

THE FORMATION OF A ROMA PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITY DURING SOCIALISM, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LEADER WHO FOUNDED IT

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Abstract: This study examines the emergence of a Roma Pentecostal community in eastern Romania during the final decade of the socialist dictatorship through the narratives and conversion story of the community's founder. It explores the measures taken by the communist authorities against the religious community and demonstrates how, despite the authorities' repressive actions, the congregation managed to survive and grow, eventually becoming one of the largest Pentecostal communities in the region. The article shows how the community leader's successful integration of the newly formed religious community into the network of non-Roma Pentecostal communities operating legally or illegally during socialism allowed his group to obtain ideas and material support to mitigate the impact of the regime's measures taken against them, while its members were also able to experience new forms of ethnic acceptance.

Keywords: socialism, Pentecostalism, Roma, religious conversion

This study examines the institutionalization, during socialism, of a Roma Pentecostal community through the life story of the Roma Pentecostal leader who brought it into being. The analysis shows that the establishment of contacts among different Pentecostal communities – a factor that played an important role in the formation of Pentecostal communities after the regime change – was also significant in the case of communities that emerged under the socialist dictatorship. Despite the prohibitions imposed by socialist authorities, the founder successfully integrated the emerging Roma Pentecostal community into the network of non-Roma Pentecostal congregations in the region. With this support, although the

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Article history: Received 03.05.2026; Revised 05.05.2026; Accepted 15.05.2026.

Available online: 01. 07. 2026. Available print: 31. 07. 2026.

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authorities banned the creation of the new Pentecostal community and tried to prevent its operation by brutal means, the community became increasingly successful at local level. Maintaining relations with Romanian Pentecostal communities (even if these relations were mostly informal and conducted in secret) enabled the Roma community to encounter a model of ethnic acceptance. During socialism, Romanian Pentecostal communities provided the leader of the Roma community with practical ideas for circumventing the prohibitions of the socialist authorities and also offered material assistance for establishing an illegal place of worship. Through these contacts, the community leader also reached the highest leaders of the Pentecostal denomination; as a result, he received an informal but verbally expressed authorization from the top leadership to continue leading the community.

Pentecostalism during Socialism and Roma Pentecostalism

According to historians of religion, the beginnings of Pentecostalism's transformation into a global movement are linked to the Azusa Street congregation in Los Angeles (1907), a congregation with African-American cultural and religious connections.² Today, „The form of Christianity in which believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying is one of the great success stories of the current era of cultural globalization”.³

The spread of Pentecostalism among Roma in Europe can be dated to the 1950s and 1960s. Its most important locus was France, while other significant sites included England, Spain, Bulgaria, and Romania.⁴

2 Walter J. HOLLENWEGER, n. d. *Pentecostalism. Article, Research Centers, Bibliographies and Selected Literature*. 5. Source: 06. <https://www.hoegger.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Pentecostalism.pdf>. Accessed 22. 06. 2026. There is, however, debate in the literature about whether the origins of the movement can in fact be attributed to the Azusa Street congregation (Allan Heaton ANDERSON, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism. Global Charismatic Christianity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 9).

3 Joel ROBBINS, The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004), 117.

4 Melody J. WACHSMUTH, *Roma Pentecostals Narrating Identity, Trauma, and Renewal in Croatia and Serbia*. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2023, 10. See also: Magdalena SLAVKOVA,

In Romania, Pentecostalism appeared in the 1920s in the western part of the country.⁵ Although the socialist authorities in Romania officially recognized Pentecostalism, in practice they regarded it as “one of the most dangerous religious deviations” and applied various forms of religious repression against it, “yet the number of Pentecostals continued to grow steadily”.⁶ In the case of the Pentecostal church, the repressive measures included, among other things, restrictions on the number of congregational gatherings, the suppression of their organizational frameworks, reorganizations, the obstruction of pastors from operating within legal boundaries, etc.⁷ The authorities prohibited those forms of religious practice that were among the most attractive features of Pentecostal religiosity – “glossolalia, noisy manifestations,” and other spectacular expressions of religious experience characteristic of Pentecostalism – and required the leaders of the religious organization to demand the cessation of these practices in circular letters.⁸

The growth in the number of Pentecostals intensified especially in the second half of socialism, after 1965; the number of Roma conversions also increased in this period.⁹

Based on secret-police documents, Manuela Marin has examined the role of religion in Roma neo-Protestant communities in Romania during the 1970s and 1980s, presenting both the initiatives of the Roma Pentecostal movement in the second half of socialism and the regime’s reactions.¹⁰ She shows that, from the

Conversion, Leadership and Identity of the Evangelical Roma in Bulgaria. Schöningh: Brill, 2025, 5–8.

- 5 FOSZTÓ László, Roma and the ‚New religions’ in Europe, Factsheets on Romani Culture, Project Education of roma Children in Europe, 2. Source: https://real.mtak.hu/215129/1/Fosztó2019C_2.4_religiosity.pdf. [Accessed 23. 06. 2026]. FOSZTÓ László – KISS Dénes, Pentecostalism in Romania: The Impact of Pentecostal Communities on the Life-style of the Members, *La Rivista Folklorica*, “La sfida del Pentecostalismo” (“The Challenge of Pentecostalism”), 65 (2010), 54. KISS Dénes, „Nekünk csak ez van.” *Vallás és egyházak a rendszerváltás utáni Erdélyben.* Kolozsvár: Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Exit Kiadó, 2020, 153.
- 6 KISS, „Nekünk csak ez van.”, 155.
- 7 FOSZTÓ – KISS, Pentecostalism in Romania, 54.
- 8 Gheorghe MODORAN, Confesiunile neoprotestante din România în perioada regimului comunist: 1945–1965. *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, 3 (2007), 659.
- 9 FOSZTÓ, Roma and the ‚New religions’ in Europe, 2.
- 10 Manuela MARIN, Faith on the Margins: Religion and Civic Emancipation among Roma People during Communist Rule in Romania. *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 14.3 (2022),

1970s onwards, Roma individuals repeatedly asked the authorities to approve so-called „Gypsy churches”, but permission was denied.¹¹ Most neo-Protestant communities continued their activity illegally, producing their own leaders or pastors,¹² even in the face of severe punishment.¹³ Drawing on documents from the Securitate archives, Marin discusses various forms of resistance by Roma Pentecostal community founders and their followers that the Securitate considered anti-systemic: transforming the homes of Roma pastors into meeting places, holding forbidden religious gatherings, and conducting prohibited baptisms.¹⁴ Her research indicates that, from the 1970s, interest in neo-Protestant communities, especially Pentecostal ones, increased among Roma in Romania, while at the same time, this remained numerically limited: at the end of the 1980s, Orthodoxy was still the dominant religion among Roma in Romania.¹⁵

The situation of Roma neo-Protestant communities was similar in socialist states within the Soviet sphere of influence. Magdalena Slavkova reports that in Bulgaria, because of the obstacles created by the communist regime, the evangelical movement was not very strong until 1989. Roma „spiritual leaders“ and „travelling missionaries” appointed by churches were rather exceptions, and the movement essentially survived in house-based „domestic churches”.¹⁶ In her discussion of Protestant Roma communities in socialist Bulgaria, Slavkova notes that ritual occasions were often held in pastors’ homes and that gatherings were disguised as secular events, such as holiday celebrations.¹⁷

László Fosztó observes that until the regime changes of 1989, Pentecostal communities, like other neo-Protestant communities, were not allowed to maintain relations with foreign communities.¹⁸ At the same time, „this movement was

405–430. Manuela MARIN, Romii în perioada comunistă sau despre religie ca mijloc de emancipare civică, Manuela Marin – Marian Zăloagă – Daniela Popescu – Cristina Mocanu – Bogdan Andriescu (eds.): *Religie, actori religioși și practici religioase în rândul romilor din România*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega, 2024, 321–377.

11 MARIN, Faith on the Margins, 420.

12 MARIN, Faith on the Margins, 418–419.

13 MARIN, Faith on the Margins, 421.

14 MARIN, Romii în perioada comunistă, 329.

15 MARIN, Faith on the Margins, 415.

16 SLAVKOVA, *Conversion, Leadership and Identity*, 70.

17 SLAVKOVA, *Conversion, Leadership and Identity*, 54.

18 FOSZTÓ, Roma and the ‚New religions’ in Europe, 3.

characterized by the interplay between forces of religious revival and suppression attempts by the authorities”.¹⁹

On the Antecedents of Research, the Fieldwork, and the Village

Between 2013 and 2018 I conducted fieldwork in Pentecostal communities in a Moldavian micro-region in the orbit of Bacău. The communities differed in denominational origin and in ethnic composition: they were Romanian, Csángó, and Roma communities. Besides their common regional location, they shared the fact that a Pentecostal community founded in the 1970s had played a significant role in their emergence and functioned for them as a kind of spiritual centre. The worldview of the people who founded these communities, and their formation as leaders, were strongly influenced by Martin, the charismatic leader who had founded a community under socialism. After the 2000s, this central community provided institutional support to newly formed Pentecostal groups, for example by helping them build their own churches, and it offered a model of operation.²⁰ The satellite communities that emerged under the support and spiritual influence of the central community were linked to one another in a loose network.

