

WORLD VIEW, RELIGION AND DISEASE IN MAGYARFALU

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The Bible teaches that the transcendent-immanent ancient cause of the universe, that is, its creator, is a god, or God. According to this world view, those responsible for the suffering of people are the people themselves. Nonetheless, there are sufferings in the world, of natural or other origins, which are not caused by human actions. The religious world view teaches that there are no situations where God—who created and supports the world—would run out of options, not even in the situations where the toolset of human actions does run out (Kessler 2008, 14, 31; Komáromi 1996, 92; Jolly 1996, 91; Nicolescu 2005, 171–2).

The concept of disease is closely linked to the concept of the body within that culture, and to the more or less identifiable origins of the disease, i.e. the cause of it. Knowledge regarding health and how to preserve it is inherent to culture as a whole, coded in the form of belief-like, experience-based practices and elementary rules which help to sort out and explain extraordinary situations.

Local religion in Magyarfalu

In Magyarfalu (Arini; Băcau County, Moldova, Romania), the culture and the institutions engrained in the culture are substantially defined and encompassed by the local religious system. The unity of religious and profane culture results in the fact that its functions cannot be attributed solely to the influence of religion, although it is difficult to separate them from it (cf. Erdélyi 1985, 17–8; Tomka 1990, 156). Doctrinal religion is not materialised and manifested in its full dogmatic excellence. Besides the official elements, magical and rational knowledge function as similar life-leading principles.

Local medicine

In Moldavian communities, the health care institutions of the state were created in the second half of the twentieth century. In Magyarfalu, there is still no doctor's surgery; for medical check-ups, the patients have to travel five kilometres from the settlement to the clinic in Găiceana.

We know little of the nature and function of medicine before our time. Based on the reports of missionaries from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries that can be found in the archives of the Vatican, in the course of their activities, the missionary priests applied preventive rules and healing methods necessary to maintain the proper functioning not only of the soul, but of the body as well (see Benda 1989; cf. Spielmann 1979, 42). These historical precedents may be related to the phenomenon whereby, even today, religion and healing connect and sometimes even overlap in the curing of certain diseases.¹

Popular practices used in local healing procedures mostly include preventive religious and/or magical actions.² The healing of some diseases includes the use of sacred and medical tools gathered from the flora and fauna of Magyarfalu and its immediate surroundings (on the use of plants and objects in medical procedures, see Csoma 2000); other diseases are healed with the help of specialists and techniques from outside the village. Among the latter are diseases that are thought to have been occasioned by some kind of spirit or some magical action. Diseases of mental or supernatural origin can be healed via specific procedures belonging to the religious toolset (see Nicolescu 2005, 172). The advent of this type of disease (*fright, epilepsy, depression*) is not strictly related either to age or to gender. There is no rule regarding the order in which they use these healing procedures (popular, magical, priestly, medical, etc.); unless we

¹ All this is naturally not a Moldavian specialty. Medical researchers have shown that the tradition of "professionists" has been in operation since the beginning in the context of the common people's knowledge concerning medicine. The holders of "professionist" knowledge (priests, folk healers, less often doctors) disposed of an extra knowledge by (also) being people who were practitioners of religious-magical activities and thus could better establish the psychological atmosphere necessary for the healing process (Gémes 1979, 17). Tünde Komáromi, for instance, calls the Orthodox Romanian priest a "psychosomatic healer" (Komáromi 1996, 91; see also: Pócs 2001, 454; Deáky 2001, 343).

² Éva Pócs has shown that folk healing transforms empiric healing methods into beliefs, thus, among the users, the borderlines between magical and "rational" practice are blurred (Pócs 1979, 66). The Transcarpathian parallels of the magical terms used in everyday life can also be found in the publications of Erzsébet Kótyuk (Kótyuk 2005, 235–44).

consider that the people concerned seek out all kinds of methods in order to recover.

There are established patterns followed by the majority as regards which disease requires the activation of which healing system (cf. Keszeg 1997, 7). Spielmann calls most of the folk healing procedures a “finalistic approach”, which essentially subordinates the diagnosis and the way of approaching the disease to the therapeutic goal. As he explains, “if a medicine has proved to be effective once, folk medicine will keep on using it without searching the natural cause of its effect” (Spielmann 1979, 36; see also Komáromi 1996, 88).

