

**THE ROMANI PEOPLE AND SELECTED
CHURCHES IN SLOVAKIA**

THE ROMANI PEOPLE AND SELECTED CHURCHES IN SLOVAKIA:

A DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF
THEIR RELATIONS
(1989-2007)

Het Roma volk en geselecteerde kerken in Slowakije:
Een beschrijving, analyse en interpretatie van hun relaties
(1989-2007)

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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PREFACE

I believe that all doctoral students hope their dissertation will be useful in the area of their research. I am no different. My hope is that the results of my research will be helpful to the churches of Slovakia and to the Romani people of Slovakia. I have seen firsthand how the Roma have been marginalized. I have also seen how an accepting and loving church has helped to minimize that marginalization. May a day come when discrimination is a thing of the past.

When my wife, Lynette, and I arrived in Slovakia as missionaries in November 1998 we had no idea what the future held. We knew that we were coming to help teach at a seminary but really had no idea what that would entail. Some of the first people we met in Slovakia were Jozef and Lydia Brenkus. At the time, Jozef was the acting dean of KETM, the seminary where Lynette and I would be teaching. One of the first questions that Jozef asked me was, "Are you working on your PhD?" If it had been left up to me, I would never have sought a doctorate. But Jozef was relentless in pushing me towards this goal. It was Jozef who arranged for me to attend a conference in Budapest, Hungary, at what is now called the Central and Eastern European Institute for Mission Studies (CIMS). It was here that I first met Dr. Anne-Marie Kool. It was through her that I was introduced to Dr. Jan A.B. Jongeneel and eventually entered the doctoral program at Utrecht University.

One of the first suggestions that Dr. Kool gave me was to write down my ideas about what subject I would research if I were to pursue a doctorate. I made a list of several topics that I thought would be interesting. When I shared my list with her, she commented that they were good possibilities, but had I considered the Romani problem in Slovakia. I had to admit that the thought had not crossed my mind. She encouraged me to do some preliminary investigation into this subject. So, I did and as they say, the rest is history. Once I began digging into the Romani situation in Slovakia, I could not put it down.

The first time I met Dr. Jongeneel was in Budapest, Hungary. He was there as a guest lecturer. I do not now remember the topic on which he lectured, but I do clearly recount the afternoon he and I walked along the Danube River after lunch. We talked about family and life. Dorottya Nagy, in the preface of her dissertation, stated that she was part of the Jongeneel family. It was on that day, as Dr. Jongeneel and I walked together, that I too began my journey as a member of the Jongeneel family. With deepest appreciation I thank Dr. Jongeneel for being my promotor and for academically challenging me to refine my research regarding the Roma in Slovakia.

Dr. Kool, who was my second promotor, deserves thanks for not only helping me to determine the subject of my dissertation but for pushing me onto higher academic ground. She asked difficult and direct questions which helped to make my research better. For this I am grateful.

Dr. Jozef Brenkus, who started me on this journey, served as a co-promotor. He helped by introducing me to key people within the Romani world of Slovakia. He not only functioned as an advisor, but as a friend.

There are several Roma who have been key to my research. Laco Duna and his wife Anna provided insights into their native culture that are found on many pages of this dissertation. Mária Atanázia Holubová, a Romani nun from Bardejov, was always willing to sit and talk over a cup of fruit tea. Not only did I gain an understanding of the Roma within the RCC, but I also learned to appreciate fruit tea without sugar.

Matúš Moyzes, a student of mine at KETM, traveled with me on many of my research trips to Romani settlements and served as my translator. I could not have accomplished this project without him. I am also grateful to Dominik Mojžiš who acted as my translator on several occasions when Matúš was not available. Dr. Lúbia Brenkusová helped me with all text translations from Slovak into English. She also translated the summary of this research into Slovak. As well I thank Dorrotya Nagy for translating the summary into Dutch.

Lynn Kanaga did the first editing of the finished manuscript. Thanks, Dad. Dr. Kelli Beery Odhuu did the subsequent editing and formatting as well as challenging my conclusions and overall presentation of my research. After many emails and telephone calls, what you hold in your hands is the result.

I am grateful for those in leadership of the Assemblies of God World Missions who have allowed me to pursue a doctoral degree while serving as a missionary. Special thanks go to Greg Mundis, Europe regional director, and to Steve Walent, Jim Sabella, Craig Mathison and Kevin Beery who all served as my area directors and encouragers.

