

## **Connection between Religious Mentality and Life Strategies in a Protestant Community from Sancraiu, Cluj County**

The spiritual currents and awakening movements have affected the Reformed Church also, and following their apparition the religiosity of several community members has changed, their relationship with the transcendent – which earlier was only interesting for them on Sundays or Holidays – has become the basis of their lives. In my dissertation I examined what kind of effects does have such a change in a traditional rural community, how does it modify after the change of mentality the individual and community religious practice, the quality of relationships with the family and the larger community, the structure of everyday life and the relationship towards the local traditions, customs and beliefs. In Transylvania, and especially in the rural localities it is extremely rare for people with intensive religiosity to gather in compact communities, and for these groups to survive longer periods, and to function without breaking out from the traditional Reformed communities. At the location of my research, in the village of Sancraiu, Cluj county, the most characteristic village for the Land of Kalotaszeg, these kind of micro-communities exist since the year 1998, from the time of evangelization session of pastor Jozsef Zimanyi. I thought that the research of these micro-communities from the perspective of the ethnology of religions could be an important objective, analyzing the reformulation of the identity of the people socialized in the traditional cultural system of the village, the change in their life strategies as a consequence of the change of their religiosity.

In the first chapter of the dissertation I make a short review of the awakening movement that appeared in the communities of the Transylvania Reformed Church District, which affect the church life even in our days, and which brought to existence new micro-communities as frameworks for the renewed religious practice, with the purpose of its conservation. The mentality-shift in Sancraiu, and the process of the restructuration of the community is a representative example.

During the presentation of the theoretical bibliography I put the accent mainly over the possibilities of making a typology of religiosity, and I thought it is important to introduce the less ambiguous and very expressive notion of intensive religiosity, which corresponds in the matter of content with the notion of religiosity described by Miklós Tomka with the attributes of: active and endeavored, or called by Gordon Allport internal religiosity, and by Meredith McGuire

sectarian religiosity: being a religiosity, which thrives to perfection and tries to influence basically all the aspect of the individual's life. Therefore I could not avoid reviewing the definition of life strategies.

In the fourth chapter I present a short history of the location of the research, with special accent over the life of the church and the religious life. In the fifth chapter I tried to present the religious practice of the community from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on the reports made by the local Reformed pastors with the goal of the examination of the closer past in order to be able to understand this period, which is extending even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Because the starting point of the dissertation is the evangelization week from 1998, which has contributed to the mostly visible change in the religious mentality of several people of the community, and which shows in an obvious contrast the differences between religious mentalities, in the sixth chapter I synthetize the different ways of reception of this crucial event. In the location of my research the spiritual awakening movement is related to the name of the pastor Jozsef Zimanyi. He was invited in 1998 by the former local pastor for a week of evangelization, to preach in the church daily, according to the order fixed in the earlier years. The guest preacher has used an unusually rough tone in the eyes of the members of the community, focusing the audience's attention on the reflection on their own sins, and inviting them to conversion. At the end he invited those who are inclined into this direction, to remain in the church after the sermon. Those who remained in the church, prayed later for conversion together with the pastor.

After the Saturday church service, the pastor asked everyone, who in earlier days has made the decision to live their lives focused on the teachings of Christ to remain in the church. Those who remained in the church, were divided in groups with ten persons, based on their address, and this way regional bible study groups were created. They have set the day of the week, the periodicity and the location of the meetings (mostly at the house of one of the members), they have set the liturgy and the leading biblical thought. 14 such groups were formed on that day, and today five of them are still functioning, each of them having less than ten members.

The participants recalled dearly the story of the creation of these groups, they were grateful for Jozsef Zimanyi for the foundation of these groups, and they remembered with gratitude some memorable elements of his sermons (which were either a great help in their religious habits, or had a direct effect over the change of their personal religious mentality), but they emphasized

mostly the role of the local pastor in the strengthening of their relationship with the transcendent. The initiative of the local spiritual awakening was also the ideal of the local pastor, who already after his arrival in the community tried mindfully to prepare and to sustain the conversion process even after the evangelization week. His role and that of his follower is determining in the conservation of the layer of the community with intensive religiosity and their meetings.

This focus on the person of the pastor is visible also from the fact, that the members of the bible study groups always expected the pastor to make the biblical introduction, to choose church hymns and to pray loudly, and did not accept gladly the initiative of Jozsef Zimanyi, which was also supported by the local pastor, that the members of the group should choose freely verses from the Bible, about which to speak freely for the others. According to some group members, many of them left the groups mainly because it was too hard for them to speak about the word of God and to pray loudly in front of the others. And even the most exigent members consider these tasks to be hard and above their abilities, therefore – even though the loud prayer is no longer a problem today, and members do not avoid free conversations and interventions over the bible passage – the role of the biblical introduction fell on the pastor, when the time was suitable for it (the change of pastors in 2011).

The formation of the local bible study groups was not accepted by one part of the community. The parish council of the congregation even formulated a resolution with its objection against these small group meetings. The local pastor, who had invited Zimányi, collected in a thick folder all the documents referring to this case (minutes of meetings, official requests and private letters, newspaper articles etc.). In the center of the debate there was the definition of the authentic Reformed identity, and the decision regarding the different approaches came from the difference of emphasis in the interpretation of this identity: should a person stay with the usual traditions or should he/she move towards new habits.