The complexity of the phenomenon is further increased by the fact that in Magyarfalu, the barriers between health and sickness are very flexible; and the concepts of *disease*, *malediction*, *bewitchment*, etc. are intertwined, meaning that it is only possible to heal a disease by applying a special and complex technique.³

Local conditions

The everyday life of the Moldavian peasant community is primarily controlled and scheduled by the work that ensures their livelihood; where human life—especially in the case of a disease thought to be incurable—is often judged to be of secondary importance. As Losonczi describes: “a peasant could only fall ill on his own account (...), if he could not work he would perish; he and his family would be in great danger. The constraints of peasant life made health an obligation, and thus a moral standard” (Losonczi 1984, 186). This norm—also prevailing in Magyarfalu—is achieved with a view congruous with the religious beliefs of the locals; namely, that disease can be looked upon as the personal intervention of God.

The reason for seeking the help of religious procedures to heal diseases in Magyarfalu can be described through the intertwining of the following factors: characteristic religious consciousness; religious interpretations complying with the psychosomatic approach to the diseases; the lack of official health institutions; the traditional doctor-patient relationship

³ According to Tünde Komáromi, “seemingly mysterious, medically un-explained and unaccepted diseases are parts of a completely different world view; which—according to its perspective—describes them within a different system of symbols, and heals them accordingly” (Komáromi 1996, 87; see also: Tánczos 2000, 217, 224).

loaded with stereotypes;⁴ the financial condition of the patient (on the financial advantages of a home pharmacy, see Kocsis 2005, 260); the level of fluency in Romanian.⁵

There were no doctors. It used to be like that. That is why there were more children, and they died sooner, too. In the old days we sometimes buried 10 children a day (Csoma 2000, 17, 87).

I know the herbs well; I'm a *doktorica*! I've grown old, but I've never been to a doctor! (Csoma 2000, 62; for parallels in Aranyosszék, see Komáromi 1996, 87; also see Erdélyi 1976, 139).

I've become weak. There's no use in going to the doctor, so that he can experiment on me, one way or another. I'm just watching as they go, sit and come home! They're all the same. Why should I go see them? (I. L., Magyarfalu, own collection).

My daughter was at home, she said we should call an ambulance; but I didn't want to go, I still had things to do at home (J. C., Magyarfalu, own collection).

When there were no doctors, people healed themselves the best they could. But now that one can go to the hospitals, who would go to the midwives? I wouldn't; not even if I died. Those who don't have money, who believe in this kind of thing, they go to them. Though they have to pay the midwife as well! Moreover, the old diseases no longer exist! We have vaccination now; you don't hear about the plague and other epidemics anymore (I. B., Magyarfalu, own collection).

The doctors themselves assisted in the survival of religious medicine and continue to do so, even today, by encouraging patients to make use of popular, magical practices. Having a mental disorder or a disease of supernatural origin eventually leads to a loss of prestige, which is why in such cases most people seek the help of "secretly public" popular or magical healing methods (on the same issue see Komáromi 2001, 121).

⁴ According to Mónika Kocsis, who researches Moldavian communities, "in the case of the professional sector, the cultural dimension is dominated by the doctor's knowledge; the healing proceeds based on his body perception (...). The role of the 'patient' and of the 'doctor' are both formalized. The dominant party is the doctor who manifests his power via the language, the terms he uses" (Kocsis 2005, 259).

⁵ As the cited examples show, we are dealing with a situation that applies generally to the villages inhabited by Moldavian Hungarians. On the historical dimensions of the intertwined nature of the causes, see Deáky 2001, 343.

Medicina pastoralis

Research has shown that the healing or maledictory activities of the priests were a common phenomenon in medieval Western Christianity. Within the Roman Church, the problems once treated by priestly benediction and exorcism were later assigned to the field of expertise of folk specialists; “in the East, however, [some forms of it] stayed in the hands of priests and monks” (Pócs 2001, 454–7). In peasant societies, the priest was considered an educated person; both his community and his office expected him to provide healing in everyday ailments. Later, medical publications (for more in-depth information on the *medicina pastoralis*, see Deáky 2001, 345; 2006; 2008) served to widen the priest’s medical knowledge, as did courses in medicine taught in the seminaries (Deáky 2001, 353). It is not an incidental circumstance that at that time doctors received a grounding in theology.⁶ As a result, the intertwining of the religious and medical traditions not only manifests itself among the common people, but also among intellectuals, and moreover in the literature of the *medicina pastoralis*, presumably established and sustained by the social circumstances of the time and by this particular world view.⁷ According to Éva Pócs, the fact that this once common, European, medieval system—and namely certain elements of it—is still in effect in the Eastern European region can only be justified by “the satisfaction of some kind of compelling need” (Pócs 2001, 455–7). Zita Deáky has shown that the priests who participated in medical education from the eighteenth to the twentieth century “stepped back to the role of the traditional (priestly) healer; even if only on a theoretical level, thus ensuring the continuity of a [...] status maintained over several millennia” (Deáky 2001, 355).