My two sons, Robby and Michael and their families have spoken words of encouragement at strategic times, which spurred me to continue my pursuit of this degree. A father could not ask for better sons. However, my greatest supporter has been my wife, Lynette, the wonderful mother of my sons and Nana to my six grandchildren. At this point in time, we have been married for thirty-eight years. My love for her only increases with each passing year. She has been my spell-checker/editor for all these years. I am thankful that God allowed my truck to break down in Russell, Kansas, so many years ago. If not, I might never have met the love of my life. Thank you, Lynette, for enduring the sleepless nights and seemingly endless rewrites. I look forward with anticipation to our post dissertation years.

Last of all, I want to thank my Lord and Savior for sustaining me through this doctoral process. After all, he is the reason for what I have written. I agree wholeheartedly with the Apostle Paul who wrote, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

ABBREVIATIONS

ACS	Apoštolská cirkev na Slovensku (Apostolic Church of Slovakia)
BJB	Bratská jednota baptistov (Baptist Union of Slovakia)
CB	Cirkev bratská (Brethren Church of Slovakia)
ECAV	Evanjelická cirkev augsburského vyznania na Slovensku (Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession of Slovakia)
ECM	Evanjelická cirkev metodistická (Evangelical Methodist Church of Slovakia)
HZDS	Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia)
IVO	Inštitút pre verejné otázky (Institute for Public Affairs)
KETM	Katedra evanjelikálnej teológie a misie na Pedagogickej fakulte University Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici (Department of Evangelical Theology at the Pedagogical faculty of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia)
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NRG	Nová rómska generácia (New Roma Generation)
RCC	Rímskokatolícka cirkev (Roman Catholic Church)
RIS	Rómska iniciatíva Slovenska (Romani Institute of Slovakia)
RKC	Reformovaná kresťanská cirkev na Slovensku (Reformed Church of Slovakia)
ROI	Rómska občianska iniciatíva (Roma Civic Initiative)
SK	Slovakia or The Slovak Republic
SNS	Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party)

GLOSSARY

The language origin of the listed terms is indicated by the following notations:
CZ=Czech, GK=Greek, IN=India, LT=Latin, RO=Romani, SK=Slovak.

Athingani or Atsiganoi (GK) Root Greek word means 'touch,' the 'a' prefix indicates a negative, thus the word means 'do not touch.' Term was used in GK to designate the worshippers of Manichaeism, and is used today for upper-class Roma. In Western Europe this term means 'untouchables.'

Beng (RO) Devil.

Bibaxt (RO) Bad luck.

Božie deti (SK) God's children.

Butyakengo (RO) A protective spirit that lives in the human body and which forms a part of a deceased ancestor. It is transferred from the father and mother to the eldest son or daughter.

Čhib (RO) Tongue or language.

Cigán (SK) Name given to Roma by non-Romani Slovaks.

Cigániť (SK) Slovak verb form of *cigán*, which means to lie or to deceive.

Demam or **Dummi** (IN) Nomadic people from India who live in Persia, Syria and Iraq.

Devas (IN) In Hinduism an exalted being or deity.

Devel (RO) God; other words the Roma use of God are Del, Devla, and O Del.

Diaconia Historically a *diaconia* was a center located near a church where needed items were given to the poor. Today it is a term used by churches to indicate the ministry of helping the poor.

Djana (RO) Good spirit/fairy that is thought to roam in the forest near Krásnohorské Podhradie.

Dom (IN) Word used in Indian languages Sanskrit, Sindhi, Lahnda, Panjabi and West Pahari to designate a wandering musician or low-caste person. This name is believed to have eventually evolved into the name *Rom*.

Gadje (RO) Literal meaning is outsider. Name used by Roma for non-Romani people (masculine). Used by Roma as a disparaging term for one who is not a Rom.

Gadžeha (RO) Instrumental form of *Gadje*.

Gadžehanies (RO) Plural form of *Gadje*.

Gadžehany (RO) Feminine form of *Gadje*.

Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (SK) Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, HZDS, political party formed by Vladimir Mečiar.

Inštitút pre verejné otázky (SK) The Institute for Public Affairs.

Internát (SK) Hostel to house and cater to students.

