

**The propositions of a (PhD) university thesis**

**The religious life of the settlements**

**in Alsó - Nyárádmente.**

**The ethnographic - antropologic examination of the system of  
connections of religious communities.**

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## **1. The objective of the thesis, the circumscription of the topic**

Among the ethnographic-cultural anthropological investigations the analysis of the religious situation of a particular region or the description of the system of connections between religious communities are well-known enterprises, but they do not necessarily belong to classic ethnographic-cultural-anthropologic examinations.

However, the religious life of the villages in Alsó-Nyárádmente, the region, which is examined in the thesis and the social-ethnic relationships being in connection with it can be included in the specialised literature dealing with the ethnography and the anthropology of religion. In my thesis the refined religious manifestations of the denominations in the villages in Alsó-Nyárádmente and their system of religious cultural-social-ethnic connections are intended to be described. The genre of the thesis primarily belongs to the ethnic (religious-ethnographic) and cultural-anthropologic (religious- anthropologic) literature. As a description it can be attached to specialized research references on ethnography and anthropology, but the latest research results of other fields of science (mainly the sociology of religion) are also consistently applied.

The summary of my investigation results is described in three main chapters, which are separated not only structurally.

They also represent the structural base, the embranchment and the construction of religious multiplicity of Alsó-Nyárádmente in a specific way. The body of the thesis consists of three main parts, which follow the stages of my investigations and fieldworks in the region and their time levels.

The main thematic units dealing with the religious life of the settlements in Alsó-Nyárádmente are the following (1) the examination of assimilative and accultural stages in the religious-ethnic identity of former Greek Catholics (these days they are mainly Reformed or Orthodox) (2) the investigation of small churches and new religious movements which appeared after the political change-over, their connections with the Reformed majority and the Reformed church as a 'social institute' (3) the examination of the effects of Hetednapi Advent Church, which is a new denominational movement of Kalapos Gábor Gypsy community in their everyday life and the effects which generate ethnic border-marking functions in the local Gypsy - Gypsy, Gypsy - Hungarian and Hungarian - Gypsy connections.

Understanding the connection between the religious communities described in the three thematic blocks is provided by the coherent description of the denominations.

The different denominations themselves only partly represent the religious life of Alsó-Nyárádmente. The research results can be shown with the help of the following examples:

a) - in the case of the former Greek Catholic communities, groups and people the different ethnic-national origin is given, their 'hesitant' or 'plastic' identity was created by the dissolution of the simple 'we'

'you' assimilative relation and their denomination is different from that of the majority;

- the connection between the ethnic group and religion is emphasized in this case, more exactly, the ethnic marks were in correlation with the religious marks and later religion became the factor which structured the ethnic minority;

b) – During investigating the small churches and the new religious movements my starting points were the exchanged conditions of the religious-social factors of the major Reformed communities in Alsó - Nyárádmente. Their ethnic self-awareness is /was basically determined by their religion. So the Reformed church integrated and integrates the communities culturally depending on the settlements;

- the small churches and the new religious movements in our region dissolve the ethnic relations, they are multiethnic, in these communities the awareness of belonging to the community can be reached exclusively through sacral experiences;

c) – the Gábor Gypsy community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva as the members of Hetednapi Advent church have different identity strategies and by this religion on one hand the Gábor-Gypsies are integrated towards the major Hungarian society but on the other hand the Gypsies' social-cultural borders are shown to the majority.

The given examples of the embranchment of the thematic blocks raise the question of the connection between ethnicity and religion. The description of the connection between ethnicity and religion is different in the thematic blocks, it is emphasized (the framework of identity constructions of the former Greek Catholics) , the ethnic point of view is less highlighted. (the small churches the religious-social background of the new religious movements) or it is described in a divergent way.(the religious life of the Gypsies in Nyárádkarácsonfalva- border - maintaining strategies, ethnic borders in Hungarian-Gypsy, Gypsy-Hungarian and Gypsy-Gypsy connections).

These three thematic blocks reflect a system which is based on the religious (cultural) knowledge of the people according to their different denominations. This system cannot be understood without the description of the system of connections between culture and the given communities.

In the thesis I am going to react on the variety of religion in the region and the (denominational) cultural differences showing the ethnic correlations in the system of religious connections. The aim of my thesis is the exact explanation of the aspects of religious communities getting over the parallel or permanent parameters of the local religious-ethnic time conditions.