⁶ Zita Deáky cites a dissertation by the Calvinistic doctor, Alajos Soltra (1826–1891) in which the author claims that in the eighteenth century “theology and medicine belonged together, they were inseparable” (Deáky 2001, 344–345, 350. Cf. Czégényi 2004, 390. On the inseparability of physical and mental healing, see Jolly 1996, 91; Stewart 1991, 212).

⁷ In the book *A Book that Helps in Need* written by the Lutheran priest János Kömlei, translated from German and published in 1790, entitled, *Besides the Advice and Instructions for Physical Diseases and Troubles*, there is mention for instance of “enchantment, witches and various natural disasters”, etc. (Deáky 2001, 347; cf. Jolly 1996, 66).



Fig. 1. The patient waits at home for the priest who comes to hear her confession. Table arranged for a home confession. Magyarfalu (*Arini*), Băcau County, Romania, 2005. Photo by Laura Iancu.



Fig. 2. Dried herbs in the attic. Saint John's wort and yarrow. Magyarfalu (*Arini*), Băcau County, Romania, 2005. Photo by Laura Iancu.



Fig. 3. Consecrated plants in a vase.
Magyarfalu (*Arini*), Băcau County, Romania,
2005. Photo by Laura Iancu.



Fig. 4. Catkin consecration on Palm Sunday in the church
courtyard. Magyarfalu (*Arini*), Băcau County, Romania,
2005. Photo by Laura Iancu.

Priestly and religious medicine in Magyarfalu

The role the Catholic priests serving in Magyarfalu played in healing was usually manifested in their maintaining and shaping the religious world view mentioned in the introduction, relying upon the tools implied by their status (sermons, teaching, benediction, prayer, etc.); a world view in which the determining role of the spiritual components of the physical diseases remains; in fact, it becomes even more emphatic. In this context, the disease might be related to the adult patient's sins, making an examination of the relation to God and the patient's moral life integral parts of the healing process.

The statement often cited in the literature asserting that the practice of seeking the help of orthodox priestly medicine, namely that the healing power of the priest (or *kaluger*—monk—, nun or other specialist) lies in the fact that he/she is an outsider to the community, language and religion, is not tenable (Györgydeák 2001, 399).⁸ My own experience shows that it was not only possible, but necessary to seek out the help of orthodox priestly medicine to cure diseases of magical origin in this religious culture because in such cases, the specialist alloyed one or more traditions, religion and magic, and priestly medicine and psychology, as long as he remained within the borders of the religious sphere, that is, the religious world view (see Gagyí 2008, 380).⁹ On the other hand, those who have sought these kinds of healing procedures do not distinguish between the somewhat religious or rather magical or other elements and procedures applied in these priestly techniques. Thus, the functioning of this diverse medicine is sustained not merely and not primarily by the lack of health institutions, but by the particular world view of the community.¹⁰

⁸ Orsolya Graf's experiences in Csík resulted in conclusions relevant to the situation in Magyarfalu: "going to the *kaluger* is considered an 'open secret' in the villages. Everyone knows about it, but they prefer not to tell about their experience; or they tell their own experience as if it were someone else's" (Graf 2001, 36).

⁹ Dóra Czégényi also establishes that the distance between Catholic and Orthodox piety is minimal, and thus the creatures and the techniques are easily transferred from one system to the other (Czégényi 2004, 383). Éva Pócs has shown in her research in Csík that priestly procedures portrayed the close interlacement of several systems. Furthermore, as she writes: "in Orthodox Eastern Europe the peasant world view, popular beliefs and witchcraft beliefs are closely linked to the devil image of the ecclesiastical demonology" (Pócs 2001a, 451, 453. See also Komáromi 1996, 94).

