

FEATURES OF ROMA RELIGIOSITY: Is it only mimicry?

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ABSTRACT: We often hear that Romanies are not religious or that, if they appear to be religious, it is only a mask. The academic view on Roma religiosity has held that: "No Gypsy has an idea of submission to any fixed profession of faith... They are Greeks with Greeks, Catholics with Catholics" (Grellmann 1807:58-59). We also have a phrase for this, at least in Hungary: mimicry religiosity. Recent studies have indicated that Romanies, as far back as the 1500's, latched on to life in various Christian churches, and that their religiosity was not only mimicry but was often intrinsic. Additionally, a growing Roma Evangelical Movement also shows an intrinsic religiosity among Romanies. In this study, we would like to present some previously unknown sources about early Romany religiosity, which make it clear that the former academic viewpoint on Roma non-religiosity is not tenable. Next, we would like to present data from our representative sociological research in Hungary, demonstrating that the expansive Romany Evangelical Movement produces radical changes in Roma lifestyle and thinking, rooted in intrinsic religiosity.

KEYWORDS: Romany, Gypsy, religion, religiosity, Christian, church, movement

INTRODUCTION

Do the Romanies have a religion? What was the attitude of Romanies towards Christian religion? These themes have not been researched for a long time. While researchers have spent a great deal of time on other topics, such as history, origins, identity, etc., they have scarcely dealt with this ethnic group's religion and attitude towards religions. This is the point where, as Pál Nagy says, historians just stop and scratch their heads (Nagy 1998:20). Many have said that the main reason for this is a lack of sources (eg. Tóth 2006, Prónai 2000, Nagy 1998, 2004). Unfortunately, the Romanies of the past have left behind absolutely no written records. "The resources on them were created by uncomprehending, negligent and prejudiced environment, and not by them" (Nagy 1998:26). Roma religion beliefs have long been an area of almost no interest to historians, says Tóth (2006:127). Any records we have about Romanies are written by non-Romanies. Hence, these often reflect the viewpoints of non-Romanies rather

than the Romanies' own internal sociological actuality. Accordingly, almost everything that has appeared in Roma studies, books, and articles up to now is about superstitious beliefs, with few links to Christian religiousness or religiosity. And if we find any connecting points with Christian religion, they are negative. Actually, two distinctive approaches have become affiliated with Roma religiosity over the years. These approaches are often blurred: 1) There is no Roma religion; they do not have their own religion or belief-system; or 2) Roma religiosity is only mimicry (it can be only a mask).

In this study, we would like to traverse the substratum of truth regarding these two primary associations. First of all, we would like to show some recently uncovered sources, regarding past Roma religiosity, that provide food for thought on Roma religiousness up to now. Second, we would like to present some findings about Roma religiosity in recent times, particularly that of the Romany Evangelical Movement. During the second part, we will use data from a sociological research conducted in Hungary in 2012, which collected representative data about Romany religiosity in this country. Similar research has never been conducted on this theme previously, so this is the first research to give us representative data¹ about this kind of religiosity.

DID/DO THE ROMANIES HAVE THEIR OWN RELIGION?

Some answers to this question are affirmative. The following authors, for instance, have all presented this point of view: György Rostás-Farkas (2006), Charles Godfrey Leland (1891), Ervin Karsai (1994), Gyula Náday (2000), and Ian Hancock (2001). According to these authors, a Roma religion has existed and is uniquely theirs. The only problem with these statements is the lack of sources. None of these authors refer to sources; none of them built their theory on the basis of facts.

What do the sources present? The first author who wrote a scientific publication concerning Romany religiousness was Samuel Augustini ab Hortis, in 1775 (Augustini 2009). According to his understanding, they had arrived in Hungary at first "certainly" Greek Orthodox, although by his time the majority followed the Roman Catholic faith and only a minority were Protestant. Toppeltinus and Tollius also thought that they were Greek Orthodox upon their arrival in other parts of Europe, and they even boasted about it (Augustini 2009: 244-245).

He declares:

"...they do not have a separate religion, hereabout, they follow the traditions of the country and of those people, among whom they live ...however, concerning their inner-self / inner feelings, they lack science and awareness as well as true empathy and the experience of the divine doctrines and regulations" (Augustini 2009:245)²

H. M. Gottlieb Grellmann, wrote the following, echoing Augustini:

„These people did not bring any particular religion with them from their native country; by which, as the Jews, they could be distinguished among other persons; but regulate themselves, in religious matters, according to the country where they live. Being very inconsistent in their choice of residence, they are likewise so in respect: to religion. No Gypsy has an idea of submission to any fixed profession of faith: it is as easy for him to change his religion, at every new village, as for another person to shift his coat. They suffer themselves to be baptized in Christian countries; among Mohammedans to be circumcised. They are Greeks with Greeks, Catholics with Catholics,

¹ Although a lot of other research is known on this theme, none has used representative data.

