

The Catholic Church and the Gypsies

Some details concerning their common history in Hungary from the 15th century up to the present¹

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Abstract

The Catholic Church and Roma people have come a long way during their five hundred years of common history. When the first crews of Gypsies arrived in Europe, they were welcomed by curiosity and mistrust. These “strange” foreigners soon earned the antipathy of the church. Even Theodore Balsamon, a 12th-century canonist threatened with excommunication those who contacted them, and several papal bulls requested their condemnation as well.

In this study, my aim is to investigate the relationship between the church and Roma people over the centuries: how acceptance replaced rejection, and how Gypsy/Roma population found the way to church.

Keywords: *Gypsy missions of the Roman Catholic Church, history of Hungarian Gypsies, Christian education of Gypsies / Roma, church leadership and Gypsies, Gypsy priests*

According to our current knowledge, the first crews of the ethnic group called Gypsies appeared at the borders of Europe in the 11th-12th centuries. By wandering further, in the 13th-14th centuries they arrived at the Greek colonies of the Republic of Venice, the peninsula of Peloponnese and surrounding islands.

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¹ This study is a short overview of the common history of the Hungarian churches and Gypsies which will be presented in more detail in my forthcoming book: *The Hungarian Churches and the Gypsies. The History of the Gypsy Mission.*

The first authentic date of the appearance of Gypsies in the territory of historical Hungary is 1455.²

Gypsies wandering in various-sized families were received by curiosity mixed with mistrust. These “oddly” looking and dressed groups, who practiced jugglery – fortune telling, magic, superstition – soon earned the antipathy of the church. Despite the fact that their appearance and behaviour was often considered repulsive – as can be seen in one of the entries of the Bologna chronicles in 1422: “It should be noted that such abominable people have never set foot in this area before. They were skinny and black, eating like pigs. Their women walked the streets by turns, wearing coarse clothes attached to their shoulders with rings in their ears and long veils on their head”³ – ordinary people used their fortune telling and corresponding services. In his explanation to the documents of the Council in Trullo (692) even Theodore Balsamon – a 12th-century canonist – threatened with six years of excommunication those members of the church who engaged in fortune telling, superstition, magic, or making and selling amulets against evil eye while travelling around the world. Their ability of ventriloquism was straight-out considered as cooperation with Satan and was referred to as one belonging to witches, false prophets and other suspicious groups.

At the beginning of the 1300’s Athanasius I, a Patriarch of Constantinople also took actions against jugglery and superstition. He sent a letter to the priests of the credulous Byzantines requesting them to defend their believers from *athinganos*,⁴ and not to let them into their homes because they do diabolical acts. Decades later, Joseph Bryennius (1340/1350-1431), a monk and preacher from Byzantium stated in one of his essays⁵ that among other things, the misfortune of the empire is the result of people meeting jugglers, magicians, and *athinganos* on a daily basis. Furthermore, the punishment of those who engaged in a conversation with fortune teller magician Gypsy women or let them in their houses was an anathema of five years by a 15th-century canon.

² Judit Szabóné Kármán, *A magyarországi cigányság I. (Cigányok és romák)*, (Budapest: Semmelweis, 2016)

³ Sir Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

⁴ On the various names used for the Gypsies in the past see Judit Szabóné Kármán, *A magyarországi cigányság I.*, 33-36.

⁵ Referring to George C. Soulis, Original text in French translation, L. Oeconomos: *L'état intellectuel et moral des Byzantins vers le milieu de XIV e siècle d'après une page de Joseph Bryennios*. Mélanges Charles Diehl I. (Paris: 1930)

The church had the strong suspicion that Gypsies - especially due to their behaviour, “crafts”, and aversion to the church - were actually heretics. The papal bulls of the 1500’s, – such as *Licet ab initio* (Pope Paul III. 1542), then *Immensa Aeterni Dei* (Pope Sixtus V. 1588)⁶ – that encouraged the Roman inquisition to take action against heretics and those who became detached from faith, opened the way for sanctions against gypsies (even though without explicitly mentioning them by name). The church leadership of the following century also distanced itself from the gypsies, the decrees of the Trnava Synod of 1611 and 1629 - which however did not name gypsies but made obvious references to them - ordered the clergy against their activities: “Spells, magic, fortune telling, casting of lot, palm reading, quackery is often scourged in sermons, and if superstition turns out about someone, the bishop shall be informed (...) Ordinary people easily become superstitious, wise-women heal with superstition and use spells.”⁷