During my fieldwork in the communities mentioned above, the Pentecostal Roma community of Lingureni²¹ also came up several times. My interlocutors described this community as distinctive and its situation as atypical. According to narratives about them, the Roma living in this village were well situated, travelled to England for work, had built new houses, and several of them were engaged in farming. At present, Lingureni is the largest Pentecostal community in the region both numerically and proportionally whose members are regarded as Roma by the inhabitants of surrounding settlements and who, apart from official contexts of identity declaration such as the census, also consider themselves Roma (Lingurari).

19 FOSZTÓ, Roma and the ‚New religions’ in Europe, 3.

20 The history, operation, and relationships of these communities are discussed in detail in my book: PETI Lehel, *A Szentlélek ajándékai és karizmatikus rítusok egy moldvai kistérség pünkösdi közösségeiben*. In: *„Krisztus ajándéka van bennünk”. Pünkösdzizmus moldvai román, roma és csángó közösségeiben*. Budapest–Kolozsvár: Balassi Kiadó–Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2020, 17–48.

21 When referring to the location, I use a pseudonym, as is the case for all individuals mentioned in the study.

I visited Lingureni in 2021, when I first met Fratele²² Bortea, the founder of the Pentecostal community and its leader at that time. He received me kindly, probably also because we had a common friend in the leader of a community that had converted from Roman Catholicism²³ to Pentecostalism and who sadly died in 2018. Thereafter I visited Brother Bortea every year. I mainly conducted semi-structured interviews, although at times these resembled more informal conversations; even then, sound recordings were made.²⁴

During fieldwork I always took part in the main Sunday congregational meetings. When the interviews took place in the days after these gatherings, I asked about elements of the meetings that seemed unusual to me or whose meaning was unclear. I listened in advance to the interviews recorded each year and prepared new questions. Several topics also recurred in our conversations, especially when, after previous interviews, I was not certain that I understood him correctly or when I wanted to learn more about something.

He appreciated my persistent interest in the founding of the religious community and in the story of his personal conversion – the fact that at least once each summer I visited him at home and attended religious meetings. This contributed to the development of trust toward me. During our most recent meeting, in the summer of 2025, he joked: When I first met you, I wondered what this kid wanted here. Look how much time has passed since then: even your beard has turned grey.“

I present the emergence of the community and its operation during socialism through the story of the Roma Pentecostal leader who created it. As part of this, I outline the major stages in the life course of the founder that are connected to his becoming a religious community leader, and I analyze the motivations behind his commitment to founding a religious community. I examine the circumstances under which a young Roma man converted and the role this played in his decision to lead a religious community that acquired a new value system and identity despite the severe reprisals of the regime. In this connection, I present his efforts to establish and operate the community and his conflicts with different levels of communist authorities.

His accounts of the history of the Pentecostal community during socialism are at the same time narratives of his religious conversion. They show the role played

22 'Borther'

23 The Roman Catholics living in the region are referred to as *Moldavian Csángós*.

24 During a longer stay in the region, I sometimes visited them twice, so two interviews were conducted in a single year.

by the experience of transcendence as a living reality in his life in motivating him to establish a new religious community in his native village, and they show how, as a consequence, he and the members of his community had to face both the intimidating arsenal of socialist authorities and the aggression of the religious majority at the time. His recollections and stories therefore contain elements of Pentecostal conversion and worldview. The interpretation of what happened to him and to his community is intertwined with Pentecostal modes of understanding the world and with Pentecostal terminology.²⁵ Since the emergence and functioning of the community, as well as his leadership activity, become visible to us through stories about his religious conversion and about the significance of transcendence in his life, I also address the anthropology of Pentecostal rituals and religious ideas.

The History of the Emergence of the Pentecostal Community during Socialism

The Village and the Life Course of Brother Bortea

Regarding the founding of the village, Brother Bortea recounted that the boyars, in order to secure the labour force needed for their estates, gathered people from different communities, among whom there may have been both Roma and Romanians. When he was young the village community was small; he remembers twenty-two house numbers.²⁶

During socialism, a significant share of the landless Roma population obtained jobs. In the nearby commune centre, and in another settlement belonging to the same commune, collective farms were established; in the commune centre there was also a machine depot. Most people were employees of the collective farm, working as animal keepers or on various construction projects coordinated by the collective. Regular bus services connected the Roma village to the nearest towns, and many

25 As Simon Coleman has also pointed out, the language used by members of Pentecostal communities differs from the social-scientific language used about them; following Thomas Csordas, Coleman argues that the researcher must strive for a „double hermeneutic“, that is, for an academic understanding of charismatic interpretations of the world (Csordas 1994: xi, cited in Simon COLEMAN, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. New York–Melbourne–Madrid: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 5).

26 26 June 2023.

men worked in newly created industrial agglomerations or on construction sites. Under socialism many people maintained small household farms, keeping poultry, pigs, one or two sheep, or cows on pastureland not cultivated by the collective farm, on land difficult or nearly impossible for machines to cultivate, or on patches regarded as nobody's land — sometimes just a few ares, on steep hayfields, ditch-sides, and similar marginal spaces. Despite improvements in the situation of the Roma in Lingureni, Brother Bortea reported that the community was marked by great poverty.

Brother Bortea completed eight grades of schooling, four in his native village and four in the neighbouring commune centre. He also participated in various forms of training at his workplaces. He came from a very poor family; his parents worked in the collective. There were eight siblings, and he was the fifth child. The children's maintenance depended mainly on their mother, while his father lived an unsettled life. Although he was a good pupil, in these circumstances the possibility that his mother might educate him further never really arose.

He married around the age of twenty. According to his account, he married so early because his parents had divorced and he was being raised by one of his mother's uncles. The elderly and sick man, a former prisoner of war, suggested that he marry as soon as possible so that a woman's hand would care for them: „He said, he advised me to get married, to take a wife, so that there would be someone to cook and wash for us.“²⁷

Looking back on himself during socialism, he said that he had not been particularly religious; he had been like an average Orthodox young man. His worldview at the time was influenced by books he had read about Darwin's theories. On several occasions he worked in the village for a military man of higher rank who, according to him, planted the idea of atheism in him.²⁸ On another occasion he also mentioned the local policeman, who likewise contributed to his becoming an atheist.

He worked on construction sites in larger settlements nearby and in town. Presumably, by the mid-to-late 1980s, he was already responsible for the registration of ballast delivered to construction sites, the scheduling of operators of machinery, as well as other administrative tasks. According to him, he had an exceptionally

27 2 August 2025.

28 28 June 2023. On another occasion, he also mentioned the local police officer, who likewise played a role in leading him toward atheism. 2 August 2025.

good salary at the time. His last workplace was on an urban construction site, from which he was dismissed at the time of the regime change.

He had eight biological children. In addition, he and his wife raised six more children. Five siblings came to them after their mother died and their father abandoned the family; the youngest was two and the oldest nine. The woman had been Pentecostal. She was a cousin of Brother Bortea's wife and their neighbour, and Brother Bortea felt morally obliged to care for the children. Later, in addition to thirteen children, he also took in another girl of about seven or eight after an event that deeply shook the Pentecostal community. He explained that the case began when a woman acquired a new partner and tried to rid herself of her husband by accusing him – a member of the Pentecostal community – of sexually abusing a child from her earlier marriage. Although it later emerged that this was untrue and the man was acquitted, the child did not want to return to the disordered family situation. According to Brother Bortea, the village police chief asked him to take the child in for a short time until some legal solution could be found. The matter faded away, the child became accustomed to living with them, and in the end she stayed; they later married her off.²⁹

He described the conditions in the household as follows: mattresses lay everywhere on the floor, and the children slept on them. If he had to go out at night, he stepped carefully among them so as not to tread on anyone. If they slaughtered a pig, it was eaten within two weeks; if they slaughtered a calf, that too disappeared immediately, because fourteen children had to be fed.