² Translations of Hungarian texts are by the present authors.

and again profess themselves to be Protestants, whenever they happen to reside where that is chap" (Grellmann 1807:58-59).

Vekerdi writes:

"It is however, certain, that there is no separate Roma religion and there never has been. ... Religion does not play a significant role in their way of thinking; practically it manifests only in the participation at spectacular church ceremonies (christening, farewell)" (Vekerdi 1974:30-31).

Other authors also confirm that we do not know anything about an original Romani religion. "I never met with anybody that pretended to say what their private faith and religion may be" (Hoyland 1816:25). "They have, as a people, no religion" (Roberts 1836:xvii). "The lack of religious ideas, and the desire of a peculiar system of worship among the Gypsies, constitute remarkable features in the history of this strange people" (Morwood 1885:281-282). "They cannot be said to have a religion of their own" (Greenfields 1977:52).

If we rely only on known sources about the religiousness of Romanies, we have to say that we do not know any kind of religion that would have belonged, or that does now specifically belong to them. If there had ever been such a belief system, by now it surely has been lost in history. The so-called Gypsy religion, or belief-system, or superstitious habits, that authors often suppose constitute Roma religion are really not authentic ethnic beliefs. Instead, they are the product of their social environment, through interaction with contact groups, which truly has been created by Roma and non-Roma coexistence. As Dellal says: "Romani traditions... are complex enough to be mistaken for their own religion" (Dellal 1999). There is no reliable data to the contrary that points to any pre-existent religious elements seeming to trace back to a kind of prior belief (like the distinction between pure and impure). The origins of any such beliefs are not identifiable without other sources. Yet, as noted, there are no sources reflecting this. By comparative analysis, we can make cautious conclusions regarding the influence or integration of other religious systems. However, we cannot say anything for sure; there is too much uncertainty for it be possible to trace backwards to a conceivable religious system that might have had its origins amongst the Romanies. The Romany stories, songs, and most of the myths that can generally be found in ethnographic collections usually have some kind of Christian roots (see, e.g., Bari 2013). And if sometimes the Christian context is questionable, there are no obvious sources that clearly prove another origin (e.g., Indian). Dupcsik draws our attention to the fact that the so-called "ancient tradition" of an archaic Roma religion is merely speculation of some authors, without any evidences (Dupcsik 2009:48).

MIMICRY THEORY AMONG THE ROMANIES IN THE PAST

As we have seen in the previous quotations, the authors were sure that there was not only a lack of an authentic Roma religion, but that the Roma attitude was actively irreligious. A typical summary is Aladár Ballagi's conclusion from 1877: "Based on our own research, just take a look at the history of Gypsies: we can learn from it, that among them not even the torso of faith, superstition, could take root" (Ballagi 1877:144, cited by Vekerdi 1982).

Wislocki Henrik, as one of the most important researchers in Hungary, extrapolated on this thought. He wrote: "As the solace for us is religion or science, for them it is superstition, since none of them can lift his head up from misery to deal with abstract things, for example, religion" (Wislocki 1893:277).

Previous authors soon reached a consensus on the attitude of Romanies to the Christian religions, based on which Antal Herrmann created the term "mimicry-religion" to describe Romany religiosity (Herrmann 1895:48). This term expresses how contemporary researchers

saw the religiousness of the Romanies: they thought that religious acts by Romanies could only be evidence of a mask. This theory had already been accepted.

These ideas about Romas' "notoriously bad attitude" had been quickly snapped up and enlarged. For instance, there are a number of known variations of a story that was widespread throughout Europe, in which Gypsies built a church out of cheese and bacon or, in other versions, out of butter, milk, sausages and all kinds of delicacies, but the dogs (and, in other variations, the Romanies themselves) ate it up shortly thereafter (see Peyster 1887:58, cited by Taylor 2008:1415). According to the story, Gypsies had not had a church since then (Dömötör 1932).

