

**Babeş-Bolyai University  
Faculty of Reformed Theology  
Ecumene Doctoral School**

**Counseling families of mixed nationality and mixed  
denomination in the Hungarian churches in Transylvania**

**PhD thesis summary**

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**Keywords:** marital counseling, family counseling, mixed family, pastoral psychology, mixed marriage, mixed nationality

## **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the research work is that the multicultural and multid denominational families, because of their specific state are facing more problems, so they need specific attention and help. The goal of the thesis is to explore these specific problems and to find those helping methods of counseling mixed families that are the most effective in such cases.

The research domain is the family counseling task of the Church. Religion and culture many times religion and nationality are linked together. The Churches not only have a greater responsibility for families, but have a more natural access to the life of the families than clinical counseling, at least to those that are active members of the church.

## **1. Introduction**

The first few chapters of the research work are mostly theoretical. The first chapter deals with the importance of the subject, the research methods and the definition of keywords. The second chapter is about the identity and dynamics of the mixed families. It is important to understand those processes that influence the forming of identity. The next chapter focuses on the factors that played an important role in the development of mixed marriages in the last twenty years in Transylvania, what cultural, sociological, ethnopolitical and other factors influenced the evolution of mixed marriages. In the fourth chapter we find the theology of counseling the mixed marriages, the biblical passages relating to this, the interpretation of these texts in the history of the Church, and the attitude of the Churches today.

The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter enlists those psychotherapeutic theories which are useful or apply in the case of mixed families, then the aspects of pastoral psychology and the practical parts of the counseling. In chapter 6 I would like to explore and evaluate the practice of families of the Hungarian churches in Transylvania with the help of the questionnaires. The studied churches are the following: Roman-Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran and Unitarian. At the end of the thesis I will draw practical conclusions that contribute to the professional development of the theory and practice of family counseling.

The practical part of the thesis is based on the results of two questionnaires, which were sent to the ministers of the above mentioned denominations, and to the church members which live in mixed marriage. This unique study focuses mostly on the western counties of Transylvania. The sample is from five counties: Salaj, Satu-Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timis. The results and the statistics used in this thesis underline the importance of this subject.

In our pluralistic society the different cultures are interacting more and more frequently. This interaction is the result of globalization, because by the decrease of the distances (travel, information flow) cultures came closer to each other. The World in which we live becomes more and more multicultural, and proportional with it increases the interaction, mixing and war of the cultures. This situation challenges us, the big question is that are we able to know, understand and moderate the encounter and homeostasis of the cultural diversity, not only to avoid the conflicts of it but to make it useful and effective for both the individuals and the society.

The chances of the development of mixed marriages depend of the extent of acceptance or rejection of nationalities involved. There are cultures and ethnic groups that are distanced, other are close to each other. The same is with the different religions in the case of mixed religious couples. Mixed marriage is a complex phenomenon which is determined by various factors that interact in the involute process of interaction of the two nationalities, language and culture.

Through the history multicultural people were considered as peripherals, and seen as problematic persons who always have to apply so they can live in two cultures, in two ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> Park even thought that these people are directly doomed to the inability of social and psychological integration because of their marginalized status.<sup>2</sup> In the last few decades the opinion about people with multicultural background was modified. The status of mixed nationality of mixed race was redefined and they are not considered as disadvantages, in contrary many of them live with pride because they are different and unique.<sup>3</sup> They have strength by their origin which those from homogenous background do not possess, or they learn them only later.

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<sup>1</sup> M. E. Campbell and J. Eggerling-Boeck: *What about the children? The psychological and social well-being of multiracial adolescents*, In: *Sociological Quarterly*, 47, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Park: *Human migration and the marginal man*, In: *American Journal of Sociology*, 1928/33.

<sup>3</sup> A. M. Lopez: *Mixed-race School-age Children - A summary of Census 2000*, In: *Educational Researcher*, 2003/32, p. 25.

These people through the interaction with family members and friends with different background are encouraged and motivated to accept and integrate all the elements of their cultural background. This is the reason that people with multicultural competence have a greater capacity for tolerance and acceptance than those who do not have this kind of experience. According to Harris<sup>4</sup> people from families with more than one nationality are able to identify more aspects of a situation, which helps them to see different sides of a certain conflict.

Thus the situation of the mixed families is two-sided, it has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is in the possibility to benefit from the support of two background groups and to feel at home in two groups, or at least they have a chance for this. The disadvantage is that this situation means multiple works, more coordination and more sources of conflict. This double situation can mean double profit or double burden, which can cause joy or inconvenience.

Not only the marriage of those with different nationality or religion makes mixed marriage, there are other differences than lingual and denominational. Such can be the social status that comes from origin, financial status, educational and professional differences, differences that comes from the culture in which were raised, rural or urban origin, or the alterations of habits in the family of origin. We can mention here the age difference between the couples, or the physical disability of one of the mates. Mixed families are formed through divorce and remarriage, “patchwork-families”, in which we find a very complex dynamics.