However, beside the official standpoint of the Catholic Church there is evidence from the 16th century revealing that priests and monks turned towards Gypsies with an open heart: St. Philip Neri (1515-1595) and St. Joseph Calasanctius (1557-1648) evangelized to them, and even a congregation was founded in their service under the patronage of a cardinal in a chosen district of Rome assigned for wandering gypsies.⁸ In the 1600’s in Palermo a Jesuit monk, Luigi La Nuza, managed a support organization for gypsies.⁹ In 1680 they received their own church building in the town (Santa Maria va in Egitto).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUNGARIAN GYPSIES AND THE CHURCH IN THE 16-17TH CENTURIES

The first sources regarding the relationship between Hungarian gypsies and the Roman Catholic the church are from the 16th century, during the period

⁶ Elemér Várnagy, “A cigányok és a katolikus egyház”, in Elemér Várnagy (ed.), *Keresztény Pedagógiai Nyári Egyetem, Pécs* (Pécs: JPTE, 1994) 96.

⁷ “Babonáság” [Superstition], in István Diós, János Viczián (eds.), *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1993-2010), babonáság szócikk: <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/B/babona.html> (2017.07.14.)

⁸ Elemér Várnagy: *A cigányok és a katolikus egyház*, in Elemér Várnagy (ed.): *Keresztény Pedagógiai Nyári Egyetem Pécs*, 97.

⁹ On the life of Luigi La Nuza see <http://www.santiebeati.it/dettaglio/95275> (2017.07.13.)

of the Turkish rule. In the country divided into three provinces¹⁰, the life of the Gypsy population was different in every respects, including their religious life. Such an early relationship with the Catholic Church within the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary is shown by an entry recorded in the marriage register of Győr downtown parish in 1650. According to this entry, in June 1650 István Berki (a typically Gypsy name) married Ilona Czigány (“Czigány” is the Hungarian word for “Gypsy”).

In 1687 a Gypsy boy – Vaskohi Grausser David (as the document has it: *natione ciganus* – of Gypsy origin)¹¹ – was also admitted to the students of the Reformed College of Nagyenyed in the Principality of Transylvania. To our current knowledge he was the first educated Gypsy in Hungary.¹²

However, significant Islamisation emerged within the territory of subjection.¹³ Numerous Gypsy families converted to Islam and the previously Orthodox Christian names, such as, Radován, Andrei, Jovan, Isztepan were changed for Muslim names like Abdullah, Mustafa, Suleiman and Ahmed.

Therefore, the appearance of a “Gypsy priest” in this area was quite a remarkable fact, about which Pope Urban VIII was informed by Alberto Rengjich. In 1626 the bishop, who was appointed Chief Pastor of the subjection territory, paid a visit to the area occupied by the Turkish people and wrote a report to the cardinals of the Holy Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. In his letter he emphasized the underdevelopment of the area and mentioned the following fact with respect to the lack of priests: “A Gypsy from Timisoara area ‘who knows but four letters of the alphabet’ and of a faith unknown to us, appointed himself a priest and baptises people disregarding the regulations of the church. Twenty-year-old adults are getting baptised in these

¹⁰ On August 29th 1526, in the Battle of Mohács, Ottoman Sultan Suleyman delivered a decisive blow on king Lajos’s armies. In 1541 it occupied Buda and the country was divided into three parts (the Kingdom of Hungary, the occupied central region and the Transylvanian Principality), and the 145-year-long Turkish occupation began.

¹¹ Jakó Zsigmond által közzétett *Matricula studiosorum Diáknévsora 1662–1841*. [list of students in *Matricula studiosorum* by Zsigmond Jakó] http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/alcim_pdf3204.pdf 112. p. (2017. 07.13.)