Aiding others on moral grounds was not limited to children. After the regime change, an elderly woman who had converted to Pentecostalism bought a house in the village. The purchase was made without documents and proved to be fraudulent; the woman ended up on the street and went to him for help. Bortea offered her a room in his house. She moved in with them and lived there for more than fifteen years, until her death; they buried her.³⁰

After the regime change, he opened a carpentry workshop and also engaged in agriculture, keeping horses and buying tractor and other equipment. His regular helper was a young man from the commune with a troubled background. The man had nowhere to go; he wanted not only work but also a place to live. It later emerged that he had previously been in prison. He worked for a long time on Bortea's fields

29 13 August 2024.

30 13 August 2024.

and cared for his horses. Brother Bortea was unaware of his background and when he was accused of employing a criminal and confronted the boy, he told him that he had previously worked for a shepherd who had killed a man. The shepherd persuaded him to take responsibility for the murder, telling him that, as a minor, he would be immune from punishment, and in exchange he would receive eighty sheep. This is how he eventually ended up in prison. The boy was Roman Catholic, but after some time he began attending Pentecostal services and converted. He married someone from the village and later moved back to his home village.

Encountering Pentecostalism

In the 1980s, the Orthodox Church began building a new Orthodox church in the commune, which also included Lingureni. To cover the costs, the local Orthodox priest encouraged villagers to „buy” the icons painted inside the church. According to Brother Bortea, the names of the local families who „bought” them are still visible on the icons. Brother Bortea and his wife wanted to be the „owners” of an icon depicting a saint and his wife popular in Orthodoxy, because they shared the names of the figures represented, but there was strong competition for that icon and they missed their chance. The priest persuaded them to become the patrons of another saint important in Christian history.³¹ Brother Bortea was not yet twenty years old at the time. He and his wife already had two children, and he did not have a job. To earn an income and be able to purchase the icon, he decided to take seasonal work on a farm in Tulcea County. Today, he considers it a form of manipulation that Orthodox believers were persuaded to “buy” icons, that is, to become their patrons. According to his account, representatives of the Orthodox Church personally approached people, emphasizing the miraculous power of the saint depicted on the icon and its ability to assist the life of its purchaser.

I contributed, as a young married man, to the construction of an Orthodox church here in the village. To have an Orthodox church built. The people’s situation was difficult. Those were times like that. Difficult times. But even then, with cooperation, it was possible to do something. And they did, they built an Orthodox church, which still exists today. And people were

31 I deliberately avoid referring to them as his patrons, since he himself did not describe these relationships using that concept and was probably unfamiliar with the logic of patronage as such.

manipulated. Religiously. Because people were heavily manipulated. Even today they are manipulated, and back then they were also manipulated, in a religious sense. And they wanted to paint images inside the church, in order to extract a bit more money from people, I don't know for what. For the church fund, for the priest's fund. I don't know, for the parish house fund. So as not to defame anyone. They painted it with small images of various saints. With icons, on the walls, like this. And everyone from the village had to buy such a little icon. They advertised those icons, with various explanations of what each little icon symbolized. Whom they represented. And they held a kind of... not only advertising. A kind of preliminary discussion. So that... and in this way they manipulated people. These things are done by... by people who understand manipulation. They explained who that saint was, what... what benefit would come to the person who bought it, who prayed to it, who honored it. And one of those saints would have suited me as well. I was a member of the Orthodox Church. A saint from among them would have been fine for me too. And my wife and I decided to buy one. [...] That saint would have suited me very well. And I went to buy it, but there was competition. As I said, people were manipulated. You understand what manipulation is. It is easy to manipulate the masses. Groups of people who have not read a single book in their life, who have no professional training, or no knowledge in the field — because there are also people who have no professional training but are not so easily manipulated, they are born in such a way that they cannot be manipulated. And I could not buy the Saint I wanted. I did not know [he says the name of the saint]'s story. I knew him as a saint, as he was presented. And I do not want to offend in their faith those who honor him, who consider him a saint. That is their business. Their problem. [...] And because there was competition, because it was an advertised saint, [...], I could not buy it, because I was poor. Because it cost some money to buy it. [So, the church bought these icons and people...] The church painted them there. (Painted them and people had to...) People had to buy each of those little saints. When you go into an Orthodox church (unintelligible word) it is full, all around, everywhere. And they bought all of them. And everyone's name is written there, of those who bought them. [Ah, I see, I see. And is it still like that?] It is still like that. Nothing has changed. I was there, I am not telling stories, I was there, a nice image, like this. The painters of that time were not worse than today's, they had such images... yes. They said that it looks at you, that it turns its head towards you. And people were too well taught. And then that monk who was responsible for the sale, for all of it, for this propaganda, for each of these little saints there, said that there is still one great-value saint left, which no one has bought yet, and it is very

valuable. I had no biblical knowledge, nor religious education. Only that I was Orthodox, like this, a member of the Orthodox Church. I knew how to make the sign of the cross, like this, and to observe the official holidays marked with red crosses in the calendar. Those were official holidays when you did not have to work. [...] [And what does it mean that some saints have greater value, that they help a person, if one has contributed to having them painted? And it means that there is some kind of connection...] It helps the person. They said that those saints who have died pray for us. Those people up there pray for us, intercede for us. [Yes, and the one who financed the painting — does that saint help him more?] Yes, more. This was the trick. Yes. Look, man, look, he gives everything, believe! It does not matter what professional qualification you have. He, if he believes like that, makes certain sacrifices. He would rather not give it to a poor person who needs a piece of bread but gives it to a certain saint. Normally, according to God, religiously, he should give to the poor, so that the other can also eat a piece of bread. Yes. Do not be manipulated. And they said that there is still one (saint) that no one has bought, and he is called Peter. The Apostle Peter. I had also heard jokes about Peter, stories, not real things that are not in the Bible.³²

On the farm in Tulcea County he met a man who had been to Italy and who, although he had not yet been baptized, spoke to him about religion in the spirit of Pentecostalism. The man spoke enthusiastically about matters of faith. Brother Bortea listened with interest, but because of his work he could not always pay attention, which prevented their conversations from deepening. It was impossible, for example, for his „teacher” to take out a Bible at certain points and discuss questions of faith based on Scripture. The man therefore made an unexpected proposal. He offered to pay him the wages for four hours each day; during that time, he would not have to work, and the time gained in this way could be spent in conversation about faith. Brother Bortea accepted the arrangement. After three weeks, the teachings of this strange new friend brought about a change in his understanding of the world that Pentecostals call „conversion”.

They wrote there that the (icon) had been bought, and I had to go and earn money to pay for it. So, I left home for somewhere in Tulcea. There I met a man who was a believer. He was not Orthodox; he was a believer, like the Pentecostals here now. But he was not a „legal” Pentecostal. He was a dissident Pentecostal, as they say, meaning that he did not belong to any community.

32 August 2, 2025

At first, I was wild toward him, because I did not come from a world with good culture. When I drank, I became angry, as young people do, especially because he came with something strange, with another religion, not the one I accepted. I wanted to beat him.³³

Many poor people without permanent jobs worked in the extensive vineyards of the state farm (gostat). At that time Brother Bortea also had no job. The strange man was rumoured to be extraordinarily clever, yet the others behaved roughly toward him. Once Brother Bortea got to know him and began to appreciate him, he defended him against the roughness of the others. The man, who came from around Galați, told him that he had fled to Italy in the hope of a better life and had encountered Pentecostal faith there. After his conversion he returned home to take his family out as well. During his stay in Italy, maintaining contact with his family had been difficult. In the meantime, his wife had become a nun, and their three children were being raised by their maternal grandmother. The man said that money did not interest him; he had stayed in the area where his wife also lived in the hope that he might still persuade her.