THE ROMANY EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

We must distinguish the early religious movements from the recent one. Namely, today's movement was created and built on an entirely different basis than those of the past. The most fundamental difference between the early religious movements and this recent one is that, while early religious life blended into the local church and was presumably not specific to the Romanies, today's movement is expressly and uniquely ethnically Roma. The second important difference is that the Romany Evangelical Movement is mostly Pentecostal, and the third important difference is that the recent movement is not only local, as was the case in the past, but is countrywide and even worldwide.³

Thomas Acton wrote:

"What is distinctive about Romani Pentecostalism? Precisely that it has become distinctively Romani. This is not to say there is not authentic Romani participation in other faith groups, because there is. Nor am I arguing that the Romani Pentecostal churches are ethnically exclusivist, because most are not, but only within the Pentecostal stream of Christianity do we see denominations that are primarily Romani in their ethnic character and leadership" (Acton 2014:1).

Although the movement started small, in 1951 and in France, some estimates put the current number of Romany members at about one million (Dixon & Dixon 2002, Atanasov 2008:133). The phenomenon has been known as the Gypsy Evangelical Movement or Gypsy Evangelical church.⁴ Some estimates say that 70,000 Gypsies became attached to the movement in the first three decades of its existence. Atanasov writes that there were about 1600 Roma preachers and 400 pastors in France in the year 2000. According to Atanasov's research, the movement was represented in 44 countries in 2008. By that time, in France alone, 130,000 Romanies had converted. Similarly, in Spain, there were 500 Romany churches and more than 2000 pastors, and more than 15% of *gitanos*⁵ were "born again", which is about 100,000 Gypsies altogether. In Great Britain more than 7% of local Gypsies were converted, which is about 1700 people; at about the same time more than a quarter of Finnish Romanies were "born again" into the movement. In Bulgaria, the membership was about 50,000 in 2008 (Atanasov 2008:133, 174). In Hungary, about 20,000 were converted in 2014 (Gyetvai & Rajki 2014). In Romania, based on the data of Gog, we estimate the number of members to be at least 50,000 (Gog 2008:63). Nowadays, the Romany Evangelical Movement has extended all over the world, and predominantly follows the typical Pentecostal pattern.

³ There are further differences between the movements of the past and the one today. However, because of the lack of space we do not present them here.

⁴ Yet they are described as Gypsy/Roma Revival, Gypsy/Romany Pentecostal, and so on.

⁵ The name of the Gypsies in Spain

METHODS

We have researched this area using two methods. First of all, from 2012 to 2014 we investigated old journals and archives, especially ecclesiastical ones. In this way, we found some still-unknown sources,⁶ which may question the classic academic view.

Secondly, we conducted a survey in so-called Roma churches in Hungary from September 2012 to December 2012. Our goal was to collect representative data nationwide and to describe the Romany Evangelical Movement in Hungary, especially from the religious point of view. However, for methodological reasons, not every denomination was included, but only the new Protestant churches.⁷ The main reason behind this is that preliminary studies had shown that most of the churches do not belong to traditional denominations.

One important criterion for selection was that the involved church had to be identified by its leaders and/or by the denomination itself as a Romany church (or as a church with significant Romany membership: the proportion of Romanies had to be at least 10% and at least 10 people).⁸ Each individual interviewee had to be an active church member, had to be at least 16 years old, and had to declare himself/herself Roma.⁹ The churches were not always fully Roma-member churches; however we considered only the Roma membership in the sampling. We found 59.5% of the churches to be wholly Romany-member churches. Another 22% of them had a membership of over 50% Romany people, and only 18.5% of them had less than 50% Romany members. The sampling was carried out by using the lists of church membership, or rosters.¹⁰ Our sample was a one-step systematical sample, in which we considered only the baptized Roma members.

We found 51 denominations that had Romany church/es, and there were 169 Roma Christian churches in Hungary that answered to the description, of which 27 collaborated in the survey.¹¹ Of the 169 churches, 135 responded, which is almost 80% of the total. However, because the cooperation-refusing churches happened to be smaller ones, the population covered about 88% of all possible interviewees. In the aggregate we found 4400 members who met our criteria. We started by polling with 1100 questionnaires and, after sorting and proofing, we were able to evaluate 705 questionnaires out of the total.¹² Thus, the research is representative of the Romany membership of 27 collaborating Christian denominations' so-called Romany churches.

RELIGIOUSNESS IN THE PAST

According to Thomas Acton, the theory of Roma irreligiousness is no more than the classical *gajo*¹³ academic view, and not the reality (Acton 1997:38; 2014). From newer sources, we know that the Romanies' ecclesiastical religiosity was not necessarily different from the religiosity of their environment (and surely that could not be the case everywhere). It may be hypothesized

⁶ Or not widely known.

⁷ Only exception is the Lutheran Church, because it had clearly identifiable Romany religious groups (in Hungary), and was ready to be involved in research.