¹⁰ As Deáky writes, the priests "cannot give up on this activity voluntarily until there is trust and faith in the recovery, in a miracle, which brings the priest together

One example: diseases caused by evil and their remedies

In Magyarfalu, *evil* is the umbrella term for a number of “popular belief figures”, a category encompassing the negative features of several supernatural creatures. Its form is a mixture of the Christian notion of the Devil and various types of spirits. A frequently used synonym is *unclean*. In many cases, these two terms (*evil*, *unclean*) are used to avoid the pronunciation of the word *devil*; (on this phenomenon in the academic literature, see Röhrich 1966, 215; Pócs 2008, 315). The use of all three terms (*evil*, *unclean*, *devil*) is followed by reciting a charm and a dedication to God, i.e. a prayer, and sometimes even the mention of an illustrious saint:

May he go to the barrens, God help us! (I. L., Magyarfalu, own collection).

Once, one night, I was walking by the Futás.¹¹ Suddenly a big tuft got between my legs. (...) Hey, is that you, János? Hold up! Stop, so that I can cross myself. (...) I arrived at the flats, and it twirled no more (I. Ir., Magyarfalu, own collection).

According to local beliefs, the *evil one* is a creature that obstructs the regular practice of religion, thereby preventing salvation; its main activity is to challenge Christian qualities (see Keszeg 1999, 90). The consequences of its mischief can be physical harm, damage to health or even disease. The *unclean* is not simply a creature; it is the counterpole to the principle of good, its opposite; thus, it is also suitable for explaining most of the negative happenings that are difficult to interpret. They are often identified with demons or as causes of diseases. (The diseases mentioned are typically demonic disorders. Pócs 2003, 227, 230). For instance, they might cause diseases via *possession*, *sending* (sickness), *fright* or *fear*.

Our dear János got so frightened, he almost died. He was once frightened by someone in the field, and that fright stayed with him. It was a priest who healed him in the end. But we had to struggle so much, I swear to you, God bless us! (J. T., Magyarfalu, own collection).

with his community; and until there is no other, or the people who turn to him cannot see any other alternative” (Deáky 2001, 355. Also see Pócs 2001a, 457; 1979, 71; Graf 2001, 32; Komáromi 2001, 121).

¹¹ A toponym in Magyarfalu.

Isti Bácsi was once frightened. First they said it was a ghost, but I know who frightened him [...] he succumbed to the fright [...] and the devil was there, too [...]. When he returned he said: Run off, because the dogs are coming, the dogs will eat you up! We didn't see anything! Only he saw them! And then he said: Look how big they are, and run, and this and that! I swear, may he go to the waste lands! (B. D., Magyarfalu, own collection).

A heavy sadness fell upon my daughter! She was so sad, that we couldn't console her. Sadness is a terribly bad thing; it blinds you, it kills you. It wipes you off the face of the earth. If the sadness prevails, then the doctors can't do anything about it. It is a truly vile disease. It shrivels you (I. L., Magyarfalu, own collection. Cf. Blum and Blum 1965, 53).¹²

According to belief, the *unclean* operates only in certain places (crossroads, bridges, at the edge of the village, in the forest) at certain times (before midnight, at midnight, at dawn, "at the time of the waning moon"). This is why they protect sacral spaces by offering them to God with the help of certain occasional and cyclically repeated cleansing and preventive rituals.

A.T.'s parents went to work; they have land beyond the Romanians; and as they went, the old lady sat on the cart, and the old man drove the cattle. At the house of V.F. a goat came out of the pit. [...] A goat appeared and the cattle stopped moving! They started moaning; they saw the evil one and didn't want to move anymore. Well, the old man got off, and started to whip the cattle but they still didn't move. Then he remembered to say: oh my Lord, Jesus Christ, what kind of creature is that? And then the evil one went back to the pit. And so the cattle moved on. Because if the devil hears God's name, he runs off (I. A., Magyarfalu, own collection).

My neighbor perished there under the bridge. He came with his haversack—it was in the winter—and the evil ones pushed him, pulled him in the water. He didn't die then; they hung his sack to the middle of the bridge where no one could reach it. And then L. and his family heard someone crying in the night. By the time they got there it was too late. They cut the ice, and he was still alive; they took him out; but then he died. The evil ones pushed him in because he didn't believe in God (I. A., Magyarfalu, own collection).