Families are “mixed” compared to each other because we see so many types and forms of family in the everyday life, besides the families of couples with children there are married couples without children, singles, widows whom we consider families if they have their own separate household. There are families with single parents, and we did not even mention the modern alternatives of family, cohabitation or relationships based on contract. In this thesis the expression of mixed marriage or family is used only in the sense of nationality and religion.

## **2. The identity and dynamics of the families with mixed nationality and mixed denomination**

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Harris: *Multiracial student – what should counsellors need to know*, In: *Ericdigest*, 2003. 09.<http://www.ericdigests.org/2005-2/multiracial.html> (Accessed: 2012.09.17.)

It is generally thought that for the children in mixed families it is difficult to understand who they are, but this does not lead to schizophrenic identity, even in the case when both national effects are the same. Children with mixed origin are best identified as “double national” or “bicultural” if they are in a healthy relationship with the both sides of their family and its both cultures. Mixed or “double” identity is possible, not only in a way that the two identities alternate, but they can form a whole unity. This should be the goal to achieve with the children in mixed families. The parents have a major role in this, depending on their aim that they wish, or are able to achieve a “mixed parent” identity.

This process is complex in the practical life, because in every case exists in different context with different people, so the influencing forces are different too. The result in most cases is assimilation and the members of minorities takes over the identity of the dominant group. The models developing in the mixed marriages can convey the possibility of identity loss, which leads to unstable value structure, identity dilemmas or the identity crisis. In many of the mixed families the parents cannot or do not want to clearly determine the nationality of their children. This indicates the identity crisis and dilemmas in many of the mixed families. It can also indicate the efforts of finding compromise for the continuity of the marriage and also the intention to find a balance between the cultures which is necessary for survival.

Choosing an identity conveys values, and when values are exclusive mixed or double identity does not develops. In the case of origin from mixed family there is the dilemma of choosing which group’s to be loyal. The everyday life-stories shoes that most of them choose assimilation, some of them live like foreigners in the culture of the majority, and there are a few who try to create a balance between keeping their culture and integration into the main culture. Parents do not have a main role in choosing the religious affiliation, some times even the national, but in the process of this decision other environmental, cultural and traditional factors prevail (grandparents, extended family, neighbors, friends and colleges).

The social context is a challenge for children with mixed origin because they have to keep up with more than one culture, but at the same time they have more flexible life conditions and more options. Furthermore the use of both languages in the family indicates the intention of multicultural cohesion inside the family. An individual can affiliate to more than one social group. In hybrid context this is unavoidable and one person can be classified automatically in many different groups some times in spite of ones will.

Thus in summary the development of the identity of mixed families from ethnic and national viewpoint is affected by many factors. There are possibilities and conditions which are determined, and there are options and directions which are conditioned by the decision of the person, or by the influence of others. Furthermore there are advantages and disadvantages which those who are planning to live in a mixed marriage need to be taken in account. Having two cultures can be a disadvantage because it makes harder to find the necessary balance, and the advantage is in variety of the options and multiple possibilities.

### **3. Factors determining ethnically mixed marriages in the last 20 years in Transylvania**

#### **3.1. Cultural factors**

The primary determining factor is the context of the local and extended culture. Starting from the traditions and habits of the family to the international trends many factors intervene in the development or the impediment of the mixed marriages. Religious bonding (or the lack of it) is a determining factor. Other influencing factors are ethnic affiliation and identity, the ethnic structure of the territory, the composition of the nationalities in a country, and that the minorities are indigenous or immigrants in a certain area.

There are cultures and cultural traditions that are more open or more closed. The same is with the religious confessions there are huge differences between the strict exclusive views and the tolerant religious understandings. The distance of prestige can be an encouraging or discouraging factor, and also depends on which historical period do we study the mixed marriages, which always existed since there are people with different culture and nationality on this world.

The Carpathian Basin was populated by people who belonged to different ethnic groups and religions. This context was an ideal soil for the mixed marriages. In the past the social norms and structures held back the engender of mixed marriages, but these norms were weakened by the time. According to the measure of assimilation any degree of mixed marriage is possible, starting from the mild differences to the extreme differences of the language and origin.

In the case of every couple there is a need for alignment but in the relationship of those with different nationality this is intensified because of the bigger cultural differences. Mixed families need to bridge many differences, which suppose a kind of “cultural



relativism”, which means the ability to see others habits and beliefs through their eyes in their own context, and not ours.