This way the memory of the event is burdened for all of the members of the community. On one hand people considered scandalous the evangelization style and methods of the guest preacher (like inviting people to stay after the liturgy), on the other hand people considered this scandalous reaction exaggerated. Along with the members of the community also several bishops of the Reformed church, and several high authorities of the Transylvanian Reformed theology expressed their different views regarding a lot of questions related to the case. They questioned the necessity of the awakening among the Reformed people, or that of the internal mission, they

were arguing about the necessity of integration of the awakening movements in the life of the church, debating if conversion happened universally or not among those who attend church services, or if the evangelization methods of Zimanyi were adequate or not, and if they were in contradiction with the Reformed religious traditions and principles, or if they were destructive for the communities or not.

The aversion against Zimanyi's awakening movement, formulated on different levels of the church was motivated with the following arguments: it creates the possibility of church schism in the community, neither the Reformed creeds and standards are taken into consideration, nor the ancient church traditions, it leads from the auspices of the church in sectarian directions, people are led in error and get confused, undesired conflicts and tensions emerge, it has theatrical character, it insists over the instant conversion, it works with mass psychosis, the tone and thesaurus of the sermons differs from that used among the Reformed church, it does not respect official church, and its traditions and institutions, it refuses communion with the unconverted, it creates dissent not only among the church community, but also among the Hungarian community, its mentality does not correspond to the Hungarian spirituality.

The discourse of the opposite pole claims that awakening movements are necessary because a lot of church members have only a formal, and not a personal relationship with Christ, and because the results of such movements are remarkable, since they have brought radical changes in the lives of many followers, who left their immoral habits, became active members of the community, but also their individual religious practice has revived, their level of spiritual exigence raised, they became more mindful and faithful Christians.

The modified religious mentality brings changes on different levels of the individual and community lives, their measure and content depends on the events from the life of the individual, his/her family circumstances and it defines also the reflection over the events of his/her own life regarding experiences, their interpretation and description – these may be seen in the presentation from chapter 7.

The members of the bible study groups use similar narrative strategies with the local community, but the main character of their religious identity is revealed after a short time through their remarks and interpretations referring repeatedly on the presence of God. These remarks appear more often, when the individual relates about the experienced miracles, through which the presence of the transcendent could be experienced more intensely. In similar conditions it often

happens that the personal life-episodes are told in a manner, in which the main role or the key role is not of the person's himself, but of God's.

Regarding the own life-episodes, the members of the bible study group network create a heterogeneous group, we cannot say that they belonged to the same social layer neither economically nor based on their social status, their group is homogenous only on the ideological level. The eventual similitudes are to be found only in the way of interpretation of the biographic events, as in the everyday micro-history, how they spend their free time, which is very similar, since they share a common area of interest.

The everyday lives of the people with intensive religious mentality is dominated by the maintenance of the relationship with the transcendent and it insists over the relevant activities both on individual and on community levels, not willing to give up on them.

In places where family worship still exists, men are very rarely undertaking the role of leading these worships, mostly the women have the initiative: they read from a book of sermons or from the Bible, and everyone is praying silently. The individual prayers are mostly similar regarding their content: mornings, during wakeup or before it, they ask for assistance in the everyday activities, and in evenings and bedtime they express their gratitude for the day that passed, and they formulate requests for the next day regarding the family and the actual problems. Reading the sermons in the mornings, reading the Bible, prayer, meditation, singing are all parts of the rituals of individual religious lives, but they apply also separately according to the preferences of the individual also for spending free time.

The members of the bible study groups do not refuse to participate on the other religious events of the community, they attend with endeavor the church services Sundays, usually even in the afternoons, and on Saturdays and Mondays, and also the bible study occasions, which are organized for the community or for the young married couples, and the youngest attend youth meetings. A lot of members sing also in the choir of the church and are members of the women association.

The intensive religiosity means accentuated reflection over the traditional thinking, habits, and earlier lifestyle, or over the earlier social network from the viewpoint of Christian religion and it refuses more intensely the presence of inadequate elements. And yet there is no countercultural attitude and the importance of the local identity is still very high: local tradition values are still values for the members of the bible study groups, and it remains an essential part of their identity

that they are from Sancaiu. This mixture of identities is not in conflict with the role of the religious person, even though the main character of religiosity is dominant.

The supporting networks of relatives and neighbors, which were functioning before the evangelization week remained important also after this, the bible study groups did not take their places, and one cannot affirm that close friendships arose among the group members. But also open confrontation is avoided with people with extremely different opinions.

The relationship with local traditions and beliefs is also changing, especially if the person that chooses to change religiosity is one with a substantial influence in the community: like the pastor, who insists about the intensive religiosity and becomes the spiritual leader of the members in this direction.