We bless it with holy water, or fumigate it with consecrated flowers. Or sometimes we burn candles. It drives out evil. The evil thoughts, and the evil things ... and it is very efficient! (G. M., Magyarfalu, own collection).

¹² The Blum author duo also mentions that in the Greek tradition, the main cause of heart disease is sadness and worry (Blum and Blum 1965: 123).

Earlier we even sprinkled holy water on the crossroads; or others who were afraid fumigated it or prayed there. (I. An., Magyarfalu, own collection).

One of the consequences of the fear, fright and depression linked to the operation of the *unclean* is the urge to commit suicide (see Pócs 2003, 232).

You see how many people hung themselves this year? They took vows and that vow was not good; when you take it the evil one is there! You've lost your soul. You've given it to the evil one. Those who take vows to the evil one belong to the evil one (B. R., Magyarfalu, own collection).

One of the diseases emanating from the *unclean* is epilepsy. (The local denomination for the disease is “evil disease” or “foul disease” see: Blum and Blum 1965, 124; Kocsis 2005, 243; Pócs 1986, 251).

My God—may he go to the waste lands, God be with us!—it [i.e. the epileptic seizure] is sent by the evil one! It is from the evil one! The unclean! (T. R., Magyarfalu, own collection).

According to local beliefs, the *unclean* infiltrates the surroundings of the patient in the form of burning charcoal. One way to exorcise it is to bless the surroundings of the patient, or to smear ground pieces of charcoal all over the patient's body.

When it locks someone down for the first time, if there is a way to dig down in the ground and find the burning charcoal—which were put there by the unclean, when he burrowed himself in—and to crush them and smear it on the patient's body so that the evil one leaves the body, then the patient will no longer be sick (L. Sz., Magyarfalu–Egyházaskozás, own collection).

The subsequent method of recovery is to pray for many long years and to lead a strictly religious life.

V. has a daughter. She's like a nun. She's smart, she takes communion every day; she used to have the evil diseases as well, but it passed. Because she prayed a lot... it passed (G. M., Magyarfalu, own collection).

One of the remarkable ways of healing epilepsy is to pay for a sermon. (You pay the priest to give a sermon with a specific purpose). It is worth noting that in Magyarfalu, paying for a sermon is a common phenomenon anyway. The most common type of sermon—besides the sermons of

various denomination and content commissioned for the dead—aims to procure health and peace within the family. Besides paying for sermons, it is also common practice to fast, often with the purpose of healing.

I always pay. I go as soon as I have a little money. Here at our church. Well, you can do it with the Vlach priests as well, they are not too bad, it's quite the same, but our priest won't let us! Our priest won't let us go to the Vlach priest! (B. L., Magyarfalu, own collection).

When I paid [for a sermon] in Bákó when her [daughter's] leg was broken, I paid, and I wanted to ask others how it goes because I didn't know, and there was *la Piața Centrală* [the Central Market] where people discuss things. I signed the register book to show that I had paid. Then the priest told me when he was going to celebrate the mass. It was a Tuesday. He asked me where I lived, and I told him it was another village; they knew our priest; and he told me to go to his [the other priest's] sermon and listen to the sermon on the same day in my village (B. A., Magyarfalu, own collection. Cf. Pócs 2001, 447).

I was very sick, too. They told me to go see the Vlach priest and ask him to pray for me! So I went, but later I confessed and my priest scolded me! Oh! What was I doing there?! (B. M., Magyarfalu, own collection).

Some people pay to cause the people they are angry with to die! Oh, the Vlach priests over there as well... they lie! They cheat the world! I've never been there (T. An., Magyarfalu, own collection).

There are many shared elements in the paid sermons of the local or urban Roman Catholic priest or Orthodox priests.¹³ According to the locals “there is no difference between the sermons paid to the Catholic or the Orthodox priest”. While in other cases, the external formalities of the religion have a determining and dividing power; when it comes to diseases, the differences become subordinate to faith in the same one God.¹⁴ Moreover, they also believe that if a magical or simply a non-Catholic element occurs in the Orthodox practice, the goal itself—for instance, to reveal the truth, punish the guilty or heal a disease—is morally right, religiously accepted, and thus is an act that falls under the scope of sacredness and not that of magic. It can occur that the Orthodox priest requires the patient or the patient's representative to interpret the

¹³ The sermon itself, the defined amount of money, the specified (time of the) day, the specified number of sermons, the explicit intention and goal, etc.