The last twenty years meant the strong acceleration of globalization for us, and as a result of it there came the need of pluralism. The possibility of social mobilization increased, which opened new perspectives and overwrote the development of mixed marriages. The economic development, the development of the infrastructure and communication made possible for people to travel farther, to make acquaintances and to keep the relationships, which means that the mate selection is not restricted to a narrow geographical area. The decrease of distances and the multiplication of possibilities untenably caused the transformation of the local traditions and habits, which in many case brought loss of moral values or uncertainty.

It is also a key question that in this situation which ethno-cultural group can grants the more modern perspective, carrier and network of relationship. Mixed marriages appear frequently in the places where the Hungarian language and culture is marginalized and lose ground in the public social life and does not contribute to the social and economic life of the individuals and groups. This circumstance intensifies the unbalance of socialization inside the marriage which ends in the assimilation with the majority.

Mate choice is an individual behavior but there social cultural and political conditions are expressed in it too. As the intermarriage between the nationalities increase, the cultural closure becomes more open. The social openness is mutually retroactive to the increase of the number of mixed marriages. Where the social distances are considered smaller the rate of the mixed marriages are higher because the couples face fewer objective and subjective obstacles, need less accommodation and they do not feel this as a burden. Thus the expression, that the measure of the ethnic homogamy/heterogamy is the “barometer” of the openness of a society.

### 3.2. Sociological factors

The ethno-demographic relationship is a very important factor concerning heterogamous mate selection. So to say the lower is the rage of the Hungarians in a certain country the more frequent is the heterogamous mate choice. According to Kiss Tamás<sup>5</sup> in Transylvania, 17-20% of the Hungarians who married in 2010 selected mates with other

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<sup>5</sup> Kiss Tamás: *Népszámlálás 2011 - folyamatok és (köz)politikai irányok* [Census 2011 – processes and public political directions], In: *Magyar kisebbség*, 2010, 3/4, p. 10.

nationality. The rate is even higher in the case of all existing marriages. According to Vetési László<sup>6</sup> in 2002 30% of all the Hungarians lived in mixed marriage (with different languages).

The probability for a Hungarian person to find a Hungarian mate and the same time to fit to the other criteria of mate selection (look, status, personality etc.) is depending on the ethno-demographic structure of the territory. In the diaspora there is little chance for this, but in the Hungarian populated area theoretically they have all the chances. This idea is consistent with the professional statement that “The ethnic homogamy is determined structurally by the satisfiability of the non-ethnic preferences that prevail at the process of mate selection inside the ethnic group.”<sup>7</sup>

Assimilation and the mixed marriages are influenced not only by the rate of the minority, but by the circumstance that the minority at what extent lives in block or scattered. At this point we need to distinguish people in rural or urban area, and also between small towns and cities. In the villages and towns it is easier to cultivate the community life and relationships than in the cities. Though many times we see a reversed situation because in the depopulating villages there is less and less possible to keep the minority culture, organizing education is difficult and the jobs are limited. This situation do not favors homogamy, but mixed marriages are encouraged in cities by the schools, jobs and friends, especially if there is no possibility (or strong will) for protecting the environment of the mother language.

We need to distinguish between two types of minority, the indigenous and the immigrant minority. In Transylvania the first type is characteristic, but in the future the second needs to be taken in account too. According to Vetési<sup>8</sup> out of four mixed marriages just in one family remain the children Hungarian. This is counted for the whole country including the counties with Hungarian majority, and in the diaspora, in Romanian-Hungarian marriages in almost none of the cases happens that the child chooses to be Hungarian.

The other sociological factors affecting mixed marriages are emigration and depopulation, also the decreasing of nativity. One interesting aspect of the statistical

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<sup>6</sup> Vetési László: *Házasságban élni - és égni?* [To live –and burn in marriage], <http://www.diaszporaalapitvany.ro/data/tanulmanyok/dolgozatok/jegyzetek-a-vegyes-hazassagrol.pdf> (Accessed: 2015.11.12.)

<sup>7</sup> Matthijs Kalmijn: *Intermarriage and Homogamy - Causes, Patterns, Trends*. In: *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24, 1998, p. 397.

<sup>8</sup> Vetési: *Házasságban élni – és égni?* 2. o.

studies is that the rate of mixed marriage is higher among people with higher education, almost double comparing to those with basic education.<sup>9</sup> We also can note that the phenomenon of mixed marriage is present in every social layer, and in every combination.

### 3.3. Ethno-political factors

From the politic point of view nationalist rhetoric creates tensions, which affects the development of mixed marriages. Peaceful coexistence favors and the national tensions hinder the amalgamation between the nationalities. A minority group is affected negatively not only by the presence of the national tensions, but by the lack of it too, because in the peaceful symbiosis, the chance for assimilation is increased. As a result of frequent interaction the national identity is weakened and so the need for self-definition. The frequent tensions lead to discrimination which ends in marginalization of the minority and economic disadvantages. In the political environment where the rights and otherness of minorities are not acknowledged, discriminated people chose to leave or assimilate. The ethnically mixed marriage offers an option for these.