¹² For more information see Sándor Előd Ősz, *Mócvideki reformátusok. Református mócok? Adalékok a Zaránd vidéki reformátusság 17–18. századi történetéhez, Református Szemle C/4* (2007), 884.

¹³ Lajos Fekete, *A hódoltság török levéltári forrásai nyomában* (Budapest: Oriental Reprints, Kőrösi-Csoma Társaság – MTA, 1993), 35.

villages where Catholic priests were never seen before.¹⁴ No further data can be found about the zealous priest. In any case, it seems that he was the first Gypsy of the country who performed religious activities.¹⁵

18TH CENTURY - THE FIRST STEPS AND FRUITS OF GYPSY MISSIONS

In the 18th century, the relationship between the church and the Gypsies was strengthened by a royal decree. Joseph II ordered the attendance at Sunday church services, religious marriage, and the education of children.¹⁶ It was, however, mostly due to the service and the members of the local church and the community that in September, 1746 in Orosháza, Sára – the daughter of Gypsy Martzin Pupi – was baptised, and seventeen non-Gypsy couples were present as godparents – including leading people of the village – assuming sponsorship.¹⁷ A fine example of Christian acceptance!

Another prominent person of this age was István Kaprinai, a Jesuit monk and scholar historian, who taught Gypsy children in the 1760's as a teacher in Kosice, and as was recorded "he also counselled rejected stray Gypsies."¹⁸ During this century, the mission towards Gypsy inmates was initiated as well; in 1780 the Catholic Diocese of Fehérvár assigned a retired priest as a prison chaplain, whose responsibility was to care for and teach inmates.

¹⁴ István György Tóth, *Koszovóból vagy Mezőpotámiából? Missziópüspökök a magyarországi török hódoltságban.* "Történelmi Szemle" 41 (1999), 279-329.

¹⁵ For detailed information on his life see Judit Szabóné Kármán, *A magyarországi cigányság* I., 107-108.

¹⁶ This regulation did not aim to emancipate the Gypsies, but was one of the elements of II. Joseph's violent assimilation policy.

¹⁷ Mihály Hajdú, Orosháza XVIII. századi személynévrendszere, in Gyula Nagy (ed.), *A Békés Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 7. (Békéscsaba: Békés Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága (1983), 76.

¹⁸ Árpád Bitay, Erdély jeles katolikus papjai, in Judit Szabóné Kármán, *A magyarországi romalcigány értelmiség historiográfiája, helyzete, mentális állapota* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2012), 108.

19TH CENTURY – “THE FIRST GIPSY SCHOOL IN THE WORLD”

Pastoring Gypsies who settled in in the 19th century had become an important part of the service. More and more initiatives were taken for their education, introduction to religious life, and acceptance.

In 1838, in Nové Zámky *József Kopácsy*, the archbishop made the first attempt himself to educate Gypsy children, however – despite the fact that children received food and clothes - the school was discontinued after two years due to the lack of interest. Nearly twenty years later, chaplain *Ferdinand Farkas* - who knew the local Gypsy settlement well - founded a school also in Nové Zámky together with *József (Bajnai) Mennyey* - a teacher and former Piarist monk, who was an instructor in teacher training at that time. Their work was eagerly supported by *József Csernák*, the parish priest of the town and by *János Bachtá*, the chaplain. The school was operating successfully from the beginning: “You could see the pride and joy on those bronze faces. The elder promised to educate the young, while children joyfully offered themselves, thus the first Gypsy school was opened on 11th March with 30 (15 boys, 15 girls) pupils for the time being...”¹⁹ - as Mennyey reports the opening of the school. The classes started out with thirty children, but ever since the first days, those who could not fit into the classroom followed the classes from under the open windows of the school “and yelled the answers to the questions through the window”.²⁰