¹⁴ Such formality is the celibacy of priests, based on which the locals consider their own Catholic religion superior and “more true” than the Orthodox religion.

intervention (for example the exorcism of the spirit causing the disease) correctly; that is, to consider it as a procedure, the aim of which is to solicit God's active intervention.

The healing sermon performed by the Orthodox priest can have no outsider witnesses; what happens during the sermon can only be learned from accounts. If we observe the components of the Orthodox priestly practice closely, we find numerous elements that we know from the Catholic religion, like the Bible, sacramentals (candle, water, etc.), the prayer, the fast, the sermons, etc.

You pay for a sermon for the sake of the family (*spre binele familiei*), there is no formula to ask for one against evil. Or you say, dear God, take the evil out of this life! And give me goodness instead, and take the evil to the waste lands! And I know that the priest says the same in his prayers when you go to him (B. A., Magyarfalu, own collection).

My daughter had a friend (*prietena*) who told me about a priest who had performed many miracles (*multe minuni făcut*), and he can tell the origins of my disease, whether it was a bewitchment or not. They used to be here in Adjud, but now they are gone, I don't know where. I don't know where they went. [...] The Vlach priest said—after I prepared the writing that my faith was strong (“*am credința tare*”), he wrote he was worried (*dar sun indoită*), he asked whether I knew it was like this or that. But with my faith I triumphed over all (*Dar totuși am credință și prin credință am învis toate*), and at that time it was enough for me. I didn't need anything else. And he prayed for my health (*pentru sănătatea mea*), too. I didn't bring him money, but I did bring a bottle of wine. He told me to come again, but I don't go to those places anymore. I was trembling with fear. I'd rather go to a hospital! He told me to go to the hospital, too (B. M., Magyarfalu, own collection).¹⁵

The further elements (e.g. the combination of paper and other unfamiliar objects) which serve to complete the list of shared features are even more significant, as these are the elements that give the patient the impression that they are receiving a treatment, that is, an intervention.

Well I wouldn't know because I've never been there. [...] They say that if you've lost something, or if things go wrong for you or you are sick then [...] they give you a piece of paper (*particika*). And if you throw the paper in the water then it will perish in water, if you throw it in the fire, then it will perish in fire. But I wouldn't know (M. M., Magyarfalu, own collection).

¹⁵ On the parallels of the “book opening” in Csík see: Pócs 2001, 443.

The one who pays has to drink it: if you want it to perish in water, then you have to throw it in water, if you want it to perish in fire, then you have to throw the paper in fire! If you chew on it, then they say that it will suffer or crush itself; [...] and if you eat it then it dies immediately. [...] If someone has an evil sickness they take him/her to pay, it is very efficient! (T. An., Magyarfalu, own collection).

If someone does wrong to you, or you have an evil kind of a disease then you go and pay. Rather than going to a sorcerer, you would pay for a sermon and fast. For one day, or for nine. And that priest will pray for you, and at the end it will be revealed who did it, what it was. And if the offence is grave, there is a way to make the perpetrator die. But it is only the Orthodox priests who do it (T. L., Magyarfalu, own collection).

The identical elements “warrant” that the patient does not leave the territory of his/her own religion; therefore, the thought that one might be unfaithful to one’s particular God does not arise; and the differing elements confirm the presumed or real feeling of being “medically treated” by an intervention. This duality is well expressed in the practice of exorcism and the local healing methods for epilepsy.

P. was bewitched [...] he turned crazy, he was with the evil one. When he came home in the evening he acted like a rabid person, we couldn’t handle him [...] he wanted to kill everyone, he broke everything. [...] They’ve taught me what to do. I took the journey and went to the priest [the arch priest] and paid him. He then prayed for him, you know, but he kept telling me to bring P. to him, or at least an item of his clothing, so that he could consecrate it. And when I went to see him for the second time, he prayed on the piece of clothing I brought, and sprinkled it with holy water and oil and fumigated it, too. He also gave me some to bring home, and to put it in his food, and to sprinkle on his bed. [...] I had to put candles under his pillow, in the form of a cross. I sewed a cross on his hat and on his shirt as well. [...] It passed. He recovered. But the time we spent on it, God bless us! (B. F., Magyarfalu, own collection).