From the fact of mixed origin we do not have to automatically think of sociological hybridity. According to Kiss and Csata<sup>10</sup> studying the prognoses of Hungarian population, note that in Transylvania there are some social mechanisms that compels people with mixed origin to choose one or the other ethnic category. In Transylvania both the Hungarian and Romanian ethnicity have clear markers which are defined by its national ideology and institutional system. In the case of mixed identity these meanings are missing, there are no institutions in which they could be embedded. The mixed couples are under the necessity to choose in subjects like: in which church to have the marriage ceremony, the name and religion of the children, language of the school, etc.

The multiple origins usually do not result in a stronger identity, but the opposite it creates uncertainty. One expression of this uncertainty is when one declares different mother language and nationality at the census. The cause of this difference is the

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<sup>9</sup> Gyurgyík László, Horváth István, Kiss Tamás: *Demográfiai folyamatok, etno-kulturális és társadalmi reprodukció* [Demographical processes, ethno-cultural and social reproduction], In: Bitskei Botond (ed.): *Határon túli magyarság a 21. században*, Köztársasági Elnöki Hivatal, Bud. 2010. p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> Kiss Tamás – Csata István: *A magyar népesség előreszámításának lehetőségei Erdélyben* [The possibility of prognoses of the Hungarian population in Transylvania], In: *Demográfia*, KSH Népeségtudományi Kutatóintézet, 4/2007. p. 375.

assimilation which means the end of the “hybrid” category.<sup>11</sup> Obviously the language difference is present in the mixed families, which is the main catalyst of assimilation, preceding the assimilative effect of the socialization of dominant language.

Mixed marriage theoretically means that couples accept the differences of habits coming from ethnic differences, and undertake the relationship with the family and relatives of each other. At the same time this means that there is less adherence to the traditions of their own community, their group identity is weakened and their origin becomes less important for them. In this sense their tolerance causes “national indifference”.<sup>12</sup> For this reason the minority groups to maintain their cultural specificity support endogamy in actively. One of the main reasons of national mixing is that the national interests are overwritten by the individual and emotional interests of the person. Young people by the marriage aspire to maintain or raise their social status.

### 3.4. Psycholinguistic factors

In order to create a mixed marriage between people with different language, there must be a common language, which means at least one of them needs to speak the language of the other. The Hungarians In Transylvania learn the language of the country too, but the Romanian speaking people learn a minimal Hungarian vocabulary only if they live among Hungarian majority. In the mixed marriages the common (Romanian) language becomes the dominant disadvantaging the Hungarian.

Several decades ago the monolingualism was considered ideal, today this is considered aberration<sup>13</sup> and multilingualism is considered normal.<sup>14</sup> Till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century bilingualism was considered even harmful for the cognitive development of the children, later they spoke about the neutral effects of it and the latest studies certify the advantage of it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ablonczy Balázs – Bárdi Nándor: *Határon túli magyarok - mérleg, esély, jövő* [Hungarians across the border - balance, chances, future], In: Bitskei Botond (ed.): *Határon túli magyarság a 21. században*, Köztársasági Elnöki Hivatal, Bud. 2010. p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Hoóz István: *A nyelvi asszimiláció és a házasságkötés* [Linguistic assimilation and marriage] In: *Statisztikai Szemle*, 2002/12, p. 1091.

<sup>13</sup> John Edwards: *Foundations of Bilingualism*, In: Tej Bhatia and William Ritchie: *The Handbook of Bilingualism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2006. p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Göncz Lajos: *A vajdasági magyarok kétnyelvűsége – nyelvpszichológiai vonatkozások* [The bilingualism of the Hungarians from Voivodina], Magyarorságtudományos Társaság és MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Szabadka, 2004, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> C. Baker: *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. Multilingual Matters Ltd., Clevedon. 2006.

It is considered linguistically mixed family where the language of the mates is different. It is so with the families where the language of the parents is the same, but different from the dominant language of the area. When there are more generations in a household it can enrich the composition of the languages used in the family. The grandparents can play a role in the development of the bilingualism of the children.

Couples living in mixed marriage elaborate a specific rule of language use, which is important for the children raised in the family. Between the couples with different language there is a process of equalization of language use which transforms the language of both. This can be a one way or a two way process. When only one of the mates is bilingual this process is unidirectional, and the common language becomes exclusive, especially if that is the dominant. It is rare to see equal language effects.

After the language of the parents, the second most important factor is the language of the school. If the children do not study in the dominant language of the family then they will start to communicate in this language between them, so the distance between the two languages increases. The use of media also affects the language and can slow down or speed up the linguistic assimilation,<sup>16</sup> depending on which language is favored during watching TV, listening to the radio or reading a magazine.