In April, 1856 the archbishop commissioner and the school councilman visited the Gypsy school and prepared the following report: “We visited the Gypsy school with 43 pupils. The school was opened and equipped this year before Easter at the expense of the local chaplain, *Nándor Farkas*, until the town begins to sponsor it as promised. The Catechism and the Bible are presented by local chaplains; gypsies attend school gladly and show fine mental talent; learning musical notes attracts them exquisitely.”²¹ The school operated for twelve years and reached nice results; for a while it also served as a practice school for student teacher education. Mennyey regularly reported of the development of Gypsy children, their change of behaviour due to schooling,

¹⁹ *József Mennyey, A cigányok Érsekújvárott, 1856, in István Péntes, Az első cigányiskola, “Pedagógusforum” 6 (2007/9–10), 27.*

²⁰ *István Péntes, Az első cigányiskola. “Pedagógusforum” 6 (2007/9–10), 27.*

²¹ *Religio, 1856. I. 263. in Dr. Kálmán Tímár, Az érsekújvári Kir. Kat. Tanítóképző Int. története. Különnyomat a kalocsai Róm. Kat. Tanítóképző Int. 1937-38. évi Értesítőjéből (Kalocsa: Árpád Részvénytársaság Könyvnyomdája, 1938), 20.*

moral and religious education, and about the significant improvement in their speech, vocabulary, behaviour, clothing, and general state. Despite of all the success and the attempts of Ferdinand Farkas, the school was closed in 1868 due to the lack of moral support and funds.

LOCAL INITIATIVES - THE BEGINNINGS
OF THE GYPSY-LANGUAGE CATHOLIC MISSION

In Mukachevo, it was János Turcsányi - the organist of the Catholic church - who tried to involve Gypsy musicians in the life of the church with more or less of a success; in 1843 some of them were employed to play music at major holidays and sing masses instead of performing public duties. Musicians willingly accepted it and fulfilled the requirements, but after a while they started to miss services, as they were playing music all night long and could not make it to church on time in the morning.

The children of the Géro family living in Alpár in Bács-Kiskun county participated in the life of the church so actively that in 1888 they received the sacrament of confirmation; according to the church records, the three boys received the following confirmation names: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar.²²

In 1894 the Newspaper of Siklós published an article on mass church weddings that took place in Miholjac: "József Kuzmics, the dean and pastor of Miholjac married no less than 15 Gypsy couples. The oldest groom was 80, while the bride was 40 years old."²³

According to the witness of a contemporary newspaper, the Catholic Church's mission in Gypsy language was initiated during this period - at least the first initiative that, however, ended up in a failure. There was a major article in the *Sunday Newspaper* of Szentes dated 7th September, 1890 about Gypsies. It also mentioned the attempt of János Szmodis from decades earlier who

"encouraged by his apostolic devotion went to Siklós to hold Gypsy sermons. Since the local chaplain did not offer the church building to his

²² Dániel Bárth, Az alpári bérmálási jegyzékek történeti-néprajzi tanulságai, in *Cumana. A Bács-Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Múzeumi Szervezetének Évkönyve*. 24. (Kecskemét: 2009), 179.

²³ "Tömeges esküvő", *Siklósi Hírlap* (2nd December, 1894), 4., quoted by Csilla B. Horváth, *A Baranya megyei hivatásos fényképészek a helyi sajtóban az 1870-es évektől az I. világháború végéig*. A Janus Pannonius Múzeum Évkönyve 39 (Pécs: 1994), 143-159.

service, he was preaching under the clear sky in the shadow of a broad-leaved tree. Gypsies²⁴ understood and listened to the words of the Bible. But the elderly were shaking their heads and started to grumble concerned about their future in case the lords may learn their language. Finally, they burst out in such an uproar that the speaker had to escape. As Mr. Szmodis arrived home, he burnt all his books.”²⁵

János Szmodis was the chaplain of Gelse in Zala County between 1826 and 1846. A canon from Veszprém, a knowledgeable educated priest, who spoke several languages, learnt the Gypsy language and wrote a book in this topic.