Jednoúrovňová viera (SK) Single-faith level.

Karma (IN) Actions or inclinations that are behind the consequences of life, understood as the cycle of cause and effect.

Kris (RO) Romani group court; the traditional tribal court of the Vlach Roma.

Mahrimé (RO) Also *marimé*; to be impure or defiled; an impurity caused by violation of the Romani purity code.

Missio Dei (LT) God's mission or the sending of God.

Muló (RO) Belief that the dead can return in the form of a spirit, a human, or an animal.

Muls (RO) Belief that the dead return to haunt and seek revenge on living relatives.

Nádej deťom (SK) Hope for Children.

Národní (CZ) National.

Nová Rómska Generácia (SK) New Roma Generation.

Občanské fórum (CZ) Civic Forum—Political activist group led by Václav Havel that opposed the communist-led government of Czechoslovakia; formed in Prague on 17 November 1989, following the attack by police on students.

Olašská rómčina (SK) One of the Romani dialects from Romania and Moldavia.

Panchayat (IN) A traditional village council in India or Southern Pakistan.

Panjabi (IN) An Indo-Aryan language spoken by the Punjab people in India and Pakistan.

Prechodná úroveň viery (SK) Transitional-faith level.

Róm (SK) Singular, designating an ethnic person who is a Gypsy.

Roma Plural form of *Róm*, designates ethnic Gypsies.

Romani Adjective form of *Róm* or *Roma*; also used for the Romani tongue or Romani language.

Romanies Term used by Helsinki Watch.

Romanipe (RO) Term used by the Roma to describe their Roma-ness; it implies keeping *Gadje* from entering their *romanipe* world.

Rómčina (SK) Romani tongue or Romani language.

Rómovia (SK) Plural form of *Róm*, designates ethnic Gypsies.

Rómska iniciatíva Slovenska (SK) Romani Initiative of Slovakia.

Rómska občianska iniciatíva (SK) Romani Civic Initiative.

Rómsky/rómski (SK) Adjective form of *Róm*.

Rudé právo (CZ) Czech daily newspaper, *Red Rights*.

Sindhi (IN) Indian dialect or language. Also name given in Arab and Persian literature to immigrants believed to be Roma from Sindh in the northwest part of India.

Sinti European group of Roma found mainly in Germany.

Slovenská národná strana (SK) Slovak National Party.

Slovenská škola pre mentálne postihnutých (SK) Special remedial schools for mentally handicapped children.

Ugria (SK) Hungarian region.

Václavské náměstí (CZ) Wenceslas Square in Prague.

Vajda (RO) Title given to the head of a Romani group who functions as leader and judge.

Verejnost' proti násiliu (SK) Public Against Violence—Slovak counterpart to Civic Forum.

Viacúrovňová viera (SK) Multi-faith level.

Vlivode (RO) Another term for *vajda*.

Voivode (RO) Another term for *vajda*.

Waynoda Ciganorum (LT) Another term for *vajda*.

West Pahari Indian dialect.

Zott Name given by Arabs in the ninth century to Indian immigrants who lived near the Tigris River.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

When Mikulaš Dzurinda became Prime Minister of Slovakia in September 1998, his coalition government began soliciting admission into the European Union (EU). One of the most significant obstacles the government faced was the Romani¹ issue. In 1993, social criteria specifically addressing minority rights had been established by the EU, and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, which sought to join the Union, were expected to comply with these standards. The EU criteria stated, "Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the respect for and protection of minorities."² The prejudicial treatment of the Romani minority at all levels of society threatened to disallow Slovakia's acceptance. Nevertheless, on 1 May 2004, Slovakia was admitted into the EU based on favorable reports regarding the Slovakian government's improved status.³

To Europeans, Slovakia's acceptance into the EU indicated that human rights issues had been resolved. However, such an assessment was premature, for, as Miroslav Kusý asserts, "Slovakia has several unresolved human rights issues and lingering problems from the past."⁴ The Roma make up the second largest

¹ A question is raised whether *Roma* is the best term to use since in the Dutch language dictionary this term designates merely one of the *zigeuner* groups. However, in the Slovak context, the term *Cigán* (equivalent of Dutch *zigeuner*) is considered to be a derogatory term by the Roma since the verb form of *Cigán* is *cigániť* and means to lie or to deceive. For this reason, the term *Roma* will be used in this study to refer to all *zigeuner* groups. (There is a small percentage of Roma with Hungarian roots, around 5%, that prefer to be called *gipsy* or *zigeunne*.)