## 2. The introduction of the applied methods

In the thesis Alsó-Nyárárdmente as an ethnographic unit is well-defined, the local communities are specified, which are mainly organised around two villages (communa) according to the Romanian administration. The religious communities are attached to the particular settlements and the settlements (religious denominations) are corresponded to one another paying attention to the spatial and temporal aspects of my fieldworks.

During my fieldworks I was in a special position as a former member of the community being investigated. This position did not prevent me being an investigator and applying a specific attitude - I mean a specific connection between the investigator and the informant- when the anthropologist 'asks', 'inquires', 'listens', 'gives his/her opinion', 'watches' and by all means interprets.

During my fieldworks being the member of the community investigated, getting to know and identifying with the system of norms was an inner cultural condition for me. The difficulties of fieldworks for an anthropologist examining his/her own culture are not the reexploration of the given culture or the rehabilitation of the investigator (it is an interesting learning process) but making the person or the group being examined understand what we are doing, why we are doing it and what our intentions are with it. A person who investigates his/her own culture can easily become a 'stranger' because he/she always asks questions and behaves like anyone outside the 'we know' category so the informants can be distrustful and suspicious to him/her.

My fieldwork techniques and my interviews were strongly influenced by the residence of the target people and target groups, the system of their relations, their social status and the position of their values. The latter two factors were beneficial for me, because I already had previous details about the informants and I was able to place the chosen interviewees in the asynchronous schemes of the social discourses.

In the topic about Greek Catholicism I managed to recognise that in the interviews both the personal and the public life spheres were represented so their publication means that personal questions can become public affairs. In this topic I made an interview only with elderly people whose knowledge connected with public affairs was originated from their age so the interpretations related to the life of the Greek Catholics belong to the open sphere of the public discourse. But in every case I asked the interviewees for their permission to the publication of the interviews. As I had previous details about the community and most interviewees, I made topic-centric, structured and 'path of life' interviews.

During my investigations in the Gábor-Gypsy community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva I applied the above-mentioned fieldwork method which was accounted by the changes in the Gypsy - Gypsy and the Gypsy-Hungarian connections. The traditional customs of the Gypsies in Nyárádkarácsonfalva and their less institutionalized world meant/mean the features of their dissociation. The 'invisible economy' of the Gábor Gypsies in Nyárádkarácsonfalva and the resulting property representation strongly transformed the

system of norms in their own community and created new social borders and the social contacts in the Gypsy - Gypsy and the Hungarian-Gypsy connections were revalued in a completely new local social structure.

My investigations dealing with the religious life of the Gábor Gypsy community were encouraged by my neighbourhood, because my neighbours are Adventist Gypsies, who are appreciated in the local Gypsy community and in the denomination. My friendly relationship with them provided me the opportunity to take photos of them and to ask questions about the inner life of their denomination.

During my investigations I - as a scientist and at the same time the representative of the given culture – paid attention to understanding the public events and customs and to documenting and analysing the facts and placing them in bigger social-scientific connections. The aim of the 'knowledge' obtained during fieldworks is to be equivalent with the goals of cultural anthropologic or ethnographic investigation methods and the picture described by the results of fieldworks should be objective.

### **3. Listing the results as abstracts of the thesis**

In order to prove the scientific results the propositions of the three main parts of the thesis are described emphasizing the points of intersections of the religious-social-cultural systems in the region. So as to examine the propositions of the thesis I specified the necessary concepts related to the ethnography, the anthropology, the sociology and the history of religion and partly theology. I also determined their meaning using them in the description of several denominations.

The goal of the investigations in the Greek Catholic communities in Alsó-Nyárádmente was to prove the alignment pressure put on the ethnic-religious identity of the (former), (Romanian), (Hungarian) Greek Catholic communities. Paying attention to the ideological effects of the historic - political periods in the 19th-20th centuries I examined how the religious identity of the Greek Catholics as a minority group was monopolised by the several political periods and how the religious-ethnic identity of the communities, the families and the people was changed in them.

The question of the investigation of the former Greek Catholics in the region is connected with the examination of the relation between religion and identity. The description of this unit – as an ambition for interpretation-also claims the description of assimilative, accultural, nation-changing and denomination-changing practice. On one hand, the Greek Catholic communities and people being examined by me have double attachment in an ethnic-religious sense (mainly the present Greek Catholics and those who became Orthodox). On the other hand there are Hungarian Reformed people whose ancestors became Reformed earlier and changed their identity. In the local common knowledge being a Greek Catholic (Orthodox) ideologically attracts the stigma of an ethnic origin different from the Hungarian majority (Romanian). In the case of the Greek Catholics in Alsó-Nyárádmente religion also preserves the former

ethnic compound of the particular region.