Among the relatives of the patient, the priestly exorcism of the spirit causing the disease is an intervention that—in this sociocultural milieu—appears as one possible, or even the only possible, cure (for the position of the Church see: Gál, Gál and Pócs 2005, 328; cf. Stewart 1991, 210). Although the priest’s prayer is not entirely public (and some of it cannot even be heard), according to the concerned parties, the procedure consists of eliminating and neutralising the evil spirit by invoking God’s aid. In this procedure, we can sort of recognise an analogy with baptism, as the executor of the ritual (~ the priest) and the aim of the sacrament (~

offering to God) are identical. The person liberated from the devil (evil spirit) and returned to God can be further protected by the ritualistic and magical use of the sacramental objects.¹⁶

There is a slight difference between the methods of the Orthodox priest and that of the Orthodox *kaluger* (monk), nun or magical specialist; in the methods of the latter, malediction plays a much stronger role.

Then he paid at a monastery (*manastirea*); his brother is a Catholic priest, he is praying for him, too! And I'm telling him, well, it is not only you who had to suffer! The things I had to go through with them [i.e. the common enemy]! I burned candles, because that's what they've taught me. When they ring the bells, you have to burn the candle upside down over the threshold and think of the one that you are angry with, the one that harmed you. And you have to say: the way this candle burns should burn my enemy, too; just as the wax drips off the thread, in the same way the meat should melt from his bones. You have to do this while they are ringing the bells. And you have to pray. When one candle goes out, you have to light another and turn that upside down! Nine altogether (I. A., Magyarfalu, own collection. Cf. Pócs 2001, 447).

She [i.e. the Orthodox nun] is bound to the evil one, she was controlled by the evil one. It is the unclean one that works with those, and it is a great matter! [...] she was so bewitched that they carried her to Braila on a broken reed, she woke up in Braila, that is where the evil one killed her (I. R., Magyarfalu, own collection).¹⁷

He went to see a midwife to get healed [...] the midwife tried to heal him, but the evil one had really overcome him, he was taken by the evil one; he told her that he had been to a shop, that the evil one had given him the power to enter the shop. When he was there, the doors opened up, he took what he wanted and then the doors closed back. That's how strong the evil power was. When the midwife was done with the procedure, his stove broke down. Because of the force of the evil one. We had to give the midwife what she asked for, money, crops, chicken. Whatever she asked for (I. L., Magyarfalu, own collection).

According to Tünde Komáromi, the Romanian priest performs psychotherapy in his procedures: he liberates the patient from the negativity of the

¹⁶ Based on the experiences of Charles Stewart, a researcher of Greek exorcism, it is not the elimination of the demon that counts the most in the procedure; the most important thing is to make the demon talk, to reveal his name, since that is how he will become controllable. According to Stewart, the healing is done by the procedure itself, by the ritual (Stewart 1991, 216–217, 218, 221).

¹⁷ On the diabolic reputation of the Romanian priest, see Pócs 2001, 454.

interpersonal efficacy, of its harmful energies. This type of recovery happens, in her words, “mostly as a result of autosuggestion” (Komáromi 1996, 92–97; cf. Stewart 1991, 221).

Furthermore, based on my experiences, the key to the success of ritual healing is that the elements involved in the procedure allow the line between popular belief and doctrinal belief to be crossed; it also makes interaction possible between the clergy and the laity; and it resolves all—essentially contradictory—polarisation, since it provides an experience where one can consider the world in unity; an experience that implements the coherence of the physical and spiritual realities.

There is one more significant factor behind this phenomenon: revealing the true cause of the bewitchment or the disease and punishing the harmful, bewitching person, the creature in this world, in the present. If a patient under a curse is healed by a professional doctor, the case ends with the lesson that the malicious wrongdoer, by using secret knowledge, can unjustly engage in activities endangering the lives of others. The methods employed by priests provide an extra service in that the perpetrator has to suffer punishment for his act; moreover, the victim can keep track of it, and through doing so, can gain public, social rehabilitation.

In this way, the desire to receive evidence of divine retribution is satisfied and at this point, we return to the correlation between world view, religion and medicine outlined in the introduction, and at its social convergence, a phenomenon which can be clearly observed in the culture of Magyarfalu.

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