And he kept talking about faith, and I had no time to listen. Because I was employed there for work, to work. And I told him: "I am employed for work, I have to buy an icon." Besides that, I also needed money, for my family, at home. "I have a family." "Alright," he said, "look, here's what we'll do. Let's make an agreement together," he said. "From six in the morning, when we go to work. Let's go a bit earlier." Because we had an agreement at work. Everyone worked as much as they wanted, as much as they could. That's how it was then. It was a very good farm where... people went there to work. And then we made an agreement that from six in the morning until two, three o'clock, whatever I work goes to me. We only put one of the worked rows under his name, to secure his food, they also provided food. And we assigned one row under his name (in the vineyard there were rows, that's how they worked), to cover his meals. And the rest (of the rows) went to me. He said: "Good, from two o'clock until six in the evening, four, five, seven, you listen to what I say. So we have time to talk." It was not mandatory, but so that we would have time. And during those three weeks, one month, he converted me. [And how did this happen for you? Was what he said interesting to you? Or did you come to understand deeper things about the world? Or how did it happen?] [...] At the beginning I thought I could manipulate

33 August 2, 2025

him. That it was easier to listen to him than to work. We were hoeing, it was hard work. It was easier to listen to than to work. And since he was a good worker, I earned twice as much as others there. Because we worked a lot in the morning. And in the afternoon, it was hot, you couldn't work. Anyway, you had to stay in the shade. Like this. And at the beginning, I want to be honest with you. Because if I tell stories, it is useless. At the beginning I saw it as a source of income. I thought I could earn some money with this man, go home and buy my icon.³⁴

At the end of the work in Tulcea County, Brother Bortea went home and then contacted the Pentecostal congregation functioning officially in nearby Bacău.

His wife reacted to what had happened to him with strong antipathy. Their disagreement went so far that she wanted to divorce him. He bore her opposition patiently and often spoke with her about his new ideas. After a while he took her with him to the religious meetings of the Bacău congregation. The women of the congregation received her kindly. The atmosphere of the meetings and their welcoming character played a significant role in gradually dissolving her initial hostility and in her commitment to her husband's efforts to build a community.

[And after you understood all these things³⁵, what did you do? Or how did the things you learned change your life?] You can imagine that I went through a major trauma. Because everything I understood there (on the farm), however little it may have been, for a month my family did not know, my wife did not know what I was doing there. My brothers did not know, my parents did not know. [...] So my parents did not know either, because there was no one in our village who was of any other religion than Orthodox. And you can imagine that I came back from there, full of fear of God and gratitude, having gained some knowledge, and here I first had to face my family. First, I told my wife that I had met someone there and that he had converted me, and that it stayed with me that I would become a believer and that this is roughly what faith means. And at first my wife did not like it; she (then) started to take an interest because of me. [...] And it did not take long for my wife to convert. And she said it was not a bad idea. "Good, right?" And she saw a little from the change in my behavior that I was not rebellious, that I tried

34 August 2, 2025

35 Those things that he heard from the person who introduced him to the Pentecostal faith.

to give up drinking, because drinking was a very ugly thing (for me). I also quit smoking. All of these were disasters as well.³⁶

Enthusiastic about the new religious truths he had encountered, he first spoke about them to neighbours and relatives. At the beginning it was mainly relatives who attended these meetings, but after a time more and more people from the village appeared. People listened with interest as religious matters were discussed with them directly, in a way they could understand and feel. The meetings became increasingly regular, although at first only a small group gathered.

Brother Bortea, who lived in a small house, built a small room onto it so that they could hold their meetings there. In this modest room attached to the little house, the first conversions took place; these were the founding steps of today's Pentecostal congregation in Lingureni. He also contacted several people who, under socialism, were secretly connected to the Pentecostal movement (among them some who were organizing religious meetings in their own native villages without permission)³⁷ and with others who were important figures in the Bacău congregation, which (probably) functioned with state permission. These people sometimes visited the illegal Pentecostal group in the Roma settlement and participated in its meetings. Their persuasive power also contributed to the further growth of the small community.

He told us a few things (namely the person through whom he came to know the faith), and then the rest was done by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit worked in our hearts and created the possibility for us to meet believing brothers and sisters.³⁸

The growth of the community did not escape the attention of the authorities. On one occasion, when they were holding a religious gathering in the house of a „brother”³⁹, that is, a member of the community, the village party secretary notified the communal police. The police arrived accompanied by several local members of the people's council and wanted to arrest Brother Bortea as the leader

36 2 August 2025.

37 See, for example, the role of the person referred to as the leader of the “central community” in organising one of the region's first rural communities.

38 26 July 2021.

39 Pentecostals refer to members of their communities as “brother” (for men) and “sister”.

of the congregation. A scuffle began, however: the members of the congregation – about fifty persons at that time, in 1980–82 – did not want to let their leader go. In the end he and several companions were summoned to the police station, where, when they appeared, they were beaten cruelly. The most elementary rights of the believers were not respected; without any formal identification, everyone was beaten. Some, especially visitors from outside the village, managed to flee. Those caught were taken in through one door, beaten with slaps and a whip, and led out through another. The president of the council was also present during the torture. A party member was also among the Pentecostal believers; at the president's instruction, he was beaten first.

And I remember that we were praying in one of the brothers' houses, and from the village, from the party organization, the party secretary notified the police. He called them, and they came together with the people's council [...] and with members of the local organization, and they came to the house where we were. And they wanted to arrest me. The police, together with the communists, dragged me out of the house; the brothers pulled me back, and they could not handle the brothers. So in the end they took me, as the one who had initiated it, as the one who organized the believers. But it was very difficult. Then again we received a harsh punishment. And all of us were summoned to the police, but that is not all I wanted to say. Still being new in the faith, I did not understand why we were being persecuted. Since earlier I had lived a bad life, I stole, I drank, I swore, I fought —here in the village we were bad people. And no one said anything. But after we became believers, the pressure from the authorities began. [...] They called us to the police station; they found us at home. They gathered all of us and finally took us to the station, and there at the police station they started beating us. They placed an executioner there to beat the believers. One went in, was beaten, and taken out through another door. Another went in, was beaten, and taken out the other side. And in the end Brother [he states his name] went in, who is still alive today. [...] He was terribly beaten. I can still see it now, when he came out of the station bent over, saying: brothers, there is no need for identity cards here, there is no need for anything. [...] And then we had to leave; we ran so that the brothers who were strangers, not locals, could escape. But we, who were locals, had to stay there. The one with whom we began building the community⁴⁰ — a younger brother, about a year older

40 He uses the term *lucrarea*, which in this context refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, that is, the formation of the community.

than me — he was also a believer, but before that he had been a party member, and even then, he was still a party member with the communists. And when the council president arrived, the one who was there when we were arrested, he said to the police: “Start with him!” Meaning with him, who was a party member. I saw it, because the door was not fully closed; even the police did not have the patience to close the door at the station, and when he slapped this brother who was a party member, I do not know how many chairs he knocked over as he fell at the police station. There was such hatred in him (in the policeman). I do not know what else they did to him, how many more beatings he received inside, I do not know.

But then my turn came as well. And I was still new in the faith; I said that I did not understand why we believers had to suffer (for our faith). Why does society reject us. Why does everyone hate us, us believers — from institutions, through laws, through legal authorities. And I did not understand this problem. And it took some time until I understood why they would hate us, because we are not of this world. And then I was also called to the police station. They called me in! They took me, holding me by the hand. The party secretary took the whip down from the hook; the policeman instructed him to take the whip down and beat me with it. When I saw him taking down the whip, I said: man, stop, you have no right to beat me, because I have done nothing wrong for you to beat me.⁴¹

After this he was not beaten, but he was fined 3,000 lei, which he said was an enormous sum: at that time, one could buy a house in the village for 5,000 lei. He could not pay the fine; his monthly salary was 800-900 lei. He appealed the penalty in court. On the day of the hearing, to his surprise, the room in which his case was discussed was full, because members of the Bacău Pentecostal congregation had come. He knelt to present his case, but the judge ordered him to stand up. He recounted how they had been attacked while praying and how they had been beaten at the police station. The judge asked whether he wanted a lawyer; he replied that he did not need one because he had told the truth. His appeal was not accepted and the obligation to pay the enormous fine remained. Tears came to his eyes, and he thought he would never be able to produce such a sum. After the hearing, the leader of the Bacău congregation approached him. This man had once been a lieutenant-colonel in the air force, demoted by Ceaușescu, and had converted to Pentecostalism after his wife was miraculously healed of cancer. He behaved

41 July 26, 2021

kindly towards him and told him that litigation with these people was completely useless, because they were the same people as those who had fined and beaten them. It was, he said, „as if one complained to Satan that his brother had beaten you”.

He said: „You, Bortea, do not come anymore to contest (to appeal), because these people here at the court, here in the law, are the same as those who fined you. You came here and said: ‘Hey, Satan, hey, look, your brother fined me! Your brother beat me!’⁴²

After they left the courthouse, something unusual happened. The believers who had attended the hearing went up to him and, “emptying their pockets,” gave him money. Through these donations, more than half of the fine was collected in this way.⁴³ At the same time, the leader explained to him how to handle the money. He said that when the debt collector, the “perceptor,” comes to collect the accumulated amount, Brother Bortea should give him 100–200 lei per month, as much as he could save from his salary. In this way, he could avoid prison, since he was not able to pay the full amount at once. The perceptor came to collect the money every month, while at times he also became the target of mockery.