THE FIRST GYPSY CATHOLIC PRIEST

Endre Pozsár experienced a warmer welcome – at least from Gypsy believers – than the chaplain from Gelse, who was the first Catholic priest of Gypsy origin. The first sermon of this priest - who was born in 1856 in Vác to a musician family – was such an extraordinary event in the summer of 1879 that it was published even in the national weekly and in the Sunday News:

“The religious ceremony was a huge sensation, as the young priest comes from a Gypsy family from Vác. A large number of audience filled the church, the parents also participated. After the ceremony, canon Virter provided lunch. In his toast he emphasized that the church makes no difference between people, and welcomes everyone without exception. The relatives of the new priest were an interesting part of the lunch, conducted by the famous Pali Rácz. Rácz was also invited to the feast, and was playing with enthusiasm.”²⁶

Endre Pozsár was raised in a poor family together with his siblings, but his parents supported their education; one of his siblings became a primate, the other became an official at a district court. His father, András Pozsár who was a well-known and honoured musician from Vác, earned the support of József Antal Peitler, the bishop of Vác, who also came from a poor family and was a

²⁴ To name the Gypsies, the journalist here uses a popular, mocking word: 'moré'.

²⁵ “A cigányokról”, *Szentesi Lap* vo. 20 no.106 (2nd September, 1890), 3.

²⁶ “*Vasárnapi Ujság*” 1879. Egyház és iskola rovat, 31. sz. 7.

generous chief pastor. With the financial and moral support of the bishop he graduated in 1876 at the Piarist Fathers of Pest, then prepared for priesthood at the seminar of Vác. His adventurous life filled with contradictions can be easily tracked by the records at the Episcopal and Chapter Archives.

For our current inquiry, a record dated in 1812 and found at the Historical Archives of Vác needs to be mentioned. It provides the information that one of Pozsár's ancestors – supposedly the grandfather – moved out of the Gypsy area of the town and bought a house among Hungarian people.²⁷ Therefore, the motivation for breaking out, progress and studying most probably came from his family, but it also required financial and moral support from outside. After finishing his theological studies, Endre Pozsár first became a chaplain, then he was the priest of Szentlőrinc-káta from 1896, and parish priest until his death. After the auspicious start, as the first Gypsy Catholic priest, his life was encumbered by numerous difficulties and stress. He often engaged in confrontation with his believers and supervisors, therefore he was moved to newer and newer locations. He served at several parishes until he found his place in Szentlőrinc-káta where he served until his death in 1930. One important piece of information is left behind about the first Gypsy chaplain, demonstrating the appreciation of his classmates and contemporary clergy. In 1926 the press reported that Endre Pozsár presided the Eucharist at the 50th high school reunion in the Piarist Chapel of Budapest for his former classmates and those who were present.²⁸

Two other young Gypsy men are mentioned from the second half of the 18th century, who worked as Roman Catholic priests in Transylvania: János Bálint served in Csíkszentmiklós, András Flóri served in Marosszék-Jobbágytelek.

²⁷ Feyes László tiszttartó: "1812. Boldogasszony hava (január) 10. Az uradalmi tiszttartó jelentést tesz a cigányok helyzetéről", in Ferenc Horváth M., Tamás Pintér (eds.), *Váci Történelmi Tár I. „Késő maradékainknak tétessen jegyzésben!”* (Vác: Vác város önkormányzata, 1996), 273.

²⁸ *Napi Hírek*, 1926. 05. 29. MTI

SOME IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT THE 20TH CENTURY
CATHOLIC GYPSY MISSIONS

Nice examples of brotherhood are preserved from the first decades of the 20th century. In 1934, the city of Kalocsa organized the *Christmas of stray Gypsies*, which was reported as follows:

“The Christmas of stray Gypsies was a glorious celebration. Gypsies dressed in picturesque and delightful clothes performed a Christmas play. Every actor was Gypsy. Then, they performed some of their ancient songs and dances, and finally the “Gypsy angels” brought the Christmas tree decorated with colourful light-bulbs, and a lot of presents under it. A great number of the town’s population participated at the event which was organised by police officer Károly Kovács Buna, who is a significant patron of the Gypsies of Kalocsa. Even Earl Gyula Zichy appeared, the archbishop of Kalocsa.”²⁹

