

László Fosztó, *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism: Community, Personhood, and Conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian Village* (Lit Verlag, Munster, Germany. Distribution in North America by: Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, NJ, 2009). xv + 230 pp., €29.90, paper.

In *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism*, László Fosztó employs both wide angle and telescopic lenses. With his wide angle lens, Fosztó captures important aspects of Romania's post-socialist identity. With his telescopic lens, Fosztó provides snapshots of religion's role in shaping life in a remote Romanian village. This includes the increasing Pentecostal presence among the Roma (or Gypsy) community. Understanding how the themes caught by one lens relate to themes caught by the other is one of the book's great tasks.

Fosztó sets about this project by proposing a theoretical template of "ritualist communication". The term is intentionally broad: Fosztó originally wanted to study conversion in the village of Gánás' (a pseudonym). But he soon realized that religious activities of all kinds were sprouting up in postsocialist Romania and that most such activity was somehow connected. Eventually, Fosztó focused on two main categories of religious activity: community rituals, such as baptism and funerals, and individual religious initiatives, such as conversions and oath-taking. He argues that both kinds of religious action are helping to change Romanian civil society as it departs from the previous dispensation's focus on equality and homogeneity. Contemporary Romania is newly pluralistic, with social divisions that run along an array of religious, ethnic, and class differences. Community rituals are providing the glue for social cohesion in the midst of this change, while individual religious activities allow a kind of moral personhood to develop. Both dynamics have implications for the way Romanian society is being reordered. Fosztó privileges the role of religion in his account, but also acknowledges other forces at work in creating these changes.

Fosztó bolsters his theoretical claims with keen empirical observations. He shows that there are many layers of religion at work in Gánás. A Calvinist church is the most dominant formal religious organization. Its membership consists of ethnic Hungarians, who make up two-thirds of Gánás' population, and Roma, who make up most of the rest of the community. The other formal religious traditions with a presence in the community are Eastern Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism. However, membership in one church does not completely exclude a person from participating in other religious communities, or calling on religious professionals in other traditions to provide religious services. Consistent with this claim, Fosztó describes a folk-type of religious cosmology that exists below, or is perhaps integrated into the beliefs of the community's formal religious institutions. This cosmology seems to be shared across religious and ethnic lines. Its features include a God who can be angry and vengeful, oaths and curses that have real power, and regular spiritual interventions into everyday life. In short, both formal religious activities such as funerals and baptisms, and an informal shared religious cosmology are at work in the community.

*Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism* contains at least two valuable contributions to Pentecostal studies. The first concerns social ties within the community. Fosztó shows that in Gánás Pentecostal converts do not cut themselves off from pre-existing social ties, which many scholars argue is the norm for Pentecostals as they enter their new faith community. Rather, all Roma in Gánás, whether they are Pentecostal or not establish complex godfather and godmother systems for their children that cross religious and class lines (the primary

godparents tend to come from a higher class than the child). Such a clear empirical example of Pentecostalism's continued participation in relational norms challenges conventional wisdom. Second, Foszto compares Pentecostal conversion to the Roma practice of oath-taking. Social scientists have long pointed to Pentecostalism's ability to force men to stop drinking and womanizing at the point of conversion. But rarely, if ever, have they identified other mechanisms within a culture that can have the same effect. Among the Roma that Foszto studied, when men lose all their money playing cards or in some other way put their matrimonial relationships in serious danger, they may agree to take an oath stating that they will never engage in the egregious activity again (there are also other reasons for oath taking). Many Roma believe that breaking an oath will result in very serious and divinely administered consequences, so real reform can result from such an oath. The cultural parallel to conversion creates an interesting dynamic in the community's interpretation of Pentecostal conversion.

As with all books, *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism* has strengths and weaknesses. In addition to the contributions just noted, a clear strength of the book is the empirical data on which it rests. The information Foszto obtained needed good research instruments and high levels of trust from the community. Foszto clearly had both. The book's weaknesses include the fact that the book's argument can be difficult to grasp. Foszto's audience is clearly the scholarly community. Yet even fellow social scientists will question the need for Foszto to create dialogue with so many conversation partners, which include some of the discipline's most historic figures such as Durkheim and Habermas. Some of these asides clutter the very important process of drawing connections between Foszto's own theoretical contributions and the empirical data that supports them. Thus, readers must work harder to see the line of logic that connects the book's chapters and ultimately answers the questions Foszto announces he will explore in the book's opening pages.

In the end, Foszto provides a unique insight to the religious resurgence in Romania and the role that Pentecostalism is playing. This rigorous academic enterprise adds to our overall understanding of global Pentecostalism, as well as to our understanding of religion in post-socialist contexts. It is certainly worth a read.

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