⁸ We found that, if in a church the number of Romanies reaches 10% of the membership, the denomination begins to mention it as Romany church.

⁹ We found only one church that was not willing to make a distinction among its membership.

¹⁰ They had to make a Romany roster of all members who defined themselves so.

¹¹ List is in appendix.

¹² The sampling error is max. 3.6% (two sided) at 95% confidence interval.

¹³ The generic name for non-Romanies.

that the quoted conclusions about Roma religiosity are due to the lack of sources or, at times, due to the prejudice of researchers. According to Tóth, this could have happened because the creators of contemporary sources were not interested in Roma religiosity; partly because it was not a problematic question, and partly due to preconceptions (Tóth 2006:127). Up to now very little data was available on the Romany attitude toward Christian religions. Only the archival research of recent years¹⁴ has shown that the religiousness of Gypsies was often not at all different from that of the other people around them. For a long time, we thought it was unlikely that more important events could have happened among Romanies, such as the paternalistic proselytizing and paternalist movements from the end of the 18th century (see Mayall 2009:97-127). We also knew that the first real Gypsy evangelical movement was started by Gypsy Smith at the end of the 19th century.¹⁵ However, our data show that the Romanies were in the churches long before then, and that their own churches and temples had been established in earlier centuries as well, at least in Hungary.

Based on our sources, the first-known entirely Roma church was in Tisza-Ujlak in Hungary (today it is Tiszaújlak, Ukraine). It was a Reformed Church, which even had its own church building built by Romanies, and the temple already existed in 1583. This church building still existed in the second half of the 19th century, at which time the membership was 180 people (Szabó 1862). This source is the earliest known to consider Roma religiousness, and shows that some Roma groups may have religiously integrated into their residential area not long after their arrival.¹⁶

The first known Roma pastor in the world was Dávid Grausser, in Hungary, from 1687. He was a Reformed Church priest (Lukács 2013). Through Attila Landauer, we know that Grausser was first a schoolmaster in Gyéresszentkirály and Középpajta, and then, from 1700 onward, was a priest in Ribice, Brád and Kristyor. In 1715 he was already a priest to the Kendeffy family (nobles) in Malomvíz, Hungary (Landauer inquiry in 2014, Szabóné 2012).

We also know of Mihály Császlai, whose ancestry was also Roma. He was a student of the Szatmár Reformed College, and later obtained a master's (magister) degree before 1719 (Lukács 2013).

A source also informs us about Roma György Vajda, who was arrested in 1741 because, together with some noblemen and peasants, he confessed to having Puritan ideas (Tóth 2006:134).¹⁷ To confess to Puritan ideas at that time showed a strong religious commitment.

We can likewise read a report about a "chismatic" religious group in 1767, in Hercegszántó (Hungary), in which some Gypsy couples are found. They were Protestant, and attended church in an other village to practise their religion ("to chismatic Lengyel"), and were condemned by a Catholic writer (Bárh 1999:322-323). At that time, only deeply religiously committed people would undertake a confrontation with the dominant religion.

Somewhat later, another source also demonstrates Roma religiousness in earlier times: the case of János Varga, who was a Reformed Church pastor, also in Tisza-Ujlak. He was a victim of cholera in about 1872-73. Based on contemporary records, we know that he was infected

¹⁴ For instance, research done by Attila Landauer and Gellert Gyetvai.

¹⁵ See Smith, 1902.

¹⁶ The earliest European sources are from the end of the 1300s (Nagy 2004:4).

¹⁷ Original source: Sz-Sz-B.megyei Levéltár, IV.1/b. fasc. 42. nr. 84.

during pastoral work in a Roma settlement, while giving the Lord's Supper to Gypsies (Kalós 1873).

Attila Landauer states that the sources of the second half of the 1700's make clear – primarily in the territories of Transylvania and the Partium – that, in larger and mainly Protestant areas, the Romanies were religiously involved, not only in their everyday life, but also in the life of the Church. It is exciting, in itself, to discover the scandal caused in a predominantly Roma settlement because a Roma man had not taken the Lord's Supper for a long time. Namely, this fact reveals something very important about the settlement: the rest of the Romanies did take the Lord's Supper and thus, it was normal and expected there (Lukács 2013:49-50, Gyetzvai & Rajki 2014). As we move forward through the centuries, the sources become more numerous (see Gyetzvai & Rajki 2014, Acton 1997).

