (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne* – The Group of Research and Study of the European Civilization) think-tank was established in Lyon. The think-tank saw as its main goal to change the intellectual climate in France (and later also Europe) through "metapolitics" (one the representatives of ND, Jean-Claude Valla defined the term as "the domain of values which do not concern everyday political questions, but those that indirectly affect

the political consensus”). An important point of reference for the ND is the concept of cultural hegemony by Antonio Gramsci. Just like the Italian Marxist, de Benoist believes that in order to gain political power, one has to gain cultural power first. Social changes are to be possible only by changing the ideological superstructure reigning amongst opinion-forming elites.

De Benoist has a very specific attitude towards religion, especially Christianity of which he is very critical. He considers it inherently intolerant, oppressive, totalitarian and bent on persecution. On the other hand, he is sympathetic towards European Paganism (be it Greek, Roman, Celtic, Slavic, Germanic etc.) which he considers tolerant and unoppressive. De Benoist appreciates the role of the Pagan cultural legacy and its role in shaping European civilization. Furthermore, following Carl Schmitt’s political theology, he considers the Enlightenment not as an antithesis of Christianity, but its secular offshoot. Political liberalism, the idea of progress, human rights, linear conception of time – all these ideas are rooted in Christianity according to de Benoist.

This thesis is concentrated on how de Benoist interprets religion, its role and place in his body of thought. The aim of this work is to show how the French thinker sees the development of religion in Europe, the role of Paganism and Christianity in shaping European history and civilization. Also, how did Christian ideas translate to modern political ideas. Because of overlapping fields of religion, politics, culture and civilization an inter-disciplinary approach (philosophy, religious studies, political science) was applied.

### **Research questions:**

1. What role does religion play in *Nouvelle Droite* body of thought?
2. What role did Christianity play (according to de Benoist) in the history of Europe?
3. What was “Paganism” (according to de Benoist) in pre-Christian Europe and how did it differ from Christianity?
4. What are the long-range consequences of adopting Christianity in Europe and how do they translate into the political sphere?

### **Methodology:**

This thesis is situated mainly in the fields of politology of religion, understood as a sub-discipline of religious studies and also philosophy of religion.

The object of analysis are the source texts of ND, especially the oeuvre of de Benoist. Because of the fact that ND is a movement that functions to this day it was necessary to establish a time period of its history for analysis: starting at 1968 (the year of GRECE's creation) and ending at 2006 (the year of de Benoist's last important book on religion – *Jésus et ses frères*). The analysis consists of three levels. The first one is the analysis of de Benoist's texts (especially the ones concerning religion) and also ND representatives that follow his train of thought. The second level is the analysis of interviews with de Benoist (in order to precise the content of his books). The third level consists of questions asked directly to de Benoist.

A hermeneutical approach was applied in the thesis in order to unveil the sense of de Benoist's works and to show its links with other texts of ND and other intellectual currents to which he refers to. In contrast to most of the research on ND (which treated the current as strictly political), an anti-reductionist perspective was adopted. However, only questions concerning religion were analyzed thoroughly – issues such as urban sociology, exact sciences were omitted.

Also, a comparative method was applied in order to compare ND with related or similar intellectual currents.

### **Outline of the works' structure:**

The first chapter is basically an intellectual biography of de Benoist – the path of his intellectual development up until the creation of GRECE. The second chapter outlines ND's ideological basics and also shows its evolution in time. The third chapter outlines "Paganism" as understood by de Benoist. The fourth chapter concerns the interpretations of Christianity in New Right thought. The fifth chapter outlines ND's political theology – how New Right "Paganism" translates to the political sphere. The sixth chapter is about ND's view of Islam. The seventh, and final, chapter has a comparative angle – ND is compared to other similar intellectual currents.

### **State of research:**

The most comprehensive research on the thought of de Benoist is undoubtedly P. A. Taguieff's *Sur la Nouvelle Droite* (1994). In French language the doctoral thesis *Les paganismes de la Nouvelle Droite (1980-2004)* by S. Francois (2005) and *Les intellectuels de la Nouvelle Droite et la religion. Histoire et idéologie d'un antichristianisme de droite (1968-2001)* by O. Moosa are of note. In English language, worth noting are: *Where have all the fascists gone?* and *Rethinking the*

*French New Right. Alternatives to modernity* by T. Bar-On, *Against Democracy and Equality – the European New Right* (1990) by T. Sunić, and *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe* (2013) by M. O'Meara. In Poland ND is not well researched – merely a handful of articles have been written, mostly not scientific, i.e. *Przeciwko równości i demokracji* („Myśl Polska”, 1993) by J. Tomaszewicz, *Nowa Prawica, Nowa Kultura, Nowe Pogaństwo* (Frona, 1997) by M. Konopko, *Wybieramy «trzecią drogę». Alain de Benoist o «dekolonizacji Europy»* (Templum Novum, 2012) by R. Mozgól, *Europejska Nowa Prawica i perspektywa białoruska* (Pressje, 2010) by A. Dziermant, *Alain de Benoist. Ponad lewicą i prawicą* („Pressje”, 2019) by K. Tyszka-Drozdowski, an interview with A. Wielomski („Odmrocze”, nr 8/91) and also an interview with de Benoist himself conducted by yours truly (Trygław, 2015). In terms of strictly scientific articles, worthy of note are: *Alain de Benoist i Francuska Nowa Prawica – twórcy prawicowej strategii metapolitycznej* („Przegląd Politologiczny”, 2003) by J. Stobiecki and four articles by yours truly: *Od tradycjonalizmu do futuryzmu. Archeofuturyzm Guillaume'a Faye'a* („Athenaeum”, 2018), *Demokracja organiczna Alaina de Benoist jako alternatywa dla globalistycznej demokracji liberalnej*, („Politeja”, 2019), *Prawa człowieka – religia obywatelska Zachodu. Perspektywa Europejskiej Nowej Prawicy* („Athenaeum”, 2020) and *Bunt przeciwko jednobiegunowemu światu, czyli antykolonializm „z prawa”. Perspektywa Nowej Prawicy Alaina de Benoist* („Społeczeństwo i Polityka”, 2020). De Benoist's works were translated to other languages (English, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian) but not one in Polish language. There is still no scientific book about the French thinker written in Polish.

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