The collector came and asked a neighbour of mine. Since the collector came to me every month so that I could pay for this problem, this fine, he asked the old woman: „Mother, do you not know what this boy is paying a fine for? He is a decent boy.” The woman, who was not a believer, always said: „Ah, that is the ticket to heaven.” That is what my neighbour said.⁴⁴

Then they sent the police after us; the priest set the people against us. They came at us, broke our windows there, smashed our doors. They threw stones inside, at night, in the evening when we gathered there. There was no one we could complain to, no one we could tell. [Did you usually gather at night?] In the evening, that is how we gathered. Not during the day, because during the day we were afraid they would come after us. But they watched it even at night. When it was not people coming at us to break the windows, officials

42 July 26, 2021

43 1,700 lei.

44 July 26, 2021

from the people's council came. "That's it, we caught you!" They wrote something down on a sheet of paper and summoned us to the police station.⁴⁵

According to his account, as the community grew, they needed a larger place to gather. He requested permission from the people's council to build a forty-square-meter „storage room”, and this was approved. That room was then used as the site for religious meetings. When the local authorities realized what was happening, they summoned him and tried to withdraw the permit. But someone on the council who sympathized with them advised him not to hand over the document, because it would be destroyed and the new structure would immediately be demolished. The room was built with the help of members of the Bacău community, who assisted with building materials and their own labour.

[And it was from his own money, wasn't it? Or how was it? The building.] We did not have the money to build quickly. It was difficult, very difficult to build a house. Even if it cost 4,000–5,000 lei, 6,000 lei was already the best house (in the village). Not everyone could afford it. It took time to build a house, because people were barely living from one day to the next. But those people who... we went to them in the city, right? They helped each other. One bought us a door, two windows. One of them helped with the construction. Another one... without the knowing [of authorities]. [Yes, yes.] They also taught us how to build, how to do things, what to do. Like that. So I had a lot to struggle with in this village, because people were bad. Very bad. They thought they were doing God's work by punishing me. Yes? And they really punished me severely. Yes? [On the advice of the priest?] The priest and the leadership of the commune. The commune leadership was also with the Orthodox believers. [After you converted you started preaching the...] Well, after I explained it to my wife, we also became a bit stronger in what we believed. The people around us, when they saw that we were not going to church, we started telling the brothers, ours, our relatives. You should know that people could also have been manipulated from this side, to draw them over. Because people did not know. But we did not want manipulation. We wanted people to understand first that Christ said: preach the word to every creature.⁴⁶

45 2 August 2025.

46 August 2, 2025

Meanwhile the police wanted to have the little room attached to his house, where they held meetings, demolished. Because the building had been erected with a construction permit, this ultimately did not happen.

People were very bad to us. Extremely bad! But in the end, the community survived. [So in the end, were you able to gather and pray, or not?] Good. They persecuted us for a very long time, like rats, like hares in the field. [And where did you gather? In houses? At people's homes?] Yes, we gathered there, where we had put up the building. The police came, and I told them: sir, faith is a spiritual necessity. [You built a building where you gathered?] A small one, a "kilér"⁴⁷, where a handful of people could fit. And the police wanted us to demolish it, but it had a construction permit. And it was not really possible to demolish it if there was a permit. And I told the police officer: sir, look, this is the situation. For us, faith is a necessity of the soul. If we demolish this building, we will still pray. Whatever they intend to do to us, they can arrest us, they can kill us, my God, we will remain believers. Because this is within our soul. And the police, no matter how many times they warned us, no matter how many times they fined us, they summoned us, fined us, beat some of us, and some outsiders who came to us were driven away and beaten.⁴⁸

Alongside the constant harassment by the police, the Pentecostal congregation also had to face the resentment of the Orthodox majority. The most serious manifestation of the conflict occurred when the community's pastor⁴⁹ arrived and non-Pentecostal villagers attacked them. The pastor, his driver, and Brother Bortea were sitting in a Dacia when people incited by the local party secretary surrounded the car, threw stones at it, broke its windows, and tried to force open the door. The attack was successful: Brother Bortea, who tried to protect those inside, was struck several times in the face and temporarily lost consciousness. The driver was hit with a large stone, and his blood splashed up to the roof of the car. Brother Bortea attributes to divine miracle the fact that although the car malfunctioned during the attack and did not start despite the driver's attempts, it somehow did start and they escaped.

47 Extension of the main building, with an auxiliary building attached to it.

48 July 26, 2021

49 It is not entirely clear when and in what form the Lingureni community came to have a pastor, who occasionally attended the community.

The pastor was beaten in our village. That is why I am saying I don't think you have enough time to listen to everything. The pastor who pastored our congregation came, and the people here in the village beat him. It was a rough fight, a wild brawl. They (i.e., the pastor and the driver) came by car, a Dacia. People were standing both in front of and behind the car. And one man from the village punched the windshield about thirty times. Do you hear me? Thirty holes. He punched the car so hard that the door opened. And I put my hand there to dull his blows, because I was afraid, he would eventually break it. The local party secretary had been watching from the beginning. When I was holding it with my hand, he punched me here in the face, in the teeth, up here. I fell back onto the seat, the back seat, stunned, I don't know how long I lost consciousness — he hit me so hard, without me defending myself. I did not know he was going to hit me; I did not see it. [...] And I don't know how long I was unconscious. I told this to another brother as well, I don't know, but when I came to from the coma, I saw that my skin was completely torn open. I looked left and right and said, who could have done this to me? But I could not figure it out. I put my hand there again where the door was broken in, and I watched. The second time he punched through the window, I saw it, but it was too late — I could not defend myself. He hit me in the mouth from below, tearing my upper lip. And when he struck again, he tore my lip at the teeth. He did not knock out my teeth, only split them open. And I lost consciousness again. Maybe for a shorter time than the first time. And when I came round (unintelligible words), they were throwing stones, breaking the car windows. [Were those people from the village?] People from the village. The believers of today. Those who later became believers. [But at that time...] They were not. Yes. A woman picked up a 20–25 cm stone. And when she hit the driver on the head — I saw it with my own eyes — the blood sprayed to the ceiling. I told the driver: start it, I shouted, start it and let's go, because the car was already surrounded by people. And he replied that the car would not start. The key was in the ignition, but the starter did not engage. But then he turned the ignition again and it started. Because the Lord wanted us to be saved. And that is how we escaped.⁵⁰

It is not entirely clear with what regularity and in what capacity, but people who had legitimate status for the community and for Brother Bortea certainly visited the Pentecostal community from Lingureni before the regime change. What

50 July 26, 2021

seems certain is that such people existed and that their presence and their role in the gatherings were decisive in shaping the community's worldview, developing its ritual system, strengthening its identity, and thus in its institutionalization.

One consequence of the attack on the community's pastor was that he no longer went to Lingureni to perform ritual tasks. In the same way, other visitors who had been extremely important for the community's emerging identity also stopped coming. During socialism, Brother Bortea went to the national Pentecostal delegate in Bucharest, hoping that a legal solution could be found for their community's functioning. Under the threat of the Securitate, the meeting resulted only in his being sent on to the county leadership, where he presented their problems and hoped that a pastor would be sent to them. The idea proved completely naive. At that time, he said, pastoral status was granted with great difficulty; one pastor might be responsible for the congregations of three counties.⁵¹ The county leaders gave him verbal authorization to act as pastor in the community despite his youth – he was barely twenty.

“Look, go home. You are the greatest pastor there.” How me? I was just a young kid. Twenty years old. “Yes, yes, yes. You are the greatest pastor there. Because people there will still beat you, they will still let you (continue what you are doing). But if we send someone else there, they will kill him.” And since then, I have pastored the Church of God in our village. Without credentials, without anything, based only on what Brother [he says his name] said. [...] (Pastoral work, religious activity) at that time was carried out in secret, without the Securitate or the world knowing. So he received me in his office there. And he says: “From this day on... look, let us pray, you are the pastor of the congregation there.” “And what will I do?” “You will bury the dead, you will perform marriages, you will preach the Gospel, you will give communion. Everything a pastor does; you will do as well. You are the pastor of the church there.” At that time, you could not officially appoint a pastor. There was a great struggle over pastoral work. It was strict. One pastor had three counties. One pastor had three counties in the region. No one knew that they had made me a pastor there, only the pastor (i.e. the head of the county organization).⁵²

51 For the low number of pastors during the socialist period, see M. MARIN, *Faith on the Margins*, 420.

52 July 26, 2021

After the regime change, he functioned as a so-called missionary pastor (pastor misionar), which, besides leading the local community, involved maintaining relations with various Pentecostal communities at home and abroad and much travelling. Around the middle of the 2020s he transferred the pastoral title and its many tasks to his son-in-law. He himself remained more of an honorary pastor, but he still plays an important communal and ritual role in the community.

