

## CHANGE OF RELIGIOSITY IN THE LIGHT OF ATTENDANCE OF WORSHIP SERVICES IN DIOSIG, BIHOR

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*Abstract: In the case of the traditional rural communities, just like Diosig, in Western-Romania, the practice of the religion, especially the attendance of worship services belonged to the core of the social life. However, on the one hand with the effects of the modernity, on the other hand, under the influence of the communist era in Romania, these values have altered, which is also reflected in the church attendance. Our paper gives a detailful insight into this aspect of the community based life in Diosig.*

*Keywords: religiosity, worship attendance, church attendance, communism, rural life, rural communities*

### **Introduction**

Even if the religiosity and the practice of religion in the case of the various societies has been a major research topic among the social researchers in Central-Eastern Europe since the early 1990s (Podolinska,2010), our paper intends to contribute to this field with an original research about the religious practices and church attendance in Diosig, a small town in Bihor county. As it is a settlement in the cross-border region, with predominantly ethnic Hungarian population, we believe that the analysis of a community in Romania with such social-economic characteristics can basically contribute to a better understanding of the religious socialization process in the multicultural and multiethnic areas of the country.

Alongside other institutions, religion and church are part of the whole of the culture (Radcliffe-Brown, 2004, 43), its norm system is, in addition, an important functional element within any community, as it determines and regulates the everyday life of the communities. Individuals share their own views on the world based on their own social and community models, which serve as a model of behavior and help to interpret different life situations (Somlai, 1997, 70).

The current has in focus the practice of the religiosity, especially church attendance..

### **The purpose of the research**

The goal of the research is to present the changes in the church attendance and the visiting of worship services in the case of Diosig, also offering a chance for the readers to follow the timeline and the reasons for the alternation of these habits.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

During the research, we intended to discover not only the peculiar processes of the present, but also relevant features of the past, mainly because it became clear to us that this is the way we can best understand today's religious practices. Therefore we thought it was necessary to make the interviews as so were we able to get deeper knowledge about the subject.

We applied the expert sampling according to which the researchers select the responders according to their own judgment and the purpose of the examination (Babbie, 2001, 206) and additionally, the snowball method. Snowball sampling is a way to gain an ever-increasing number of observation patterns by asking the interviewees to contact other people who are competent on the subject (Babbie, 2001, 206-207). In our judgement, our research was best served by these data collection techniques..

Using the principle of saturation at the selection process, we picked up the cases until redundancy occurred in the research, so we did not get any more relevant information during the interviews.

### **The order, frequency and process of the worship**

First of all we would like to present the order of worship of Diosig from the 1800s to the present. We have seen this description desirable because the number of ever decreasing worships is very much reflected in the fact that the need for worship is decreasing, so the church has reduced their number from time to time. In the beginning, every day, there was worship twice a day. These, however, ceased by the end of the 1800s, as the faithful did not participate, so that their number was reduced to one day per day, twice worshiped on Sundays and holidays (Molnár, 1885, p. 56).

The order regarding the worships was under the influence of a strong clergyman, but he regularly shaped the need for the congregation (Magyar néprajz VII. Népszokás. Néphit. Népi vallásosság., 1990). A good example of this is the decline in the number of worshipers from time to time. In 1976 the number of worship services on the weekdays decreased, as only one person visited it. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday stayed for three days. Wednesday was suggested because the market was more frequent, and on Saturday after a baby bed, mothers first attended church service. This did not affect any morning worship service on the penultimate weeks (Presbyterian Protocol, January 4, 1976) Even before the regime change, the worship service of the weekday was completely abolished, as there was no request for it.

The attendance of Sunday afternoon services has become increasingly frustrating over the years, and since 2004 they have taught poems and poetry in the afternoon worship, studying poetry and discussing issues of women's confession and mummies (Presbyterian Protocol, 22 August 2004), and from 2010, afternoon worship, repentance weeks were held in the chantery in winter (Presbyterian Protocol, 19 December 2010). At noon there was a Sunday afternoon worship when mourning was held.

At present, the morning service at 10 am and the afternoon church service will begin in the afternoon 6 in the summer and 5 in the winter, but most often there is no Sunday afternoon attendance.

In the course of time, there were changes in the church's keeping of church holidays. Until 1829, they stayed for three days, two days later (Molnár, 1885, p. 61). According to the liturgical rules of the Calvinist Church, worship before the sacramental ceremony is preceded by a week of repentance, that is, worship services are held in the afternoon. The number of these worship services is not centrally regulated, so the presbytery of the given church decides it. Over the years, the weeks of repentance have also been shorter, which means that a week's worship has become shorter due to two days since it begins on Thursday. This is also the reason for the lack of interest in attendance at worship.