According to Navracsics<sup>17</sup> the linguistic configuration of bilingual people is different from the monolinguals. In their speaking we can notice the interaction of the two languages. They make errors in syntax and in the order of the words, or switch to the other language in case of a word or sentence without noticing it. In forming the sentences one of the languages is the matrix (primary) language, and the other is the embedded (secondary) language, but still active during speaking.

We can distinguish two types of bilingual system, the coordinate and the mixed one. The coordinate (or associate) bilingualism is formed in the early childhood. The mixed (called also alternate) is formed later, in school or when the familial and institutional education differ. In the second case the primary language remains dominant and the information received through the second language connects through this to the interpersonal reality. In the case of coordinate bilingualism the linguistic repertoire of

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<sup>16</sup> M. Cormack: *The media and language maintenance*. In: M. Cormack and N. Hourigan (eds.): *Minority Language Media: Concepts, Critiques and Case Studies*. Multilingual Matters Ltd., Clevedon, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Navracsics Judit: *A kétnyelvű beszédprodukciónak jellegzetességei* [The characteristics of bilingual speech production], In: *Iskolakultúra* 2010/10., p. 3-17. <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00011/00151/pdf/2010-10.pdf>. p. 3.

minorities expands, while the alternate is damaging the mother language. Language thus is a critical element of identity.

Many degrees of the bilingualism is possible between unequal and balanced bilingualism. The ideal bilingualism forms if both languages are encouraged and learned equally, and in the early childhood, because in this age children handle very well the differences and accommodate easily to the new situations. The positive attitude to the other language is important, because hostile attitude can be an obstacle in developing the bilingualism. We can also note that the challenges of the two languages and cultures do not cause psychological or mental disadvantages, but according to the studies it enhances the skills of concentration and selectivity.

#### **4. The theological approach of mixed marriages**

##### 4.1. The prohibition of mixed marriages in the Old Testament

One of the outstanding characteristics of the Hebrew marriages is the prohibition of marrying with the other nations. This law came into force after the exodus from Egypt when Israel had been forming as a nation. At the same time before that we can notice a fidelity for the own tribe and relatives. On the pages of the Old Testament the prohibition of the mixed marriages are repeated several times, some times as a strong command, other times as a hint that promotes the idea of preserving the nation.

The Torah prohibited this from a very logical reason, for the protection of the nation, especially protecting the religion. A heathen not only came from another nation, but from another God too, and to marry to a stranger in a way meant relationship with his god.<sup>18</sup> The relationship with the idolatrous people conveyed the danger that they can be seduced to idolatry, and if somebody contracted a marriage with a worshipper of the idols, the result of it was that their children ended up worshipping idols. These kinds of mixed marriages were forbidden by God for His chosen people.

In these Old Testament prohibitions we see a triple reason: the emotional opposition, the protection of the lineage and religious identity, finally the purity of the worship of the true God. Many times these ideas are interwoven, forming a strong bond, but we meet quite a lot of exceptions.

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<sup>18</sup> Brian O'Higgins: *Mixed Marriages - The 'Cautions'*, In: *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Sage, 1974/41, p. 206.

#### 4.2. Mixed marriages in the New Testament

Analyzing the texts of the New Testament we can see a paradigm shift in the attitude towards the other nationalities. The exclusivism of the Mosaic law disappeared when the gospel had been spread among the nations and the majority of the Christian churches were not Jewish. Jesus in his teaching and practice went over to the limits of separation and xenophobia, and Peter and Paul the apostles totally bridged the gap between the chosen people and the nations when they understood that “God does not show partiality.” The liberation force of the gospel demolished the walls of the cultural social and gender differences. The new approach and the new situation contributed to the appearance of mixed marriages, which raised new questions.

The Roman law obliged the wives and the slaves to follow their owner’s religion.<sup>19</sup> This became a sensitive point especially for the wives with pagan husband, and it is imaginable that it became a source of tensions. Mixed marriages became inevitable because some members were converted to Christianity and some do not. Paul the apostle quotes the prohibition of Jesus concerning divorce (1Cor 7:10-17) then commands for the believer husbands to not to dismiss their unbeliever wives, and the Christian wives not to forsake their unbeliever husbands if they want to stay. In the difficult question of Christian-pagan mixed marriage, the apostle gives a viable way. His instructions overwrite both the Jewish law and tradition, and both the practice of that time period. He sees these mixed marriages as possibility for mission, which can be the place of sharing love, possibility for testimony and Christian service.

From the viewpoint of counseling the principles and morals of biblical stories can be used in Christian counseling, but with careful interpretation. The exclusivity of Israel cannot be used to support racial, national or religious discrimination. The ancient practice of the New Testament also cannot be interpreted as an example to follow in our days. We have to analyze every mixed marriage separately. We need to focus on both keeping the biblical principles and both on the understanding of the specific context.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Harrington and Mary Ann Getty: *A Korintusiakhoz írt első és második levél* [The first and second epistle to the Corinthians], In: *Szegedi Kommentár – Újszövetség*, Benyik György, webes változat, <http://mek.oszk.hu/00100/00188/html/7korint.htm#korintus>, (Accessed: 2014.12.11.)