When I asked how, among other things, he had learned to conduct a funeral, he explained that he had attended funerals two or three times in congregations belonging to his network and saw there what had to be done. His learning of the pastoral and community-leadership role took place through maintaining contacts with other community leaders in the region.

He told several times the story of one occasion when he was summoned to the militia and the militiaman complained that, because of him, he had been interrogated by the party secretary, who had reproached him for not acting effectively enough against the Pentecostals in the village. When Brother Bortea replied that he no longer stole — though earlier, like everyone, he had stolen from the collective's property in the fields — the militiaman shouted: „Did I tell you not to steal? Go and steal, only leave this believing business!” In other words, he would have preferred that I go stealing rather than convert.⁵³

The resentment of the Orthodox in the village toward the Pentecostal group also broke into open conflict when someone in the Pentecostal community died and the Orthodox did not want to allow the person to be buried in the village cemetery. Because of their resistance, the Pentecostals were forced to bury their dead in the courtyards of family houses.

There are „proroci“ in the Pentecostal congregations of the region and also in Lingureni. These are people with complex religious functions whom believers most often visit for healing and to inquire into the will of the Holy Spirit. The „information“ that the prophets receive from the Holy Spirit is usually called in Romanian *descoperire*, that is, “a disclosure”, “revelation”, “or manifestation of the Holy Spirit”.⁵⁴ Through *descoperire* the Holy Spirit may assist in solving a problem or may convey different important messages to the community or even to an individual.

⁵³ June 28, 2023

⁵⁴ In certain contexts, the term *lucrare* is used in this sense to express the miraculous nature of the event.

The best-known *proroc* in the region was Martin, the founder of the central community established in an Orthodox village during socialism. Martin's spiritual significance was also present in Brother Bortea's life. According to one of Brother Bortea's stories, at a time when he was already interested in matters of faith, he reached Martin. They had not met before. His companion explained the purpose of their visit: to „see what the Lord says about him.” They knelt and prayed, and Martin received a *descoperire*. The Holy Spirit showed Martin that at the age of nineteen Brother Bortea had been in a car accident in which three people died. Bortea survived with lasting injuries to his leg that are still visible. Martin said that several people around him had died; he saw how they had died. He told Brother Bortea that the Lord had preserved him so that he might convert. According to Brother Bortea, this had a great effect on him and touched him deeply.

And then we knelt and started to pray. And he said: “Let us see what the Lord says tonight about this boy. You, boy, I do not know you. I am seeing you for the first time.” That is how that man said it. “Look at what I saw about you. I saw you in an accident. People died around you. I saw how they died.” Yes? “And the Lord preserved your life so that you would convert.” Oh, this really touched me, Peter, it had a great impact on me. [...] Because he was a man who had revelations (*descoperiri*). And it really moved me. It made me understand... why does this man know this, where does he know it from? There was no way he could know it, if he had not had a revelation (*descoperire*) (unintelligible words). And this was a revelation. A reality.⁵⁵

He was already in contact with Martin when he helped resolve a specific problem of the community. This assistance also took place within the framework of a *descoperire* (revelation), which falls under the authority of *proroc*. In Pentecostal communities, the final stage of ritual incorporation is baptism. This can take place in a river or stream⁵⁶ – even today – or in a church or congregation hall equipped with a baptismal pool. In the absence of these, baptism can also be performed in some kind of “water-retaining facility,” most commonly a bathtub. During socialism, although – as the interview excerpt below indicates – there were occasions when baptisms were carried out in secret at night in a stream,

⁵⁵ June 26, 2023

⁵⁶ In the case of Roma diaspora communities abroad, I have also heard of examples where it took place in the ocean.

those who participated took a very high risk, as the socialist authorities strictly prohibited such practices.⁵⁷

After a few years had passed, I converted to faith and continued on. It was during communism, and we were not allowed to baptize those who had converted to the faith. And in our small congregation, where we gathered [...] there were four people who needed to be baptized. So, I rolled up a piece of linoleum and made a kind of small tub out of it, so that we could pour in about two buckets of water and baptize someone. Meanwhile, a friend of mine from another denomination came – the Evangelical Christians. We are close (as denominations), but not exactly the same in teaching. And he came to me, and I said: come to the congregation. But hey, what are you doing here? Look, we want to baptize someone. We have four people who need to be baptized. But we cannot go to the stream, because if the communists find out, they will put us in prison. [So you could not baptize in the stream at that time?] At night, in secret, yes – but if anyone was caught doing such things, they would get into serious trouble. And then I said: look, I will take you by car, we will squeeze into the car; there is no one here with a bathtub. In the village, I said, people were very poor and no one had a bathtub. No one did. And I said that in [he mentions the name of the village], someone has a bathtub. I knew it, I had been to that person⁵⁸, I mentioned him earlier. But it was Sunday and I did not know if he was at home; maybe he had gone to church, but maybe someone had stayed home who would allow us to use the bathtub. Because maybe they were at the service, since they went to church in the city. But it could happen that we would find someone at home. And so we got into the car with him and the four other people [he mentions a settlement in the Bacău area].⁵⁹

Brother Bortea recounted that when they arrived at Martin's place, they found him leaning on the gate. He asked why he had not gone to the religious gathering held in the city, to which Martin replied that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him (descoperire) that Frather Bortea would come that day with four people to baptize

57 As Marin Manuela notes, requiring official authorization for baptism into neo-Protestant faith was one of the regime's techniques for restricting Roma neo-Protestant religious communities, alongside the limited issuance of operating permits for such communities (Marin, *Romii în perioada comunistă*, 328).

58 Martin, the founder of the central community.

59 June 26, 2023

them, and that he therefore had to stay at home. He showed that the bathtub had already been filled with water, and the white garments used for baptism had also been prepared in advance. The driver, who was an Evangelical Christian and, according to Brother Bortea, someone who does not understand miracles, asked excitedly whether this was not something arranged in advance, but he replied that there was no such thing. The Holy Spirit had communicated their arrival to Brother Martin through a *descoperire*. He specifically noted that in the evening it had still been expected that only three people would be baptized, but in the morning a fourth person joined them, and Brother Martin already knew that there would be four. He also told him that they had initially intended to hold a secret local baptism, and it was the driver himself who suggested that they go to Brother Martin. As a result of these events, the driver was deeply moved. Afterwards, Brother Bortea asked Brother Martin to baptize them together, but he refused, explaining that they should do it exactly as it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Tanya Luhrmann introduces the concept of metakinesis⁶⁰ to describe specific forms of charismatic religious experience. As she states: “I use the term *metakinesis*⁶¹ to refer to mind-body states that are both identified within the group as the way of recognizing God’s personal presence in your life and are subjectively and idiosyncratically experience”.⁶² Based on fieldwork in a Californian religious community, the author demonstrates the operation and role of metakinesis in the community’s religious practice. Members of the studied community learned to identify “metakinetic states,” through which they experienced their relationship and communication with God as living and real: “In identifying metakinetic states, congregants identify—and, thus, psychologically organize—bodily phenomena that seem new and distinctive to them, which they come to interpret in ways that are congruent with the group’s understanding of evidence of God’s real reality in their lives”.⁶³ Tanya Luhrmann describes how these experiences were often lived as dissociative: by narrowing their attention, believers entered states of consciousness

60 A dance studies–derived concept originally describes “the way emotional experience is carried within the body so that the dancer conveys the emotion to the observer and, yet, does it by making the expressive gesture uniquely his or her own” (Martin (1983), 23–25, cited in Tanya M. LUHRMANN, *Metakinesis, How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity. American Anthropologist*, New Series, 106 (2004), 519).