In addition, there is also a so called praying week once a year since 1990, when worships are held in the afternoon for week.

### **Until the start of the communism**

At that time, religion was an integral part of everyday life, and it was obvious that everyone was born. He defined man's life, habits, conduct, morality. There were some more religious and less religious people (Tomka, 2000, p. 3), and one of these habits was the regular visit to the church. Participation in worship is an active maintainer of religious affiliation ((Magyar néprajz VII. Népszokás. Néphit. Népi vallásosság., 1990), and since the external, measurable, verifiable mark of religious practice was the visit of church worships, the rich ecclesiastical records give the evidence of the of walking habits to the church.

Formerly the whole community was involved in worship. Their importance was indicated in the 19th century, that their disruption meant serious sanctions. In 1763, the Church Council ruled that "those who don't visit the church and their children also can't have the privilege of being honestly buried.." (Molnár quotes in 1885, 64) .

"Our ancestors' faithful zeal, religious warmth, love for God's house and her ecclesiastical character are often referred to as examples of ours today, in many respects, deceived, unmixed, and in our materialistic times" (Molnár, 1885, p. 55)-as wrote in 1885 by János Molnár bishop of

Reformed Pastor, who also adds that in the mid-1800s "the religious life that had flourished so far seemed to fade". Church attendance has decreased since earlier times. The Sunday administration of the village hall, Sunday's weekly wages of Sunday traditions, Sunday markets, and the presence of two pubs around the church contributed to the decrease of church attendance to 1885 (Molnár, 1885, pp. 64-65).

According to my information, the true church life flourished until the 1920s and 1930s, the church was the main institution for the local Hungarians and practiced the patronage over ecclesiastical schools.

Until the beginning of communism, nothing was confined to religious practice. The period of communism, however, was low in terms of religion. In 1946, the communist party took over the power with which the onslaught began. From 1948 onward, an anti-religious stream was set up in the struggle against ecclesiastical power. The Greek-Catholic Church was abolished, and the properties of different religious denominations were attributed referring to an agricultural reform. Religious organizations were proclaimed, church schools were nationalized, Protestant clergy became state employees, religious education was completely eliminated, all to eradicate religious identity. (Nastasa, 2009, p. 162)

### **Religiosity and practice of religion in communism**

The general concept used to reduce the spread of religion is secularization, which is the process in which religion loses its social significance (Wilson, 1976). There is no consensus among the researchers on the theory of secularization and seems to be overwhelming, as it has been shown that, with the progress of modernization, the level of religion in many developed countries has not decreased (Tomka, 1996), a very good example in the United States and Japan religiosity. This secularization was very specific in Romania, as it became one of the main points of the program of the then Communist regime, since the aim was to completely suppress religion, to create an atheistic worldview (Kiss, *Az erdélyi magyarság vallásosságának sajátosságai*, 2010, old.: 72)

Since religion in the Communist era was completely absent in Romania, most people dealing with this issue rely on demographic data issued by public authorities. According to these publications, the rate of attendance in the church during the communist period decreased. Atheism was the confession of the Communist Party, which was pushed by the party members with violence to create a secularized nation. For this reason, it is doubtful that these data from public officials provide credible information about religiousness at that time (Gog, 2007, p. 52). Changing the population into an atheism from a communist party's goal and proving that this was successfully achieved has also been modified so that this goal is realized only to prove that the founding fathers of communism thought it well, when predicting the disappearance of religion (Froese, 2004, pp. 40-48).

My contributors also reported about the extent to which church attendance dropped during this time. However, this was a slow process, since it was considered compulsory to participate in worship even in the 1950s, while most of Walnut Reformed churches were in the church, so the initial period did not bring much change compared to the previous ones, religion was part of everyday life, like before. These years were characterized by the fact that parents were worse off in religion, and parents whose faith was stronger were also required by the children to practice religion. The evening prayer and visiting the temple were compulsory for them. There were quite many people in the churches, while they were full of crowds on holidays. It was typical for the peasants to go to church every feast, even those who were less religious. We do not find exact records about church visits in Bihardiószezen for this period, so I relied on his information:

*We went to church as a child, on holidays with parents, but on other days, on Sundays, we were mostly kids alone. But we were so much in the church that around the altar, near all the three paddles, there was a desk, but we could not get there so much we were. (No. 1953)*