There is no consistent usage in English literature for the grammatical forms of the proper name *Roma*. Because of these inconsistencies, the following forms will be used in this thesis—*Rom* is the singular form, *Roma* is the plural form, *Romani* is the adjective form, and *Romani* is the language Roma speak. Exceptions occur when quotes use a different form.

² The European Council, *European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993: Conclusions of the Presidency*, Bulletin of the European Communities, no. 6, 1993, 13.

³ See Dena Ringold, *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000) and Claude Bapst and Pál Csáky, *Improvement of the Situation of the Roma in the Slovak Republic: Final Report* (Bratislava: Phare Twinning Covenant, December 2003), SK 0002/SK00/IB-OT-01.

⁴ Miroslav Kusý, "Human Rights," in *Slovakia 2001: A Global Report on the State of Society*, eds. Grigorij Mesežnikov, Miroslav Kollár, Tom Nicholson (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2002), 113.

ethnic group in Slovakia (over 9 percent), and they remain marginalized in all segments of society.⁵ Their lack of education, their high rate of unemployment, and their atypical housing conditions contribute to their current position in Slovak society.

The issue of marginalization or discrimination is dealt with in this study from a collective prejudicial perspective and not from the perspective of the discrimination of individuals or structural/systematic discrimination. While some individual stories of discrimination are presented, the purpose is to present the corporate marginalization of the Roma.

This collective prejudicial marginalization can be addressed by the Slovak church, which is in the position to provide the Roma, through the influence of Christianity,⁶ with a non-syncretistic faith and enabling them to participate more readily within the selected churches of Slovakia. Four research questions are answered in this study. The first two are preliminary in nature and establish a foundation upon which the last two rest: (1) In current Slovak society, what position do the Roma occupy politically, socioeconomically and culturally; (2) what is the reality of Romani religiosity; (3) what impact has Christianity had upon Romani spirituality; and (4) what position do the Roma hold in the Slovak churches?⁷

The first research question has been investigated by a number of sociologists and organizations; thus, further examination of this point is repetitious. However, a general understanding of the pejorative attitudes that pervade Slovak society is necessary in order to provide a framework for examining the effects of the Christianization of the Romani population. This framework needs a historical perspective of the past, which traces the Romani people from their place of origin, and which will reconstruct how the Slovak and Romani people have arrived at their present situation.

Questions 2 and 3 are examined together so that a comparison of the two can reveal what religious beliefs (both traditional and Christian) have been most

⁵ Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2. Barany defines marginality as "the condition of being subordinated to or excluded by others."

⁶ Christianity is defined as "the religion derived from Jesus Christ, based on the Bible as sacred scripture, and professed by Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bodies." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "Christianity."

⁷ This study uses the word "church" to refer to all Christian churches in Slovakia. The use of the word "Church" (capitalized) includes only those selected churches that were studied.

influential. While it is understood that question 2 is preliminary, it is nevertheless directly related to question 3. A basic conjecture among romologists is that when the Roma convert to a new faith, they do not "give up their original confession completely."⁸ Thus, syncretism is viewed as a phenomenon of Romani spirituality. Though the general characteristics of Romani Christianity have been studied, little research has been done regarding the major influences and faith levels of the Roma of Slovakia.

Research question 4 is concerned with the level of participation by the Roma in Slovak church life. This topic has not been sufficiently researched in the past. This study posits that most Roma who live in Slovakia are syncretistic in their faith; consequently, the Roma are marginalized within the church and their opportunities to participate are limited. However, a growing number of Roma are changing from a syncretistic faith to a non-syncretistic faith, finding a new level of acceptance that mitigates their marginalization.

This research intends to reveal the impact Christianity has on the present situation of the Roma in Slovakia. By examining established churches within the Slovak-Romani context, various strategies and results are observable. This research will allow the established churches to gain a better understanding of their mission to the Roma. It will also allow the Roma to gain an understanding of how their spirituality has evolved and how Christianity can make a significant impact upon their position within the established churches of Slovakia.