RELIGIOSITY IN THE MOVEMENT

The most important issue related to the religiosity of the Roma population is the determination of how it should be characterized. In the sociology of religion, we distinguish three basic religious types around Christianity, or three ideological fields: professing Christianity, cultural Christianity and secular humanism or atheism (Földvári & Rosta 1998, Tomka 1991:27-29, Hegedűs 2000, Rosta 2000, Riffault 1994, Lambert 1992). Földvári defines the three core types as follows:

"The term 'professing Christianity' is characterized above all by a personal faith in God, with regular visits to religious ceremonies, belonging to a religious community, and characteristically proclaiming the purpose of life is God-centered. The 'cultural Christianity' is characterized by rare religious practice, its belief being uncertain, all of these being associated with the free individual choice of religious and spiritual¹⁸ cultural elements, which could be a typical example of the New Age movement. The 'secular humanism' is characterized by the rejection of religious beliefs and practices" (Földvári 2003:20).

Although there are other approaches in sociology as well, we chose this simple threefold typology because one of the main characteristics of the movement we have researched is its ecclesiastical nature. In our research the members have categorized themselves as a part of a particular religious group¹⁹, practicing a Christian lifestyle, following the regulations of the denomination, and belonging to an active core within the specific denomination.

In the second part of this study, we would like to present data on the present-day features of the religiosity of the Romanies in the movement, in Hungary. The main reason for sharing this data is that, although Romany churches have existed since the mid-20th century (in Hungary from the 1970s), the mimicry-theory is still alive.

¹⁸ Every kind of religious and spiritual element can be involved in this kind of "religiosity", from the eastern mystic to the western Christian. We can imagine it as a religious mix.

¹⁹ These churches are not always officially (legally) registered churches. We found that nearly half of the movement's "denominations" were not previously registered churches, but were autonomous and self-organized.

SOME FEATURES OF THE POPULATION*Gender*

The gender ratio is roughly the same as in the overall population: men are 49.4% of the population, and women are 50.6%. However, there is a significant difference by religious type.²⁰ In non-charismatic churches, the ratio of men is 64.4%, and 35.6% of women. At the same time, in charismatic churches the ratio is more balanced: 48% of men, and 52% of women. Other researchers draw our attention to the fact that, generally, women are more religious (Shermer 2000:83, Indries 2005:10). That considered, these ratios differ from the average among religions, and at the same time the ratio of men in non-charismatic churches is unprecedented.

Age

In the studied population, 8.4% of the membership was 16-20 years old, 18.4% was 21-30 years old, 25.1% was 31-40, 29.1% was 41-50, 14.1% was 51-60, and 4.9% was at least 61 years old. Comparing these data with the 2011 Census,²¹ we find that the membership between age of 16-30 is underrepresented (our data said 26.8% vs. 40% of the population in the census). At the same time, those between the ages of 41-50 were overrepresented (our data said 29.1% vs. 18% in the census). We can say that middle-aged churchgoers are dominant in the churches studied.

Education

16.5% of the membership has not completed even primary school (1.3% did not attend school at all). 57.3% has only a primary school education; 17.4% has vocational education; 7.3% has a high school education; and 1.5% has some kind of higher education. These education ratios are similar to other findings (census 2011, Kemény et al. 2005). The significant difference is that, in the studied religious population, higher education was more common than in other Roma populations (see Rajki 2010). Amongst the church membership, vocational and high school education was twice as likely, while a diploma was three times as likely.

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL CONTENT OF THE ROMA REVIVAL MOVEMENT

Our most important question was: how can we describe the Roma Evangelical Movement's religiousness? Is it intrinsic or not? According to our hypothesis, the religiousness of the examined membership is intrinsic. In Kevin S. Masters' definition, intrinsic religiousness is "a master motive", in which individuals "try to consistently live the religion they believe" (Masters 2013). How can we identify this kind of belief? The population that we examined is genuinely the core of these churches; they are the membership that always participates in worship, and they consistently live the religion they believe.²² Also the denominations expect this from their members. In this sense, we considered internal religiosity, intrinsic religiousness, if the members try to consistently live the religion they believe. When they do it, they pray and read the Bible frequently, feel themselves close to God, etc. At the same time they meet the expectations which are set out by their church.

²⁰ Sign: 0.016. Cramer's V: 0.016

²¹ Based by own analysis of 2011 Census data.

²² And, at the same time, they are almost the same group which makes up the membership of the church. The overlap is nearly complete. Moreover, there are more people in normal worship than in the membership, because in these churches the so-called "seekers" are always there.