#### 4.3. The attitude of the Churches towards religious and national mixing in the last twenty years

The similarity or difference of the religion of the couple plays an important role in the quality and stability of marriage. Lehrer and Chiswick<sup>20</sup> in their representative study shows that couples with same religion have a more satisfying marriage than couples with religious heterogamy. They also observed that marriages with bigger religious difference are more instable, especially if one of the mates is not religious at all or is an atheist.

It is a presupposition and the justifiable fear of the Churches that mixed marriages have a secularizing effect. They see it a priori as weaker religious commitment, which results in even a weaker commitment, especially concerning the faith of the children. Next to the fear of alienation from the church there is the fear of losing the members. This is a danger in both the case of mixed nationality and mixed denomination, which can lead to tension or rivalry between churches. The real reason of the mixed marriage many times is linked to the weak relationship with the church and the lack of spiritual life. These are in a circle-like interaction, the spirituality affects the relationship with the church and the commitment to the church affects the spirituality of the person.

The Catholic Church has a well elaborated theology of marriage and has detailed specifications for mixed marriages. These rules give direction primarily for priests and control the marriage between a catholic and a non-Catholic. These specific rules are based on the historic traditions of the Catholic Church and on the principles that were formulated by the councils and papal encyclicals.

According to the official catholic standpoint, mixed marriage is not recommended because it creates obstacles and problems in the marital unity, in the accord in faith and in the practice of religion, at the same time the raising of the children becomes problematic. They acknowledge (do not consider invalid) the contracted mixed marriages, which is a result of the religious diversity and the division among the Christians. The Catholic Church acknowledges the freedom of decision and the right for marriage and childbirth of people. They admit that the contracted mixed marriages need to be respected, offer them pastoral attention and help as it is possible.

The attitude of the Reformed Church towards interdenominational mixed marriage is tolerant, which is based on the freedom of conscience and the freedom of religious

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<sup>20</sup> E. L. Lehrer & C. U. Chiswick: *Religion as a determinant of marital stability*, In: *Demography*, 1993/30, p. 385-404.



practice. With a typical humanist approach it takes in account the right for free decision, and respects the religious belief or denominational commitment of the non-reformed party. At the level of laws only the mixed marriage of priests is forbidden, except with a Lutheran. This view is typically ecumenical concerning the mixed denominational marriages. In the case of mixed nationality, because of the Hungarian character of it there is a strong national identity, which makes it less tolerant.

The Lutheran Church's attitude follows quite strict principles in dealing with mixed marriages, at the same time takes responsibility for the counseling of their members. It has rules to discipline those who baptize their children in the Catholic Church (because of their mixed marriage), but they make it possible for mixed couples to have the wedding ceremony in the Lutheran Church. Besides the questions of structure and church policy they focus on the faith and counseling of those who prepare for mixed marriage, and they see important to educate young people to have a strong religious commitment.

The Unitarian Church's attitude is typically Universalist, relatively tolerant. They condemn the catholic practice of making pressure on mixed couples to baptize all their children in Catholic faith. Their theological approach respects the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience, takes in account the personal preferences and makes it possible for the Unitarian party to have a marriage ceremony unconditional of the religion of his or her mate.

The Baptist point of view regarding mixed marriages is exclusive, which is based on the basic theological idea that every person needs to repent from his/her sinful nature in which was born, and needs to separate from the immoral world and join a living faith community, which is part of the Body of Christ. This idea is related to one of the basic principle of their creed that only the only the born again Christians can be a member of the church, who confess their decision in the baptism. In such theological context we can understand the basis of rejection of mixed denominational marriages in the theory and practice of the Baptist Church.

Churches were trying to prevent or at least holding back the development of mixed marriages, but because of the existing mixed marriages they were forced to make exceptions and accept them as a reality of the social context. As a conclusion we can say that churches and denominations need rules and principles, but at the same time a readiness to help, and allow exceptions.

## **5. The psychology and counseling of mixed families**

### 5.1. The psychodynamics of mixed marriages

The psychodynamics of mixed families is very complex because as many family so many variation exists. The dynamics of mixed marriage is very similar with the homogamous, but they need more effort because mixed couples need to unify more elements, differences are more drastic, and most of the times mates have different problem solving methods.

We cannot say that mixed marriage is good or bad in itself. The personality and the character of the person define if the marriage and family life is successful or problematic. So we cannot state that mixed marriages are problematic, the same as we cannot say that couples with same culture are successful. Parallel with the negative forces and consequences there are positive forces too that operates to balance the relationship, which in a natural way serves the harmony, or at least the survival.