The research of this study has focused mainly on the situation after the fall of communism (1989), specifically after Slovakia became an independent nation (1993). The field research was collected between July 2003 and September 2005 after which the author moved from Slovakia to Greece. In instances where further information was needed, follow-up interviews were done by phone or email. A return visit to Slovakia was made in May 2008 to reassess the previous field research and to ascertain from romologists, leaders within the selected churches, and Roma if the conclusions of the research were accurate.

⁸ MilanKováč and Milan Jurík, "The Religious Life of the Roma and the Activities of the Church in Relation to the Roma," in *Čačipen pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, eds. Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2003), 100.

1.2 Methodology

This study will use two methods of research: historical and comparative. Both of these methods are descriptive and analytical in nature.⁹ While there are some cultural issues mentioned this is not an anthropological study, but an historical and missiological study.

1.2.1 Historical Method

The historical method deals with more than merely a chronology of events germane to a topic. History presents a plethora of seemingly confusing events, but the historian gives meaning to the relevant events. Paul Leedy states, "The heart of the historical method is...not the accumulating of the facts, but rather the interpretation of the facts."¹⁰

When using the historical method, the researcher is conscious of both external and internal evidence. On the one hand, "external evidence...is primarily concerned with the question, Is it genuine?"¹¹ A researcher must always be concerned about the authenticity of his sources: Is the data truthful or credulous? On the other hand, internal evidence is concerned with meaning and, in particular, with specific issues that surround the author at the time of his writing. Issues that must be considered are the audience to whom the author is writing, the historical context about which he writes, and finally the motivation and intention of the source's author.

The best scenario in collecting recent historical data is to interview those who are in the field, both participants and observers. The goal is to discover facts as close to the original event or source as possible. Oral history can provide information about past events in societies whose people are not able to read and write; thus, stories are passed down orally from generation to generation. However, in dealing with past history where the participants and observers are no longer living, the researcher cannot depend on oral history alone; he is compelled to investigate written sources as well. This study, therefore, will employ the oral history method in addition to available written sources.

However, "it is fundamental among researchers that the more you know about the peripheral investigations germane to your own study, the more

⁹ Paul D. Leedy, *Practical Research*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 111, 156.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

knowledgeably you can approach your own research problems."¹² A review of the available literature can reveal "methodological and design issues," problem-solving solutions, data sources, researchers to contact, and "new ideas and approaches," all of which will help in refining the research questions.¹³

Oral research demands that the sampling be appropriate to the field of study. There are five distinct methods of sampling: "simple random," "stratified random," "proportional stratified," "cluster," and "systematic."¹⁴

In this research project, the author has used a combination of simple, stratified, and proportional methods to gather oral data. The sampling format was employed in the personal interviews with church leaders and with Romani sources, both inside and outside the church (see chapters 4 and 5). In some cases, the interviews were accomplished in group sessions rather than individually. The questions used by the interviewer were open-ended, allowing the interviewees flexibility in their answers, and this, in turn, allowed the author to ask follow-up questions based on the answers given. Permission was received from all those interviewed to use their comments in the text of this study.

1.2.2 Comparative Method

The comparative research method compares data from two or more different sample groups concerning the same observed phenomenon. This method has

¹² Ibid., 71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 213-8. Simple random sampling is the least sophisticated way of gathering information and is normally used when the population to be sampled is homogeneous. The data-gathering instruments most often used are personal observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

Stratified random sampling is used when the population has more than one layer and each layer is proportional in size. In this method of research, an equal amount of samples are needed from each layer. It is important in this process that the samples taken from each layer are representative of the entire population. The format of the samples can be surveys, questionnaires, or interviews.

Proportional stratified sampling is used when layers are not proportional within themselves. With this method, it is important "to separate the several discrete elements in the total population and to select from each of the individual groups a random sample proportionately representative of the numerical strength of each of the components within the entire conglomerate." The data-collecting instruments are the same as those used in stratified random sampling.

Cluster sampling is used when the population is spread across a large area. The population is organized into similar groupings or clusters. A random sample is then taken from the clusters. The same instruments are used as in stratified random and proportional stratified methods of sampling.

In systematic sampling, the selection of interviewees is based on a predetermined selection process. This method is designed to remove any bias that the researcher might have and uses the same sampling format as the above-mentioned research types.

several variations and names. Correlational research is "a statistical investigation of the relationship between one factor and one or more other factors...[and] looks at surface relationships but does not necessarily probe for causal reasons...."¹⁵ Ex post facto or causal comparative research is a non-experimental method that "observes existing conditions and searches back through the data for plausible causal factors."¹⁶ It is often referred to as the "detective method" because it seeks to discover the motivation and cause behind a phenomenon. Causal comparative research will be the primary method used in this study.