61 The italics are also from Tanya Luhrmann.

62 LUHRMANN, *Metakinesis*, 522.

63 LUHRMANN, *Metakinesis*, 522.

in which they felt as if they were “floating or not in control of their bodies”.⁶⁴ These states could also be accompanied by various auditory or visual “sensory hallucinations”.⁶⁵

The literature describes religious conversion as a multi-stage process.⁶⁶ In most Pentecostal communities, it is expected that the individual receives the gift of speaking in tongues (a phenomenon referred to in the literature as baptism with the Holy Spirit). In the communities I studied, the acquisition of glossolalia occurred after the completion of the conversion process, when the converted person became a „stable” member of the religious community. This is also reflected in Brother Bortea’s account, according to which his first such experience took place during a small congregation gathering in Bacău. The description of the event suggests that its atmosphere and unfolding evoke the social and ritual conditions of what Harvey Whitehouse describes as imagistic religiosity—a highly aroused emotional state, strong solidarity among participants, and a creatively experienced form of religiosity⁶⁷ characterized by intense group cohesion.⁶⁸ In the communities studied in the region, it was often reported that the reception of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) took place in small, intimate congregational settings, like those described by Whitehouse. According to Whitehouse, “And one of the hallmark features of the imagistic mode is that its rituals trigger transformative experiences through the enactment of traumatic ordeals, searing themselves into the memories of participants and triggering a process of exegetical reflection that last for years,

64 LUHRMANN, *Metakinesis*, 522.

65 LUHRMANN, *Metakinesis*, 522.

66 J. LOFLAND – R. STARK, Becoming a World-saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective. *American Sociological Review* 30.60 (1965), 862–875. Lewis R. RAMBO, *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1993; Lewis R. RAMBO – Charles E. FARHADIAN, Converting: Stages of Religious Change, in Christopher LAMB – M. Darrol BRYANT (eds.), *Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, London–New York: Cassell, 1999, 23–34.

67 At one point, the author refers to this as “*interpretive creativity*”, which contributes to the formation of group cohesion, what he calls an “*imagistic bond*” (Harvey WHITEHOUSE, *The Ritual Animal: Imitation and Cohesion in the Evolution of Social Complexity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021, 9).

68 Harvey WHITEHOUSE, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004, 70–74.

sometimes for a whole lifetime”.⁶⁹ Imagistic rituals, which are components of initiation rites involving torture or strong physical and psychological ordeal – as Whitehouse emphasizes⁷⁰ – are of course absent from the rituals accompanying the reception of glossolalia. At the same time, Whitehouse argues that imagistic religious experience is not limited to these rituals, but can appear in any ritually significant transformative context, including shamans’ visions, spiritual journeys, and so on.⁷¹ “At the heart of this imagistic process was usually an emotionally intense experience which endured in memory and demanded interpretation.”⁷²

The transformative power of the experience of glossolalia is indicated by the fact that individuals recounting their conversion narratives consistently recalled this experience in detail and presented it with great emotional intensity. The role of this experience in personal religiosity remains significant even though, through its narration as part of the conversion story and its repeated ritualized telling, it also becomes to some extent structured in the same way as the conversion narrative itself.

According to Brother Bortea, after meeting Pentecostalism on a farm in Tulcea County, and before fully committing to it, he observed a kind of one-year probationary period of abstinence to see whether he could truly give up certain “sinful habits” condemned by his new faith. Among these he mentioned smoking, alcohol consumption, and occasional “entertainment” with other women. After this year had passed, he experienced the event that resembles the transformative experiences characteristic of Whitehouse’s notion of imagistic religiosity.

See what happened to me. After I turned twenty, after I converted, I first tried (perhaps) to discipline myself. To see whether I could manage not to smoke, because I used to smoke. To see whether I could manage not to drink anymore, because I used to drink; I liked alcohol. And to see whether I could leave behind my episodes with women, my “womanizing.” Because this is a difficult episode for people who have once experienced its taste. It is like changing cars — like someone getting tired of their car. [Did you have many

69 WHITEHOUSE, *The Ritual Animal*, 90.

70 For example, here: WHITEHOUSE, *Modes of Religiosity*, 111.

71 Harvey WHITEHOUSE, *Inheritance. The Evolutionary Origins of the Modern World*, Cambridge–Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2024, 86–87.

72 WHITEHOUSE, *Inheritance*. 87.

girlfriends?] Yes, I liked going to several women. I liked having some fun. Even if my wife did not know, she did not need to know what I was doing. And I said that I would not engage with faith until I left these things behind, because they are from the Devil, from the Evil One. Because the Evil One tempts people. Yes? And after a year of abstinence, I saw that it was possible. After that I underwent water baptism.⁷³

He recounted his experience as follows: on one occasion he travelled to a nearby large city for medical examinations. Accessing the results took longer than he had planned, so he asked to stay at the home of one of the Pentecostal members he had met through the city congregation. In the simple house, located in a suburban area, several people were taking part in an informal gathering. The believers from the urban congregation, like him, were simple people without extensive theological knowledge or interpretive skills regarding matters of faith, but they had been members of the Pentecostal community for a longer time. They asked him whether he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to which he replied that he had not. At this point, the small group present knelt and began to pray aloud, asking God to grant him this gift of the Holy Spirit. Some people prayed on their knees in a “desperate” manner, breaking into tears. While this was happening, Brother Bortea was also praying when he sensed the appearance of a supernatural force in his body. At the same time, he felt a heat in his mouth and throat, which he identified as the “warmth of the spirit.” He closed his eyes and felt as if flames were coming out of his mouth, while hearing a sound like water being poured from a full bucket into an empty one. This experience lasted a few seconds; he then opened his eyes and saw how the others were praying. After this brief episode, he began speaking in a foreign language, which lasted approximately ten to fifteen minutes, during which he wondered how he could speak without consciously controlling it. He then went out into the courtyard of the house. As he explained, he wanted to make sure that what was happening was real and not a dream. When he went outside and saw that his sense of space and time belonged to reality, he was filled with indescribable joy and felt like running and jumping over fences. At that moment he believed that this experience was entirely unique and had happened only to him. After he told the members of the congregation, they informed him that anyone in their community could experience it if they believed and prayed for it.

73 June 26, 2023

(...) they knelt and prayed to God. “Lord,” they said, “baptize him with Your Holy Spirit, baptize Brother Bortea with Your Holy Spirit.” They prayed, they were literally crying. I watched their tears and I felt sorry for them. [This was at a church gathering....] Not at a church gathering, but in a house, at someone’s home. [...] And they said: Grant it, Lord, to Brother Bortea. That is how they prayed, desperately. They believed, they were simple people, but they believed, they knew the *lucrare*⁷⁴ better, they were older people (in the faith). Peter. While they were praying, and I was also praying, a supernatural force came over me⁷⁵, which I cannot explain. And I felt it in my mouth and (perhaps) also in lower parts. A heat. The warmth of the Spirit. And I heard with my own ears. I heard now, with my eyes closed, and I was praying. I heard with my ears. As if a... As if flames were coming out of my mouth? Or as if water were being poured from a full bucket into an empty one? I heard such a gurgling sound. And flames came out of my mouth and then I felt... the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ [Did you feel it like this?] The Spirit. The heat, so to speak. That is how it felt. Like this. It lasted a few seconds. Like this. They continued praying for me. Because I opened my eyes and looked at them. At those who were praying. And after this few-second episode ended, my mouth started speaking in another language, which I did not yet understand. For more than ten minutes. Almost a quarter of an hour. [And you understand what he was saying?] Nothing. I did not. It was something else. And at a certain moment I said, but can my mouth speak without me? That is what I thought. A continuous flow of speech, but no one understood it. And it is written in the Bible. It is written. Like this, document, I can show it. And it says..., they jumped up, they applauded. They said, the Lord has baptized him with His Holy Spirit. I did not understand what was happening. Yes? Like this. During this time, for me. A special force manifested itself there. For about 10 minutes, a quarter of an hour, because I did not check the time, it seemed like a dream, what was happening. It could not be real. Then I went out (into the yard). “Where are you going?” “Wait a moment, I’m just going outside for a bit.” I did not tell them what I was going to do. I went out in order to see whether this was reality. Was it happening in reality? I had originally gone

74 *Lucrare*: a miracle brought about through the Holy Spirit (see PETI Lehel, Két moldvai karizmatikus vallási közösség alapítójának megtéréstörténete. In: „*Krisztus ajándéka van bennünk*”. *Pünkösddizmus moldvai román, roma és csángó közösségekben*. Budapest–Kolozsvár: Balassi Kiadó–Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2020, 103).