In many of the mixed marriages we can find a strong marital commitment, which is the result of the hard work they had to invest to bridge the differences and to remain together. They are more dedicated than those with same culture and when they face problems, they do not give up easily. Next to having a greater tolerance for differences they are prepared for difficulties, so they are more indulgent with the mistakes and failures. In these relationships there is more dedication and flexibility, and they become skilled in handling and accepting differences.

### 5.2. Psychotherapeutic theories in counseling mixed marriages and families

With the appearance of the family therapy the systemic approach was rediscovered and became popular. The systems theory is the most useful in understanding and helping families. Actually the mixed families are a composition of different cultural, national and religious interactions; a system of subsystems. As the eco-systemic theory teaches, families and family members are best understood in their biological, psychological, cultural and historical context. This perspective provides a lens for family therapists to discover the useful or harmful transactions between the family members and the environment.

The other useful method in family therapy is the postmodern approach. The advantage of this in counseling families consists in the fact that it takes in account and respects the diverse traditions, stories and beliefs. This approach considers every story as

unique; it does not question their validity and does not seek conformity. The postmodern way of helping families does not aim to reconcile the different beliefs, it does not instruct and it is non-judgmental, which are indispensable in multicultural environment.

### 5.3. The viewpoints of pastoral psychology

It is important to distinguish between faith and religion, between religious denomination and spirituality. Religious categorization defines a person and from this we can conclude the habits, ideology and values, but from the viewpoint of counseling this is a too narrow frame of reference. Religious differences are not expressed only by denominational labels, but there are big differences in the personal significance of religion. As a conclusion we can state that not the difference of the denomination or the homogeneity of it makes a marriage rich or unstable but the measure of the consensus between the mates.

From the pastoral viewpoint it is important to track the developmental cycles for the marriage and family, its milestones and the religious rituals. From the viewpoint of pastoral psychology the premarital counseling has an outstanding importance. It is also important to focus on the education of children and youth in the church. The systematic family visit is one of the most effective preventive counseling. In the case of the mixed couples there is a need for intensified attention and both for the pastor and for the couple preparing for marriage, the premarital counseling represents a very important task.

### 5.4. The practical viewpoints of counseling mixed families

One of the most important elements of counseling is exactly the person of the counselor. The helper heals with his or her personality. The character, skill, experiences and solved or unsolved problems of the counselor are crucial in the effectiveness of counseling. It is vital when counseling intercultural clients that counselors clarify their own cultural background and values. They need to be clear about their own feelings for other nationalities and mixed families, with their own biases prejudices and limits. They need to be aware of the cultural source of their own behavior and develop the skill of empathic understanding towards the diverse clients. It is also important for them to respect and value people from other culture, and set the goal to help the person, not the culture of the person.

The period of the premarital counseling is the best time for a couple to discover and discuss the differences and the dangers they hide. The counselor can initiate an open discussion about the role of the family, the influence of their parents in mate-choice and about the healthy limits between the family members.<sup>21</sup> By this helps them in knowing themselves and knowing each other better, and deepens the knowledge of each others culture. The task of the counselor is no to encourage or discourage their decision of having a mixed marriage, but to help them to see the dangers and the extra work of it, and than let them decide.

At start, with them mixed marriage they receive a stimulating power to overcome the stereotypes, but it also bring to the surface some deep nestled biases that were hidden before. Mixed marriage brings the cultural differences of two people in an “intimate confrontation”.<sup>22</sup> The worldview of both of them has an impact on their relationship, and it is important for the counselor to analyze the expressions of it between the two of them and in the interaction with others. The more distanced are the worldviews, theoretically they create more stress and frustration.

With the birth of the first child the life of the couple is transformed. This affects mixed couples in a special extent, because it brings to the front the differences of their background. The question of disciplining can be the focal point of unresolved philosophical differences, the differences of values or beliefs. Counselors need to encourage the couples to explore their belief about the goal and meaning of marriage. This helps to distinguish between their marriage and previous expectances, and to understand which details are typical in their family of origin.

Parents tend to revert to patterns learned in their childhood, and follow what they received from their parents intentionally or unintentionally. Raising children is the test of how the couple learned to handle the differences between them. In the everyday interaction the parents and family members influence the children’s development of identity in direct and indirect mode, and by this provide the sense of ethnic identity. If a parent denigrates the culture of his mate in front of the child, then the child will not want to be part of that culture. Children raised in mixed families connect to at least two cultures which provide stability and flexibility. In the case of the young people with mixed origin the best help is to help them understand their identity and the complexity of it.

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<sup>21</sup> Tracy Lara and Jill Onedera: *Inter-Religion Marriages*, In: Jill Duba Onedera (ed.): *The Role of Religion in Marriage and Family Counseling*, Routledge, NY, London, 2008, p. 224.