PRAYER HABITS

91.6% of the population prays at least once a day, implying a firm religious commitment. 5.4% do it at least once a week, and 2.8% pray only occasionally. We did not find significant differences according to gender, religious type (charismatic or not), ancestry or age. In this way, frequent prayer is a general criterion of religious life in the movement. If we compare these data with the values measured by the National Population Health Survey in 2003, we find a large difference (Indries 2005). Although the frequency of prayer was not measured with the same method,²³ the data can be compared, within limits. For comparison, in Hungary, 52.9% of men never pray or practice religious or spiritual activities. The rate of those who rarely pray is up to one third in both genders. Of women, 36.5% pray frequently, but only 14.5% of men do.

HABITS OF BIBLE READING

Almost two thirds of the respondents (65.5%) declare that they read the Bible daily. Approximately one quarter of them answered with at least once a week, and 8.5% said that they take the Holy Scriptures into their hands only occasionally. Only 2.1% said that they do not read the Bible at all. There is, however, a significant difference²⁴ between charismatic and non-charismatic churches. Two thirds of the respondents in charismatic churches read daily (67.9%), while in other churches the value is 56.9%. The trend is the same if we look at the rates of "once a week" answers: in charismatic groups, it is 24.8%, while in non-charismatic it is 18.9%. The stratum of occasional readers, in this sense, is mainly found in the non-charismatic groups. The Sola Scriptura principle is an accepted basis for both religious types, and includes systematic Bible reading, yet it prevails slightly more in charismatic groups. We are not sure why this is. One theory is that the non-charismatic churches (like Baptist, Adventist, etc.) are more traditional, and the more traditional a church is, the weaker the "daily nutrition" is. There was no significant difference, on the other hand, by gender, age or ancestry. We did find big differences, however, between the overall Hungarian population and the Romany members.

According to the research of TÁRKI in 2008, 53% of the Hungarian adult population never reads the Bible, 27% rarely, and 10% read the Bible a few times a year. The rate of those who read it several times a month, and so might be considered regular readers, is around 10%. Within this group, only 2% read the Holy Scriptures daily. This means about 160,000 people in the entire country, which is about the number of the membership of new-Protestant churches as well (Pecsuk 2009, TÁRKI 2009).

RELIGIOUS "DISTANCE"

Based on the logic of the Bogardus' social distance scale, we measured the approximate distance that is between the respondents and a given religious element, person or transcendent. According to the Sola Scriptura religious frame,²⁵ keeping this distance to a minimum is obligatory. In this sense, religious distance is the distance at which a person allows the sacred one or his representations (God, the Holy Scripture, pastors, etc.) into his/her life. The more

²³ While we asked how many times they pray a week, giving them four options (daily, sometimes a week, only occasionally, never), the OLEF gave them three options (frequently, rarely, never).

²⁴ Sign: 0.000. Cramer's V: 0.166

²⁵ The Sola Scriptura principle is part of the religious framework of the Protestant reformation. It states that any life-principle should be solely grounded in the Holy Scriptures.

you allow God, the Bible, etc., to have a say in your life, the more religious you probably are. Possible distances are shown in Table 1.

Rate of closeness	%
Observe only outwardly	0.4
Have a say in my religious matters only	1.5
Can have a say in my non-religious matters also	18.6
Can ask for the greatest sacrifice	71.1
I am unsure about the answer	8.4
Total	100

TABLE 1: How Close can God get, to the life of the respondent? (N=705)

More than two-thirds of the respondents answered in a deeply religious way (71.1%). Another 18.6% also answered within the “good answer” category. Less than 2% of those questioned show distancing, and 8.4% were unsure about his/her answer. We did not find a significant difference by gender, age, or ancestry.²⁶

Certain comparisons can be made with other data. Although none of them can suit our measured values completely, due to the different methods, they can still serve as good reference points about the religious attitudes of other groups.

According to the survey of TÁRKI, in 2008, only a bit more than a third (39%) of the Hungarian adult population claimed that they had always believed in God, and only 12% declared themselves as converted. In recent decades, the rate of believers has been decreasing: in 1998, 48% still declared themselves as believers. Gerécz finds that the practice of religion and the religious-spiritual commitment is continually getting weaker in Hungary (2014). The membership of the traditional churches has been radically decreasing, according to the censuses. Only the new-Protestant churches were able to increase their membership in the last census period (2001-2011): from 0.89% to 1.60% in the total population. The analyzed gypsy-mission churches belong to this category.

We supposed that the reason for joining the congregation could also allude to intrinsic religiosity (see Table 2).