There were not any conflicts between the Greek Catholics and the Reformed majority in Alsó-Nyárárdmente. The intolerance of the majority towards the Greek Catholics sometimes became stronger from both sides (Romanian and Hungarian), but they were expressed mostly in verbal gestures or in local administrative abuses. The (socio-) cultural projections of the religious-ethnic identity of the Greek Catholics in the region have changed, but they exist even these days and form the local society and the religious life.

Examining the small churches and the new religious movements in the region I wanted to show the new religious-social-cultural syntheses which were created in the last twenty years due to the religious complexity of the region in the process of the religious revival.

In this thematic unit of the thesis the denominational differences are described and the social-ideological-cultural structure following from them. The description of the religious life of the Reformed communities is related to the scientific attitude according to which I analyse them from outside. I consider the effects of the Reformed church and the local social conditions on each other primary. The people in the small churches and the new religious movements came from the Reformed communities in this region. The new conditions of religious life were created in a different way in each settlement. That is why the change of the social structure is different in the settlements.

I do not talk about the Reformed communities and their social conditions or the connection of the weakened Reformed communities and the sects as a theologian. I try to write down the religious-social phenomena observed and explained during my fieldworks. I do not intend to analyse the inner system of the Reformed communities. In the relevant chapter of the thesis the reactions of the major Reformed communities on the recent quick religious-social changes are shown. I do not express an opinion on the social responsibility of the religious communities. In the background of my analysis and statements there is the experience of an investigator examining culture. From the regional small churches and the new religious movements I am going to introduce the Baptist congregation in Fintaháza, which is the branch of the Hungarian Baptist Church in Marosvásárhely and the Új Kezdet and the Jehova Tanúk congregations, which were parted from them. From the Hetednapi Advent church the religious life of Gábor-Gypsies in Nyárárdkarácsonfalva is described.

In connection with the Baptist Congregation from Fintaháza the background of the religious-political movement is the Hungarian Baptist Denominational Association from Romania and the foundation of the Hungarian Baptist congregation in Marosvásárhely, the branch of which the congregation is in Fintaháza. This new Baptist congregation has a lot of Protestant puritan traditions.

This community assigns life-forming power to belief, and in their opinion conversion means losing the old 'I'. They pay attention to honest work, reject entertainment and have strict church discipline. The name 'sect' used for small churches by the locals is less negative than for Jehova Tanúi and Új Kezdet.

The Reformed feel the Baptists closer to themselves and vice versa. This 'feeling' is created by the dogmatic and liturgical similarity of both churches.

The religious community called Új Kezdet separated from the Baptist congregation in Fintaháza. In 1988-89 the people in this congregation started to follow doctrines connected to charismatic movements and it led to congregational schism. In my opinion Új Kezdet is a new religious movement and it belongs to the group of revival movements. The local society puts a stigma on the denomination, they call it a new sect.

The Jehova Tanúk Társasága is the most active and the most extensive of the new religious movements which appeared after the political change-over. According to the latest international and local research I classify Jehova Tanúk as millennium believers and it belongs to the group of rebellious sects. The locals call it a sect in a pejorative way, and the symbolic dissociative forms are much stronger towards them.

In order to avoid any value judgement and considering the fact that the name 'sect' is generally used for the religious organizations which are dangerous for the society I use this expression in an objective social-scientific sense. Avoiding the negative connotation of the religious common talk in Alsó-Nyárádmente and the ambiguity of the notion of sect the local use of this notion is explained under the heading 'Clearing up notions' in the thesis.

The meaning of the expression 'Adventist Gábor-Gypsies' is the same in the regional – and in many cases in the Transylvanian and Hungarian – common language and shows the representative features of the religious life of Gábor-Gypsies from Nyárádkarácsonfalva.

I examine their membership in the Advent church and their 'success' together with its economic, cultural and social relations. More exactly, the two basic pillars of the change in the way of life of the Gábor-Gypsies – their Adventist belief and the social and sociocultural marks of their trading and economic activity – are examined in a correlative form.

The Adventist worship of the Gábor-Gypsies in Nyárádkarácsonfalva is a resocialising pattern, 'reorganization' and 'organizing onto' their earlier cultural-social models, which makes the community separated and permanently forms the Gypsy-Hungarian and Hungarian-Gypsy interethnic relations in Nyárádkarácsonfalva.

In my thesis I am not going to state the moral and functional value of the system of the small churches and the new religious movements. (In this case I should follow a theological point of view.)