<sup>22</sup> Ken Waldman and Luis Rubalcava: *Psychotherapy with Intercultural Couples - A Contemporary Psychodynamic Approach*, In: *American journal of psychotherapy*, 2005/59(3), p. 229.

As a conclusion, we cannot say that mixed marriages are in risk only because of the ethnic or religious differences, just as the stability of the marriage of the people with same culture is not guaranteed just because they have similar background. The secret of staying and developing together in both cases is in the constructive handling of the differences. Counseling can teach this constructive interaction. This learning starts with the exploration of the differences and their background.

## **6. Own research**

The research study is based on two questionnaires which focus on two target groups: those members of Hungarian churches from Transylvania who live in mixed marriage and the ministers of these churches. The five selected Hungarian denomination are: Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Unitarian and Baptist. The geographical area is limited to the western counties of Transylvania: Satu-Mare, Bihor, Salaj, Arad and Timis.

At the procession of the questionnaires the studied population is divided in three main groups: 1. Mixed nationality but same religion, 2. Mixed religion and same nationality, 3. Mixed religion ad mixed nationality. The two questionnaires complement each other; one studies the subject from the point of view of the priests, and the other focuses on those in mixed marriage. The number of respondents is 149 in the case of couples in mixed marriage, and 98 from the priests.

According to the results of the study, the mixed couples usually face problems from people around them at the beginning of their relationship which affects their relationship even later. This initial tension, what they experienced at the beginning was alleviated later, and their relationship with the extended family improved. Almost half of the respondents reported that they did not have tensions before, and more than half of the rest says that most of the conflicts ceased by the time.

Those who face frequent problems because of their mixed situation are less then 20%, and among them there is only 3% of those who struggle with very frequent problems. Religion is a frequent source of problems for them, but is not the most common. According to the answers most of the respondents speaks the language of his/her mate, their children use both languages and the use of mixed language is not dominant, as we might thought. It is surprising that most of the studied people remained in their religion, and 28% of them are dedicated and active members of their church, 34% of them respect the religious

celebrations and traditions of the other, and there are relatively few who changed their denomination for the other.

Mixed couples receive directions primarily from their priests concerning their questions raised from their nationality and denomination, then from books and other lectures. The rate of help from “other couples” is lower than we expected, which shows that the mixed couples meet rarely and do not share their questions and experiences. This should be initiated in larger churches, where there are many mixed couples.

The church members think that their denomination is more against the religious mixture than to the national. More than half of the respondents agree the viewpoint of their Church, 30% says that they should be more open, 18% thinks that his church’s standpoint is too strict. The majority of the mixed married respondents had never availed the help of the priests, but most of those who tried it reported a great benefit from it. The largest group consists of these who never felt that they need help in this matter.

From the answers of the priests there comes to light that most of the mixed couples are visited by the priests, and few of them go to look for help from them. The majority of the ministers are in a way tolerant for mixed marriages, but there are few who have a totally positive attitude towards it, only 5-7% said that it is very good. A bit more than a quarter of them consider that national mixing is dangerous. We can notice that there is a greater opposition towards mixed nationality than mixed religious marriage.

For fewer than a quarter of the priests it is problematic to deal with mixed families. This is explained by the facts that in the small congregations there are few mixed families, and in some of them there are not at all (so there is no problem with them). The most frequent area in which mixed couples need help is the integration and responsibility in the church, then the questions of raising the children and the problems with the family background and relatives, and finally the marital conflicts.

Looking at the results, it is outstanding that there is a lack of information from theological education concerning the counseling of mixed families, which in the most cases was not complemented by self-education either. The priests do not gain the necessary skills for dealing with mixed families in theoretic way, but through experiences. The opinion of the ministers slightly differ from the official teaching of their Church, some of them expect greater tolerance for couples with mixed denomination, and some of them would like a stricter stand against the ethnic mix-up.

Most of the church members (56% of the respondents) are content with the official viewpoint of their Church but 30% of the thinks that there is a need for greater tolerance,

and 18% says that it is too strict. In the case of the priests, only 2% thinks that it is too strict (in the case of mixed nationality) and 12% in the case of mixed denomination.

One of the hypothesis of the research study is that the children of the mixed couples are more inclined to chose a mate with different nationality (or religion) than those from homogenous families. This idea seems logical for the first sight, but the results of this study do not confirm it. 70% of the respondents had parents with same nationality and same religion, and the parents of the mates of the respondents were in 79% identical.

The research confirms the hypothesis that mixed marriages need more attention, more counseling and more help from the church. This truth is balanced by the antithesis that in the mixed families, people are more aware of the dangers, invest more energy in their relationships and are clear about their multiple tasks. The mixed marriage or family does not mean a disadvantage if the multiple tasks are accepted and solved, in contrary it can be an advantage, especially for children who achieve to learn both languages, double identity and can benefit from the blessings of two nationality and culture.