In the autumn of 1935 thirty Gypsy couples held their weddings simultaneously in Kiskunhalas. Wedding guests were offered food by the people of the town, then a folk festival and Gypsy parade was organised at the market-place. A group of three hundred people checked in even from Vienna.³⁰

In the spring of 1935 there was a collective wedding in Tiszaroff as well. This was a special event, as the wedding mass was the primice of the newly ordained son of the local Gypsy violinist. According to the reports “the Gypsy priest delivered a beautiful speech, then married ten Gypsy couples who were living in wild marriages before.”³¹

Another good example of cooperation is the closing ceremony of the Gypsy school of Tárkány in 1937, and the success of the children:

“It was the second closing ceremony at the Gypsy school of Tárkány, where pupils were wearing clothes purchased from the donations of the Hungarian Red Cross and the county. The chair of the exam was gallant

²⁹ Magyar Távirati Iroda jelentése: Kalocsa 1934. december 23. 1. MTI „könyomatos” hírek. Napi hírek/Napi tudósítások 1920-1944. Magyar Országos Levéltár

³⁰ Magyar Távirati Iroda jelentése: Kiskunhalas 1935. október 9. 14. MTI „könyomatos” hírek. Napi hírek/Napi tudósítások 1920-1944. Magyar Országos Levéltár

³¹ *Békésmegyei Közlöny* 62. (1935. 05. 09.), 105/2.

István Szabó, a royal inspector. The cream of the town appeared, led by vicar Guido Mátray and town clerk Nándor Semmelweis. Not only was the leadership present but the complete Gypsy settlement as well. Fathers and mothers were proudly listening to the bright knowledge and smart answers of their children.³² Dénes Jász, who was a young teacher of the school, made a thorough and impressive job. From next year on, there will be three classes at the successful Gypsy school. Guidó Mátray - a Benedictine parish priest - deserves thanks and recognition, for supporting the work of the school and Gypsy families in all kinds of living conditions so that they can become useful citizens of the country as soon as possible.”³³

In 1936 the Gypsy school of Mohács started its operation in a quite unique way and at an unconventional location. Antal Kiss - who later became a teacher in Homorúd - organised school classes at a former pub that was maintained jointly by the Roman Catholic, the Reformed, and the Jewish parishes.³⁴

The examples of religious service towards Gypsies could make a long list, but the one who must be mentioned is Miklós Sója. The Eastern Rite Catholic father was an outstanding figure of the Roma mission in Hungary. In 1941, after his ordination, he was sent to Hodász in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county by the bishop. He lived and served there for forty years among the Gypsies. This is how he described the beginnings, his mission and his work:

“In 1941 bishop Dudás sent me to Hodász. He did not know that there were Gypsies, nor did I. Not long after my arrival I passed through the Gypsy settlement. I was almost thunderstruck by the sight of the chaotic crowd of cabins that were dug in the ground amidst the horrible filth. I shouted to myself just like a Columbus-type explorer: This island was not indicated on the bishop’s map! Countless number of patched and decayed fabricated cabins dug into the ground are clustered in a space that is hardly enough for one single residence; people on top of one another inside, only some of them wearing any clothes. There are no wells or lavatories anywhere in the settlement. During my first visit I realized that if

³² The term for the Gypsy children in the original text is ‘rajkó’.

³³ Esztergomból. Napi Hírek 1937. 06. 16. MTI.

³⁴ János Pesti, *Baranya megye földrajzi nevei*. II. köt. Baranya monográfiái sorozat. Baranya Megyei Levéltár Pécs III. Adattár 191–236: Mohácsi járás 468. 1982.

