

“Krisztus ajándéka van bennünk.” Pünkösdzimusz moldvai román, roma és csángó közösségekben [“The Gift of Christ is Inside Us” Pentecostalism in Romanian, Roma and Csángó Communities]. By Lehel Peti.

Vallásantropológiai tanulmányok Közép-Kelet-Európából [Religious Anthropological Studies from Central Eastern Europe], Vol. 9. Budapest–Kolozsvár: Balassi – Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2020. 163 pp.

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The chapters of Lehel Peti’s volume focus on the religious lives of three Pentecostal communities in the rural region of Moldavia, in the east of Romania, a country with one of the largest Pentecostal populations in Europe. Being part of a loose network linked by the figure of the central community’s religious leader, their groups differ in size and ethnic background: the central community is ethnically Romanian, with thirty or forty adult members in an Orthodox village of about 3,000 inhabitants, the second is a group of 400 Roma members in another Orthodox village where they make up a quarter of the local Roma population, and the third is a group of seven Csángó families living in a Catholic settlement of 4,600 inhabitants. Their integration to the national Pentecostal organisation also varies greatly: while the Csángó group is completely autonomous and independent of the national organisation, the Roma group is under the control of the regional branch of the Romanian Pentecostal Church, which even holds propriety rights over its church.

Peti’s papers are based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2013–2017 and funded by an ERC project led by Éva Pócs.<sup>1</sup> With the leader of the Csángó community as his key informant, Peti made several shorter and longer trips to the region where he participated in the groups’ ritual events and conducted semi-structured interviews with community members.

While this is an edited volume of Peti’s individual articles as its chapters (four of which have already been published elsewhere), reading it chapter by chapter

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1 ERC Project No. 324214.

brings the reader to a better understanding of the communities and offers more nuanced answers to the questions raised. Naturally, this does not make it a monograph on local Pentecostalism, since Peti only focuses on three key problems related to Pentecostalism, namely conversion, migration, and ritual differences. He studies these issues embedded in their social contexts and in relation to processes of modernisation. While doing so, he is in constant conversation with the key literature on Pentecostalism and charismatic Christian movements,<sup>2</sup> using their models and comparing their findings to his own.

The central issue in the volume—one that all articles address to varying depths—is conversion. As it becomes clear by the end of the book, conversion is also key to understanding the other two issues studied, namely migration, and ritual differences. Peti investigates conversion from various angles. Apart from personal details, conversion stories from the region build on the narrative schemes and tropes known from the international literature on charismatic movements. One of these is that converts emphasise the contrast between their lifestyle before and after turning to God, stressing the moral superiority of the latter. Contrasting their new mentality to the old, narrators underline the positive consequences of their conversions and lend authenticity to their new identity. There are differences though between the groups. In Roma people's narratives, conversion is presented and understood as a successful life strategy to improve one's social status. On the one hand, when talking about their new lifestyle, they explicitly counter negative stereotypes attached to Roma people (for example, by repeatedly emphasising that the level of crime has significantly dropped in Pentecostal Roma communities). On the other hand, they attribute their post-conversion economic success to leaving their former, hedonistic way of life behind. This element is missing from the narratives of non-Roma converts, for whom taking on Pentecostalism has a marginalising effect in their original community and often leads to a drop in social prestige.

Conversion is most often triggered by a personal crisis. Apart from illness, family tragedies, or addiction, migration may also be experienced as such—as shown by many of the conversion narratives. When people live far away from their loved ones and need to cope under unfamiliar social circumstances, Pentecostal groups can offer a supporting environment and the warmth of a community. They may also offer asylum for those who, as relatives of migrant workers, are left at home and must deal with hardships alone. It is therefore not surprising that several members of the communities studied turned to Pentecostalism in a migration situation or were encouraged by a family member involved in migration—although we have no data of the members

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2 E.g., McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics*; Rambo and Farhadian, "Converting: Stages of Religious Change"; Stromberg, *Language and Self-Transformation*.

converted independent of migration. Migration also leads to a growth in the number of Pentecostal communities; it is not uncommon for Pentecostals living abroad to form a new community that stays in loose touch with their home network. As some of the Roma converts point out, a further link between migration and conversion is that it is conversion that renders migration a successful economic strategy precisely because money earned abroad is no longer spent on a hedonistic lifestyle.

Individual conversion processes are best shown in the fourth chapter, which, for me, is probably the most memorable text in the volume. It focuses on the conversions of the leaders of the central and the Csángó communities, which could not be more different. The main argument of this chapter—and probably of the entire volume—is that the circumstances of conversion fundamentally influence how converts see the significance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the way they have developed ritual practices in the groups under their guidance. The central community's leader turned to religion following a series of mystical experiences and saw glossolalia as an organic part of church service, himself regularly exercising it and other charismas. In contrast, the leader of the Csángó group, who met with Christianity in free Christian groups that put less emphasis on charisma and converted to Pentecostalism after a long period marked by lonely meditations and reflections, considered glossolalia as a private religious experience and discouraged his followers from practicing it in public.

This argument is further supported in the last chapter focusing on the role of glossolalia. Here, it is shown that practicing the gifts of the Holy Spirit does not only vary with groups but also differs within them, and that these differences can always be traced back to the members' dissimilar experiences of conversion and exposure to charismatic experiences. This chapter paints a rather dynamic picture of local religious life, revealing the constant interplay between individual and group religiosity and the factors influencing them.

Research on complex social phenomena may never end: there will always be interesting aspects or issues left unexamined or unanswered. This is our case as well: I would be happy to see more publications on the role of women in the lives of these communities beyond the paradox that they have a subordinate role within the church, while often playing a pivotal role in the conversion of their family or immediate environment. It would be interesting to see if they have a say in the formation of the group's religious life, and if they do, what are the informal means at their hands. It would also be interesting to find out in more detail whether Pentecostalism really does overwrite ethnic boundaries. Having read this volume, I am not totally convinced that the Roma are considered fully equal with the other two communities and that they have managed to successfully shed all the negative ethnic stereotypes attached to them.

Overall, Lehel Peti's edited book makes exciting reading and is a valuable scientific contribution that reveals interconnections between conversion, migration, and ritual practice. Thus, it helps us better understand Pentecostalism as a social and religious phenomenon.

## Literature

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