75 In Romanian: “(...) o coborât peste mine o puterină supranaturală, pe care nu pot să o explic.”

76 Here he refers to it as *duhoarea*.

to the city for medical examinations. My wife knew that I was in the city. I went to do medical analyses, but it was postponed from one day to the next. Come tomorrow, like this, come tomorrow. After the results. I had to sleep somewhere there, at someone's house. There I met those people. And when I went out and saw that this was reality, that it was true, I felt like jumping over those gardens, running in joy. I did not know what to do! It was true, true, what had happened! I thought I was the only one to whom this was happening. The only one on earth. But I spoke with those people, and they said that every believer receives it, those who came to the faith, who converted and believe in this miracle (lucrare) and pray to God. "We also received it, we also received it!" And full churches, people like this... from every place which (unintelligible word).⁷⁷

In the case of the experience lived by Brother Bortea, we can identify the principles of the functioning of metakinetic experiences described by Luhrmann. Brother Bortea described the experience of receiving glossolalia as an entirely new experience for him, but behind the experience lies the religious community's interpretation of such experiences. Moreover, the emergence of such a special experience is expected by the community; sooner or later it must happen to its joining members.⁷⁸ The experience itself took place during a communal gathering, where the present members were in a particular state of sensomotoric perception (they were praying, breaking into tears). The experience thus lived by Brother Bortea came into being under the influence of communal expectations and interpretations adjusted to it, as if "reflecting" them. The principle of metakinesis based on "reflection" thus turns it into a Durkheimian concept of the social functioning of religion.

According to one of his accounts, during the socialist period, when several people had already converted to Pentecostalism, a fellow believer invited him to the seriously ill father of him so that they might pray for him. The father, whose death had already been due a week earlier, was not a Pentecostal. In the house they encountered several people who themselves were not Pentecostals. Brother Bortea began a prayer asking God to „touch” the man and to extend the patient's life. At that moment, according to his account, those present experienced the appearance of an alien force. The non-believing persons at the bedside began to cry

⁷⁷ 26 June 2023.

⁷⁸ In the communities I examined, the time required to receive glossolalia varied from the moment the individual joined the group.

out and weep, they cried out to God and began to speak in tongues. Brother Bortea particularly emphasized that for those who do not understand the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it can even be frightening. The patient rose from the bed and asked for food. The non-Pentecostal participants of the event subsequently converted themselves. Their baptism took place at night, in secrecy. These believers then also played a role in the spread of the new faith within their community.

Those who experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, the holiness of the Holy Spirit, were baptized. But baptism did not take place in such a way that everyone could see it, in front of the eyes of the whole world. We had to go at night. At one o'clock at night. The baptisms took place in a stream, in places like that. Like this. But they not only (perhaps) converted, but they also told others what had happened to them. They also spread it to others. And thus, the message of the Gospel spread.⁷⁹

According to his account, during the one-year period of trial he studied the Bible in depth.⁸⁰ On the farm in Tulcea, the person who had spoken to him about faith taught him how to "search" the Bible himself in order to find answers to his questions.⁸¹

Summary

The formation of the Pentecostal community in Lingureni began with the stay of a twenty-year-old man on a remote farm, where, following the teachings of a person who had encountered the Pentecostal movement abroad, he converted and began community building. This element is also present in the case of other Pentecostal communities formed in the region, which I studied during earlier fieldwork.⁸² Although the religious community in Lingureni has a somewhat

79 26 July 2021.

80 13 August 2024.

81 13 August 2024.

82 A similar pattern emerged during the socialist period in the Orthodox Romanian-background "central community," which, due to its charismatic leader and long-term activity, became a model congregation in the region (PETI Lehel, *A Szentlélek ajándékai és karizmatikus rítusok egy moldvai kistérség pünkösdi közösségeiben*). In the 2000s, the first Pentecostal Roma community was formed in a village inhabited by both Roma and Romanians (PETI Lehel, *A pünkösdzimusra való áttérés okai és funkciói egy moldvai roma közösségben*. In: *„Krisztus ajándéka van bennünk”. Pünkösdzimusz moldvai román, roma és csángó közösségekben*. Budapest–Kolozsvár: Balassi Kiadó–Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2020, 49–73, see also PETI

different history from the network of Pentecostal congregations operating in the area (one of its particularities being that, like the rural central congregation, it was formed during the socialist period), its institutionalization followed a similar pattern to that of post-socialist communities that emerged after regime change and differ from one another along significant cultural features. In the case of the Lingureni community, a defining factor was that the young community builder came into contact with key figures of both illegal and legal Pentecostal communities in the region (community leaders, charismatic individuals, “proroci,” etc.), who not only provided him with information on how to navigate conflicts with the authorities, but also contributed to strengthening the motivation he acquired at the time of his conversion. At the same time, they also offered important models and “role components” for his functioning as a religious leader. His conversion and the consolidation of his leadership identity were particularly strongly influenced by the community in Bacău, which also functioned as a catalyst congregation for the founder of the Orthodox background “central community,” which organized an illegal Pentecostal congregation during the socialist period. Brother Bortea’s becoming a community founder was also significantly shaped by his contacts with the leaders of Pentecostal communities operating in the region.⁸³

The state obstruction of the Pentecostal movement during the socialist period meant that its leaders exercised informal forms of leadership authority.⁸⁴ This

Lehel, Migration and Pentecostalism in a mendicant Roma community in Eastern Moldavia. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*. 63.1 (2018), June, 83–106), where, although the founding figure remained an important member of the church throughout, he was unable to maintain his leadership role. A community following the same pattern also emerged among the Csángó Pentecostals (PETI, *A Szentlélek ajándékai*). Analyzing the conversion narratives and life trajectories of community leaders, it became clear that the founders’ subjective conversion experiences and cultural backgrounds played a fundamental role in shaping the “religious profile” of each community as well (PETI, *Két moldvai karizmatikus vallási közösség alapítójának megtéréstörténete*). While in some communities’ certain rituals well known in the Pentecostal movement (healing, speaking in tongues, etc.) were highly significant, in others they were given less emphasis or even prohibited (PETI, *A Szentlélek ajándékai*).

83 For the rural, post-socialist communities of the region, such a figure was Martin, the founder of the “central community,” who established a community that lasted for more than forty years.

84 I encountered a similar form of informal authorization (in the case of the Csángó-background Pentecostal community) in the 2010s as well.

practice was also one of the conditions for the successful spread of the Pentecostal movement: it provided significant room for maneuvering for individuals with ambitions of community building and leadership.

His relationships with other Pentecostal actors in the region were important not only in terms of his attempts to strengthen his community on an institutional level, but also because they continuously motivated him to realize his determination and sense of mission.

Alongside the processes of the formation of the Lingureni community, we can also identify the elements that structured the religious worldview of its founder, Brother Bortea: the characteristics of globalized Pentecostalism⁸⁵ (the experience of glossolalia), as well as its locally significant variants (the revelations of the Holy Spirit mediated through the highly legitimate prophet of the central community, the so-called *descoperiri*⁸⁶). Joel Robbins points out that Pentecostal Christianity is characterized by the fact that it largely reproduces the ritual, ideological, and organizational features of Pentecostalism in a similar manner, while at the same time successfully adapting elements of local culture.⁸⁷

According to Marin Manuela, during the socialist period in Romania, Roma churches contributed to the preservation of civil consciousness and ethnic and cultural identity at a time when the state did not recognize Roma as an official minority but instead pursued their full assimilation.⁸⁸ The fact that the Lingureni community, by being mostly clandestinely connected to the Bacău-based and other illegally operating Romanian Pentecostal communities in the region, on the one hand strengthened its civil consciousness (as M. Manuela notes), while on the other hand it also encountered a new model of acceptance within Romanian Pentecostal communities. Some authors argue that Roma communities may, through Pentecostalism, belong to a “transethnic denomination,” which offers a possibility for the dissolution of social stigma.⁸⁹

85 For the relationship between the local and the global in Pentecostalism, see COLEMAN, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*.

86 The *proroc* is able, even without prior knowledge of the person, to recount (attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit) the key traumatic events of his life.

87 ROBBINS, *The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 118.

88 MARIN, *Faith on the Margins*, 422, 429.

89 Johannes RIES, The Cultural Dynamics of Romani/Gypsy Ethnicity and Pentecostal Christianity. In: David THURFJELL–Adrian MARSH (eds.), *Romani Pentecostalism. Gypsies and Charismatic Christianity*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Academic Research, 2014,

In the case of Lingureni, conflicts with the socialist authorities resulted in a strengthening of relations with members of the urban Pentecostal congregation. Members of the Bacău community supported Brother Bortea and his small community in various ways. As Slavkova has shown in relation to Roma evangelical churches in socialist Bulgaria, the anti-religious policies of the dictatorship contributed to the expression of unity and solidarity among communities.⁹⁰

Members of the Bacău community helped establish what Slavkova also describes as a “domestic church,” assisted in paying court-imposed fines, and provided leadership advice in navigating legal constraints (for example, advising him not to pursue further legal action).

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90 SLAVKOVA, *Conversion, Leadership and Identity*, 70.

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