Main reason for joining	%
Coming with a member of my family	8.0
Attracted by members	6.4
I liked the service (the atmosphere)	35.6
Personality of priest/pastor/missioner	5.4
Grabbed the message/the Bible	42.0
Other (e.g., curiosity)	2.8
Total	100

TABLE 2: What was your main reason for joining the congregation? (N = 705)

42% of respondents indicated that the religious message, the Bible, was the most important reason for joining the congregation. In other words, the spiritual-cognitive need was determinative for seeking a church. This implies seeking to meet internal religious-spiritual needs, rather than mimicry-religiosity.

Many say that Roma people go to church because of the atmosphere (in the charismatic churches). The atmosphere was the primary reason for 35.6%. The mood, however, is not

²⁶ Mainly due to the item numbers.

specifically due to the Roma churches. The heightened mood, emotional music, sermons that deeply affect emotions, emotional self-expression, and so on, are general characteristic elements in Pentecostal churches. At the same time, Romany congregations slightly differ from the general picture. Romanies integrate their own music and some of their own customs into the liturgy, which makes their worship more unique and more attractive to the rest of the Romanies (Lange 2002). Other reasons for joining include the family (8%), the members of the congregation (6.4%), and the personality of pastors/missionaries, who are often also Roma (5.4%).

The effects vary by gender. According to respondents, the Biblical message attracted more men than women (47.5% vs. 36.0%).²⁷ However, women were more strongly affected by the mood in the church than were men (43.1% vs. 29.7%). Currently, we do not know what causes this difference.

We also found differences between church types.²⁸ Our data shows that in non-charismatic churches, joining due to the Bible/message is more typical (62.7% vs. 40%). At the same time, decisions based on atmosphere are more dominant in charismatic churches (37.2% vs. 18.6%).

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN LIFE

Some authors drew our attention to the fact that significant changes can be observed in the lives of Romanies in the movement. However, these studies were local, or their data were not representative, so it was uncertain to what extent or how unique this change was (Péceli & Lukács 2009, Gog 2008, Blasco 2000, Atanasov 2008, Rózsahegyiné 2003, Blasco 2008, Péterfi & Szűcs 2004, Rövid 2012). We wanted to know if this is an isolated, local feature in some churches, or a general phenomenon of the movement.

The question we asked was: What changes were seen most commonly in the Roma/Gypsy people's lives after joining the church? The question was open-ended, and the clusters were aggregated on the basis of the answers. Table 3 shows the response structure.

Type of change	Mean %
Changing ethnic identity	1.5
Release from addiction	23.5
Healing (charismatic healing)	1.0
Better family relationship	4.7
Morality and conversion	19.7
Lifestyle and behavior	48.9
There is no change	0.7
All in	100

TABLE 3: Changes in the lives of the converted – three mentions (% , N = 705)

Only 0.7% said that they do not see any change among the converted Romanies. Life changes were experienced by 99%. Among six categories, the three most dominant are lifestyle and behaviour (48.9%), freedom from some kind of addiction (23.5%), and morality and conversion,

²⁷ Sign: 0.005. Cramer's V: 0.158

²⁸ Sign: 0.002. Cramer's V: 0.133

as the moral aspect (19.7%). Thus, based on our data, the impact of the congregations is significant.

One of the consequences of this change is that the “new life” is combined with a strong new self- (and Roma-) identity. Because of the radical and positive change, Roma identity also becomes stronger. A “good Roma picture” evolves in their minds, which makes members’ ethnical identity stronger. After their conversion, Romanies distinguish between “good Roma” and “bad Roma”. The good Roma is the converted one, whose life is changed, and the bad Roma is the Roma without life-change. They are proud of their changed lives, of the movement, and of its ethnical character. This further reinforces their ethnical identity. They believe that they are connected to a supernatural God who accepts them as Roma, and so – sometimes for the first time in their lives – they can be Roma without shame. All of this creates a new kind of Roma and religious identity (see Gyetvai & Désfalvy 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

What do our data and sources tell us about Romany religiosity? Is/was it only mimicry? We think that our sources and data meet Kevin S. Masters’ definition about intrinsic religiousness as “a master motive”, in which individuals “try to consistently live the religion they believe” (Masters 2013). We are sure that mimicry theory, as the only one way of viewing ancient Roma religiousness, is not tenable henceforth. Our sources show that, early on, there were Roma groups who were religiously integrated with religiously committed attitudes. We do not say that the religiosity of this ethnic group was always close to mainstream Christian religiosity. Rather, we say that it was contradictory when Roma religiousness met Christianity. Based on the sources, we say that – at this meeting point – not only did mimicry religiousness emerge, but intrinsic religiousness did too.