I considered them as human beings, then my mission was to 3.000 people instead of 1.500. They let me look inside a few cabins. I had to bow down low to enter the cellar where they lived in bulk and only some of them were wearing any clothes. I sensed poverty, starvation, uncleanness, nudity and sin on them.”³⁵

After he decided not to abandon Gypsies, he started to teach and educate them. First, by the ditch or in the meadows as remembered by an elderly woman: “There was a wide meadow where Sója would make the children seated and teach them. He was always on the road no matter how cold or muddy it was and visited the filthy Gypsy towns as well. He would come by bicycle but the children would not want to let him go home. What a lovely world that was!”³⁶ Then they built a chapel:

“Due to the cold weather and the demands, they rented Peti Pankus’s house and gathered there almost every day to pray, talk and sing. Later it was necessary to buy the house and turn it to a chapel. Each Gypsy family produced a thousand adobes and sold it to Hungarians. In 1948 they bought the house from the money collected from sold adobes and by peddling. They tore down the roofing and raised the walls. Due to the system at that time, the chapel was registered as a school. Bishop Dudás did not want to consecrate the chapel for fear of the political regime of the time. Because of this and the high level of illiteracy, the chapel was registered as a school. It had two functions: it served as a church, the house of God – and as a school and community centre. Indeed it provided for school services as well. Miklós Sója soon realized that actions are needed instead of preaching. He taught them to read and write. They practiced eating with knife and fork on chocolate instead of meat. The multiplication table was also hanging on the walls of the chapel next to religious icons. They received the alphabet tables from a local teacher. There was a stick at the foot of the wall for reaching all the letters. The stick was actively used, children would compete for it especially if a question was at stake, such as: this ribbon, apron or candy goes to the one who can spell the word correctly. The first candidate for spelling was Zági

³⁵ Éva Rózsahegyiné Juhász, *Sója Miklós öröksége Hodászon*. http://www.ciganypasztoracio.hu/Soja_Miklos (2017.07.31.)

³⁶ Ibid.

who started her studies as a girl and took her final exam as a young lady by reading the actual section of the Bible at the Sunday mass. I made an agreement with the director of the school as well, who had the chapel filled with school desks, the altarpiece covered with a big blackboard, and every evening an educator taught the adults how to write.³⁷

Education and becoming a Christian adult walked hand in hand under the service of Father Sója. Following his example in the second half of the 20th century, many ecclesiastical Gypsy missionary services were launched.

Among the many initiatives and services we must mention József Lankó's nearly forty years of mission among the Gypsies of Alsószentmárton *Beás*, and the name of father László Somos, who served for more than twenty years among the Kaposfő country Vend gypsies. As a consequence of these missions, the plan for the creation of Christian Roma Colleges was born.

THE NETWORK OF THE CHRISTIAN ROMA COLLEGES OF STUDENTS
– A NEW WAY OF 21ST CENTURY GYPSY MISSIONS

In the spring of 2011 the leaders of the Hungarian Province of the Society of Jesus (on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church), the Hungarian Eastern Rite Catholic Church, the Hungarian Reformed Church and the Hungarian Lutheran Church signed the constitutional document of the Network of the Christian Roma Colleges of Students. According to the intentions of the founders:

“The aim of the technical college is to train Christian intellectuals who ‘live for others’, and the basic goal is to contribute to the formation of Gypsy intellectuals who are dedicated to public responsibilities, maintain active social dialogue, and combine professional excellence with the sensitivity towards social issues. The religious institution strives to develop the humanity of its students in all dimensions by deepening the intellectual, moral, collective way of life and spirituality. The education of

³⁷ Ibid.

technical college is based on an ecumenical approach that enables these youngsters to experience spirituality.”³⁸

In addition, these special institutions also strive to reach integration. According to their fundamental principle *they consciously try to admit also non-Gypsy students*.³⁹ Currently there are seven Christian Gypsy/Roma technical colleges operating in Hungary. Christian education and guidance towards Christian adulthood are both stressed in all these institutions.

Our survey has shown that the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church has come a long way from the initial distrustful welcome through the support of individuals and local churches to the foundation of colleges today that operate with the agreement and support of the state and the church. Gypsies and non-Gypsies have influenced, changed and shaped one another in the course of a common history of almost six hundred years, and one has learnt and tried to understand the pivotal truth: *the essence of the gospel of Jesus is not a system of doctrine, norm or custom, but the personal loving relationship with God.*

³⁸ A Keresztény Roma Szakkollégiumi Hálózat küldetésnyilatkozata: <http://krszh.hu/a-krszh-kuldetesnyilatkozata/> (2017.07.31.)

³⁹ Ibid.