Participation in church worships was regarded by the whole community as compulsory and rarely, with great excuses could someone stay away. Mostly, agricultural work, which had to be done immediately because of the weather, was the only reason for skipping church visits:

*We did not go on Sunday when the hay was to be collected. The one could not be left, but even my dad mowed very quickly, as he wanted to be done until Sunday. If the weather was rainy, the field had to be rotated several times, so only if we had to collect it on Sunday we worked on Sundays but no other time. We were not the only ones, everyone went to the church. Not like today, when three persons go to the church from this street. Neither do I. (S. P)*

Religious life was not only ensured by church attendance, but also by various programs organized by the Church. Religious evenings were organized for the adult population while religious classes were organized for the children. They were held weekly on a weekly basis, on a weekday afternoon for adults, on weekends for children, and many of them attended by the faithful, also from the peasantry.

In the early 1960's, they began joining the state co-operative, the collective. A part of the population began to work in the local cooperative and the other part was in Oradea. In 1953, the process began to slow down (Stalin died) and then accelerated again in 1957 and ended in 1962. In the 70's and 80's, according to my information, the most denser are the basements of the temples. For this time, the propagation of the previous decades has been impressed. Until then, a generation who had limited their rights, especially the intellectuals, had grown up and their children had never received such a degree of religious upbringing as the generation before. They were no longer born into religion, they were no longer natural and self-evident. The necessary religious-related tasks were done: they were baptized, confirmed, but the strong religious education was far behind. This affected the intellectuals and the workers of the then senior positions in the collective leadership, or the most important positions, while the religious traditions of the peasantry did not change much.

However, religion could not be destroyed despite persecution, and because they believed that this was in the way of progress (Froese, 2004, p. 41), and with this fact which was referred to as they tried to legitimize the confiscation of religious goods, the suppression of religious education or abolition of the number of churches (Gog, 2007, p. 53). They could not abolish religion, but they could strongly restrain it. The long-term consequence was that the generations that were then absent had no longer engaged in religious education for their children.

Many of my contributors have lived personally this era differently. Most of them were born during communism and lived most of their lives in this system. The ban on churches and religious classes was mainly concerned with students and government employees, ie those who could be sanctioned in some form. Most of them recall that in their school age, the school principal and the then teaching staff were those who checked them and imposed various sanctions if someone saw them when they went to church, religious lesson, or pre-ordination. Mostly they were punished with disgrace, mockery, disgrace. Physical abuse and humiliation were common for children.

Despite the school insults, according to my information, it was rare for a student who did not confirm or did not attend the confirmation preparatory classes regularly. I heard one case when the confirmation was not in its usual order: at the beginning of the 1960s some students were not confirmed in time.

The aspiration to change the people to atheism started from the top down. Atheism was more effective where the proportion of urbanization and education was higher, where socialization in communist education was higher, the number of party members was higher (Martin, 1978, p. 221). My contributors, who lived most of their lives in communism, all reported about this and the compelling power of this violent atheism and most of all those who worked in education, co-operatives and public workplaces. However, the majority of the population (especially the peasantry) did not have any disadvantages when they lived in a religious life.

*They forbade religion for those who were in a leading position under communism, because for those who were only working in the collective in the great culture it was not possible. There were 1-2 party members who always agitated, I told them I did not go in, and I am finished, but who had already had the post they had to go. He did not work anymore, he was brigadier, or if he had a good head, he was a bookkeeper. If they learned that they were going to church, they got fired (F.J.)*

*Azoknak tiltották a vallást, akik vezető posztban voltak a kommunizmus alatt, mert aki csak a kollektívbe dolgozott kint a nagy kultúrában annak nem volt hogy. Volt 1-2 párttag az mindig agitált, mondtam, hogy nem megyek és kész, de akinek már volt posztja azok akkor már be kellett menjenek. Nem is dolgozott többet, brigádos lett, vagy ha jó feje volt akkor könyvelő. Ha megtudták, hogy templomba jár kitették a munkahelyről is (F. J.)*

The communist party kept the public sphere under constant control. Many people were scared by many, and most of the teachers did not attend church. According to my communicators who worked in important positions during the communism, the party forced them into a uniform state mentality that they did not understand to live a religious life or their family members. The hypocrisy of the entire system, however, is reflected in the fact that the children of these people were baptized in the same way as other people, but they were often confiscated (though most often in other settlements) and occasionally they went to church, also to other settlements, so that the villagers did not see it. They also told us what sanctions they had for belonging to the church. Not only prevented the promotion and raising of salary (Gog, 2007, p. 53), but in many cases forced the person to make a choice and, if he chose to belong to religion in the face of the party membership, consequence was getting removed from the job.