At the same time, we have found that the religiosity of converted Romanies is also often characterized by a deep inner spiritual commitment these days. Based on our data, we say that, in the Romany evangelical movement, religiosity is a frame, a milestone for most Roma who have converted to the movement. A main feature of this is a significant change in life that happens due to religion. The habits of Bible reading, the frequency of prayer, the main reasons for joining the congregation, and the life change all represent this real change in the lives of members. This feature is not only local, among a few isolated individuals, but is a general feature of the movement.

We do not say that there are no other features in the movement that may not be so positive, but we do state that mimicry religiosity is not a characteristic of the movement. The data we have presented indicate that the primary characteristic of the members is intrinsic religiosity.

We do not say that mimicry-religiosity did/does not exist, because it certainly has existed, and in some instances, continues to exist. However, we are saying that Romanies did not *necessarily* differ religiously from their surroundings (neither in the past nor in the present). Sometimes Roma and non-Roma religiousness have been the same or very similar. Roma religiosity had/has its intrinsic religious branches too, which latched/latches on to its religious milieu. Roma religiosity was/is not limited to mimicry-religion.

APPENDIX

The involved denominations and the number of churches in the survey (collaborating denominations are in bold; noncharismatic denominations are marked with italics):

1.	Agapé Gyülekezet	(7)
2.	Ámen Gyülekezet	(1)
3.	Apostoli Pünkösdi Egyház	(1)
4.	Balogh Kálmán-féle közösség	(1)
5.	Bethesda Gyülekezet	(1)
6.	Boldog Isten Gyülekezete	(1)
7.	Budapesti Autonóm Gyülekezet	(1)
8.	Budapesti Teljes Evangéliumi Gyülekezet	(1)
9.	Ébredés Egyháza	(2)
10.	Élő Forrás Roma Gyülekezet	(1)
11.	Élő Kövek Gyülekezet	(10)
12.	Élő Szó Gyülekezet	(2)
13.	Evangéliumi Barátság Egyház	(1)
14.	Evangéliumi Szolnoki Gyülekezet	(1)
15.	Gecsemáné Kert Gyülekezet	(1)
16.	<i>Hetednap Adventista Egyház</i>	<i>(4)</i>
17.	Hit Gyülekezete	(14)
18.	Isten Egyháza	(1)
19.	Isten Gyülekezete Egyesült Pünkösdi Egyház	(3)
20.	Jézus Minden Nemzetért Egyesület	(1)
21.	Keresztény Élet Központ	(12)
22.	Krisztus Nagykövetsége	(1)
23.	Krisztus Szeretete Egyház	(2)
24.	Krisztus Teljessége Gyülekezet	(1)
25.	Magyar Apostoli Gyülekezet	(1)
26.	Magyar Evangéliumi Egyház	(1)
27.	<i>Magyar Katolikus Egyház</i>	<i>(2)</i>
28.	<i>Magyar Unitárius Egyház</i>	<i>(no data available)</i>
29.	Magyar Pünkösdi Egyház	(37)
30.	<i>Magyarországi Református Egyház</i>	<i>(no data available)</i>
31.	<i>Magyarországi Baptista Egyház</i>	<i>(5)</i>
32.	<i>Magyarországi Biblia Szól Egyház</i>	<i>(2)</i>
33.	<i>Magyarországi Church of God</i>	<i>(9)</i>
34.	<i>Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház</i>	<i>(3)</i>
35.	<i>Magyarországi Metodista Egyház</i>	<i>(8)</i>
36.	Magyarországi Szabadkeresztén Gyülekezet	(4)
37.	Maranatha Gyülekezet (vagy Marana Tha Gyülekezet)	(1)
38.	Megnyílt Ajtó Gyülekezet	(1)
39.	Megújult Roma Pünkösdi Hitközség	(3)
40.	Nagykirály Háza Gyülekezet	(1)
41.	Nemzetközi Evangélista Hálózat	(1)
42.	Nemzetközi Keresztény Missziós Egyház	(1)
43.	Omega Pünkösdi Gyülekezetek Hálózata	(3)
44.	Ópályi Gyülekezet	(1)
45.	Potyamo Romani Kaangeri	(1)
46.	Sekina Gyülekezet	<i>(no data available)</i>
47.	Szentlélek Gyülekezet	(1)
48.	Szeretet Hídja Teljes Evangéliumi Keresztény Egyház	(6)
49.	Tüzes Szívek Gyülekezet	(1)
50.	Újszövetség Gyülekezet (vagy Újszövetség Egyháza)	(2)
51.	<i>Üdvöhadereg Szabadegyház</i>	<i>(1)</i>

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