The former pastor, Janos Mihaly criticized many local beliefs, marking them “sinful” or “with no Reformed character”. But still I think that a lot of activities based on earlier beliefs disappeared from the community simply because they have lost their functions, and not only because the pastor has insisted on their disappearance. The pastor did not deny the presence of the forces of evil, and even warned everyone to take seriously their dangers, and to be armed against the supernatural negative powers with Bible verses and prayers. This way prayer became not only the way the religious person communicated with the transcendent, even though for those who lived it mostly this way, it provided the sense of protection. These are presented in chapter 8.

In chapter 9 we focus from the spiritual structures toward objects, and in a case study we can see how religiosity appears in the presence and usage of religious objects in homes. The furnishing of the homes of the persons with intensive religiosity reflects their religious endeavor. A significant part of the sacred objects are visible for everyone. These are paintings on the walls, wall carpets, plates and decorative plaques. The other objects are less visible: they keep them under the table cover, in drawers or in other places. My informers are more attracted to literature. The number of books they own is significantly high, mostly religious printings, which they read repeatedly.

My conclusions were based on the interviews with the involved persons, combining information from these interviews with my notes taken from observing participation and from data taken from historical documents.

## Table of contents

1. First steps .....	5
1.1. Raising questions .....	5
1.2. Research methods .....	8
2. History of awakening movements in the Transylvanian Church District.....	11
3. Clarifying notions .....	18
3.1. Religiosity typologies.....	18
3.2. Life strategies, life models .....	20
3.3. Reformed church services .....	21
3.4. The correct Hungarian form of the expression: Christian .....	23
4. Short history of the research location, Sâncraiu, Cluj, county especially regarding church life .....	25
5. Religious life of the community in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century, based on the reports created by the Reformed pastors of Sâncraiu.....	31
5.1. Generation and gender differences regarding church attendance.....	32
5.2. Moral lives of the Reformed persons in the community – in the vision of the pastor .....	34
5.3. Readings of the church members acquired through the local church .....	34
5.4. Interconfessional relations: conflict, parrallelisms, colaboration, tolerance and intolerance .....	35
5.5. The spirituality of the church leaders: pastors, clerks, clergymen, animators (fuglemen, organizers, initiators), individuals.....	37
5.6. Religious associations in the community .....	40
5.7. Spiritual life of the community in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.....	41
5.8. The life of the community in the present .....	44
6. The evangelisation week in 1998 and its effects .....	46
6.1. Objectively about the evangelization week.....	47
6.2. About the event based on the first document created after it .....	48
6.3. Subjective reception. Differences among the narratives about the event. Case study.....	49
6.3.1. Ideological diferences .....	51
6.3.2. Way of expression .....	66
6.3.3. Conclusions .....	67
6.4. The abstract and the context of the „inquisition file”.....	68
6.4.1. Structure of discursive field .....	69
6.4.2. Actors and fields of discourse .....	70
6.4.3. Argumentation.....	74
6.4.4. Strategies.....	75
7. The modified religious mentality .....	76
7.1. Similitudes and differences between the life experiences of the members of the bible study groups.....	77
7.1.1. Shortcomings, losses and traumas.....	77

7.1.2. Religion practice in the family – the family in church practice .....	79
7.1.3. The evangelization as a discussion topic, and its role in the shift of religious mentality .....	81
7.1.4. Narratives regarding religious experience .....	83
7.1.5. Narratives regarding everyday events .....	87
7.1.6. Conclusions .....	90
7.2. Individual and community religious practice .....	90
7.2.1. Community religious practice .....	90
7.2.2. Individual religious practice .....	96
7.2.3. Conclusions .....	99
7.3. The effects of the idological grouping over the relational network between Reformed church members from Sancraiu .....	100
7.3.1. Forming micro-communities .....	101
7.3.2. The role of conflicts in weakening or strenghtening of the relationships .....	103
7.3.3. The situation today .....	105
7.3.4. Conclusions .....	110
7.4. Language. Narrative strategies. Discourses .....	110
8. The religiosity from the perspective of objects. Religious objects in four homes of the village. Case study .....	114
8.2. The owners of the objects .....	114
8.3. The uiverse of the objects .....	115
8.4. Object groups .....	116
8.4.1. Paper based objects with text inscriptions .....	117
8.4.2. Non-paper based objects with text inscriptions .....	118
8.4.3. Paintings and symbols .....	119
8.4.4 Other religious objects .....	120
8.5. The path of the objects .....	121
8.5.1. The creation of the objects .....	121
8.5.2. An object finds its owner .....	122
8.5.3. The place and migration of objects .....	124
8.6. The function of the objects .....	126
8.7. Sentimental links with the objects .....	128
8.8. Conclusions .....	130
9. Change of attitude toward local traditions and beliefs due to the intervention of local pastor János Mihály .....	132
9.1. Rejected beliefs .....	137
9.1.1. „Too much agitation around dead people” .....	137
9.1.2. Fortune-telling .....	140
9.1.3. Hexing .....	142
9.2. The appearance of the forces of evil .....	143
9.3. Protection from the forces of evil .....	145
9.4. Conclusions .....	146
10. Conclusions .....	148



11. The theses of the dissertation .....	159
12. Bibliography .....	163
13. Annexes.....	170