Church attendance decreased among students, as the participation of students in various agricultural works was compulsory and the best learning students were obliged to take part in a subject-related or sports event organized by the school.

*They did not say openly that you could not go but they organized so many programs for the children that they simply had no time to go. Pupils in the fifth class were always ordered to the fields to work. My sons also went for 2-3 hours every Sunday. (K.L.)*

The Communist system maintained the ecclesiastical identity recognized by the state and the freedom of the Church, together with the various activities which were, however, restricted solely to the Church's sphere of authority. Instead of the traditional religious holidays, new secular festivals came to the foreground, which were: August 23, November 7, December 30, May 1. Traditional church holidays were kept in the church, but no solemn performances were organized such as today, after the singing of a song and a poem, a sacrament was taken. During the religious feasts, adults were required to work.

*We also had to work, at Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, there was no problem if we did not work, we talked and everything, but we had to be there so that we could not be able to go to church. (Sz.K.)*

#### **A rendszerváltást követő évek**

The renegotiation of religion is called by Peter Berger desecularization (Berger, 1999, pp. 1-11). This phenomenon can also be observed in Romania after the change of regime, as the lonely religious life revived. After the collapse of communism, besides Poland, Romania became one of the most confessional countries in Europe (Tomka, 2005, pp. 15-30), but the religiosity of the Hungarians in Romania developed differently.

After the fall of communism, religion was reborn in Romania as well. Communist ideology, which wanted to countenance religion, did not leave a deep mark on the religiousness

of the population (Tomka, 2005, p. 28), despite the violent rapes of religion. In fact, religion has not disappeared, it has not disappeared (Gog, 2007, p. 52), so strong desecularisation can not be mentioned.

The change of regime also brought about changes in the education system. The number of priests has increased, religious classes have been reintroduced, religion teaching began at several colleges, which resulted in a significant rise in religious religion, ie the number of theologically qualified persons since 1990 (Kiss, 2014, p.6). In Diosig, just like in other settlements, various religious associations have evolved, such as the Youth Christian Union, choir, women's association, etc.

After the change of regime, the number of regular churchmen in Diosig increased abruptly and many of those who forbade religion during communism became regular church attendants after the change of regime, some also engaged in church functions (eg presbyter, guardian).

The initial enthusiasm, however, began to slacken quickly, the as presbyterian report suggests. On several occasions they emphasize the unattractiveness of after-hours worship and the practice of youth in the rare church. Presbyterian protocols report this in the 2000s: "Part of the congregation unfortunately does not attend church, does not require spiritual food. The flare-up after the changes is spilling, there is now no enthusiasm in humans. This is also demonstrated by the fact that neither the sacrament is required of all. Many Church members do not feel responsible for God or our Hungarian nation. (...) The interest in the puppeteers also stole. Unfortunately, at this time, the church is not fully involved, though it is important to respect God, secondly, the service of priests from remote locations.

This can be also said about the attendance of afternoon worship. Even the church members who attend the morning will not arrive in the afternoon. "(Presbiter Protocol: June 16, 2002) We find similar reports almost every year, where the pastor mentions that the participation of the youth church in worship is unacceptable. It always emphasizes the unattractiveness of after-hours worship (Presbyterian Protocol: 8 December 2002, 13 April 2003, 18 May 2011). The consequence of this was that over the years, the Sunday prayers of preaching were completely eliminated. The purpose of the Reverend is to rejuvenate the Reformed and Hungarian communities in the field of spiritual life, as the congregation's spirit and spirit weakened. (Presbiter Protocol: 18 September 2011)

### **Conclusion**

We can notice during the past approx. a century and a half, that all pastors, regardless of age, century, just like the pastor of today tells us that in older times people were more religious. This suggests that from the beginning of the XX. century, the proportion of those who came to the church gradually fell back. It is clear from the records, information reports, and from the order of worship that they have been less of a church in the past than in earlier times. A real decline was only caused by the atheism policy of the communist system when it was sanctioned for participation in church worship by intellectuals and party members. After the change of regime, the religious life grew again, and the number of church attendants grew dramatically, but this growth did not prove to be permanent, as the number of participants in the worships began to decline again within a short period of time.

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