Instead, I am going to highlight the social conflicts following the expansion of the small churches and the new religious movements in the region.

I am also going to describe the tendency to modernise and to secularize after the political change-over in Alsó-Nyárádmente. In the thesis I considered that besides the social-political-cultural changes the relating theses put the question of modernization and secularization into their answers given to the changes of modern religious phenomena. According to the religious-sociologists we should emphasize the religious revival instead of the political-social-moral changes of secularization. Religion returns to both social and

personal life as consumer's demand offering the possibility of renewal. This tendency does not necessarily strengthen the traditional churches, on the contrary, the new movements appear as competitors at the 'religious market'.

During examining the religious life in Alsó-Nyárádmente, especially when analysing the expansion of the small churches and the new religious movements I do not examine the process of modernization and secularization. Instead, I consider them the casual factors of the change of the regional religious (denominational) systems.

In connection with the topic it is important to examine how the traditional homogeneous denominational situation was changed by a privatised, religiously subjective religious-ideological model.

In the settlements of Alsó-Nyárádmente the denominational borders quickly became obvious and the differences between the people of the 'big churches' and the 'small churches' started to transform the local religious-social connections.

#### **4. The author's relevant publications published and accepted to be published**

##### **1. Egyháztörténeti Szemle**

*The examination of identity in the old Greek Catholic community in Nyárádkarácson*, 2003. IV/2. 100-131. p.

##### **2. Between cultures I and II. Intercultural Student Conference selected presentations**

*An objective examination as a function of the economic situation of the Gypsy-Hungarian living together*, Miskolc, 2004, 70-83. p.

##### **3. Nemzetvédelmi Egyetemi Közlemények**

*„Hungarian world” – reconstruction from the military-civil administration of a Transsylvanian region between 1940-1944.*, 2004/9/1 74-81. p.



4. **Néprajzi látóhatár** edited by **Keményfi Róbert** 2006/15/1-2 39-53. p.  
*Narrative models in the memories of the Greek Catholics in Bálintfalva*
5. **Ünnepi tanulmányok Szigeti Jenő 70. születésnapjára** edited by **daniel Heinz-Fazekas Csaba-Rajki Zoltán, Miskolc 2006, 278-299. p.**  
*„Soap and water” The examination of the religious life of the Gypsies in Karácsonfalva during the extension of the Hetedik Napot Ünneplő Advent Church*
6. **Religious minorities, minority religions** edited by **Gergely András – Papp Richárd** Nyitott könyvműhely, Budapest, 2007, 361-383  
*The situation of the small churches and denominations in the village of Nyáradkarácson after the change-over.*
7. **Néprajzi Látóhatár XVIII. ÉVF. 2009. 1. SZÁM, p. 73-93.**  
*Religiousness and forms of beliefs in Alsó-Nyáradmente*
8. **Cigány közösségek hagyományos kultúrája, kulturális öröksége a Kárpát-medencében. (szerk.): Keményfi Róbert, Néprajzi Látóhatár, 2009, XVIII. évf. 3. sz., 38–66.p.**  
*Gábors of Karácsonfalva”: Recent societal-social boundaries and ethnic Stereotypes in a Transylvanian Gábor community*

### **Articles being published**

9. *Ethnic, religious identity constructions in a small Greek Catholic community – Néprajzi Látóhatár (2011)*
10. *Kalapos Gábors: Property representation and space transforming processes in Nyáradkarácsonfalva – Néprajzi Látóhatár (2011)*
11. *„There is no way back, the whole village is theirs”-living next to each other-social-ethnic relations in Nyáradkarácsonfalva – Disputa (2011)*

12. *Identity production of scattered Hungarians on the edge of Székelyföld-the precedent in Nagyteremi – Korunk (2011)*

### **5. The authors's other published publications**

13. *„Being Transylvanian” in our days, in the view of the cultural antropology's field of interest. In Alteris Anuar de studii și Comunicări Multiculturale. The international Symposium Mutucultral Values, Volumul I. Asociația Multiculturală alteris, Editura Status, 2007, 130-143.*
14. *„Being Transylvanian” in our days, in the view of the cultural antropology's field of interest. In Új Hegyvidék, 2007. 1-2. Tavasz-Nyár, 126-135. p.*
15. *Responsibility for each other. Cross-border discourses on national constellation Transylvaniai-Hungarian, Hungarian-Transylvanian Nations and national. Minorities in the European Union edited by Barna Bodó – Márton Tonk International Scientific Conference European Union Nations and National, 217-225. p.*