This research will take the findings of the written sources and the results of the oral field research and compare them in the following ways. The religiosity of the Roma prior to their encounter with the Christian faith will be compared with their religiosity after such an encounter (see chapter 4). The results of field research among the Roma with a particular denominational orientation are then compared with the Roma who have a different denominational orientation (see chapter 5). Subsequently, the similarities and the differences will be examined to determine if there are common factors within the various groups. The differences will then be examined to determine their causes (see chapter 6).

1.3 Structure of the Study

This study has six chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the research project (statement of the problem, methodology, structure of the study, and sources).

Chapter 2, *Historical Developments to 1989*, endeavors to understand the depth of the Romani problem in Slovakia from a historical perspective. The historical research method used in this chapter explores the Indian origin of the Roma. Linguistic evidence that shows a link between the Sanskrit and Hindi dialects, and the present-day Romani dialects is presented.¹⁷ Anthropological studies are also considered as a possible link between India and the Roma of Europe. The peregrination of the Roma from India to Europe is documented in historical records. Of particular importance to this study is the beginning and continuation of pejorative actions toward the Roma, which began shortly after their arrival in Europe. These prejudicial attitudes developed into acts of

¹⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Stanislav Cina, "The Roma Language and Its Standardization," in *Čačipen pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, eds. Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2003), 91-8.

persecution, occurring from the Habsburg era into the Nazi era and through the communist era. An analysis of the historical reasons concludes the chapter.

Chapter 3, *Developments after 1989*, analyzes the contemporary Romani situation in Slovakia since 1989. The political context surrounding the Roma during Czechoslovakia's first years of independence is discussed. Furthermore, the historical events that led to the 1993 separation of Czechoslovakia into two independent nations, Slovak Republic and Czech Republic, are presented.

An analysis of the socioeconomic environs surrounding the Slovak Roma reveals the numerous difficulties the Roma confront in Slovak society. These difficulties are observed in the lack of adequate housing, lack of educational opportunities for the children, marginalization within the labor market, and lack of satisfactory healthcare.

The structure and worldview of the Romani culture are compared with the structure and worldview of the non-Romani culture. Differences between the two are examined to determine any contribution they might make to pejorative behavior.

Chapter 4, *Religiosity of the Romani People in the Republic of Slovakia*, examines Romani religiosity previous to encountering the Christian faith and Romani religiosity following its encounter with the Christian faith. Their propensity is toward a "multilevel faith," which is how Milan Kováč and Milan Jurík describe the Romani practice of syncretism.¹⁸ The influence of Christianity did not thwart the multi-faith level tendency but simply added another layer. The general characteristics of Romani Christianity are affected by regional and tribal/familial influences. Another phenomenon that has influenced Roma in some regions of Slovakia is acceptance shown them by churches or missionaries. "The Roma easily modify or completely change their faith" when shown concern.¹⁹ In these instances, the Roma can move from a syncretistic faith to a single faith. In contrast, there is a growing number of secularized Roma in Slovakia that have rejected the Christian faith.²⁰

Chapter 5, *Participation of the Romani People in Church Life in the Republic of Slovakia*, examines the religious context, prejudices, and levels of Romani participation within selected churches in post-communist Slovakia. The

¹⁸ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jozef Brenkus, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 30 July 2005.

persecution of church leaders under communist rule limited the church's ability to see and understand the plight of the Roma. When more democratic concepts emerged, the attitude of most non-Romani church attendees did not change from the pejorative attitudes of Slovak society under communism. Only in the last several years has the church begun to perceive more accurately the real plight of the Roma. Unfortunately, the response of the church in allowing the Roma to participate in church life and in the development of theology remains limited. This is a reflection of the prejudicial feelings that still exist between the Roma and the non-Roma within the church. However, these relational problems are by no means one-sided. Instead, they continue to persist both from the church's perspective and the Romani perspective.

The particular churches which will be investigated include the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAV), the Reformed Church of Slovakia (RKC), the Evangelical Methodist Church of Slovakia (ECM), the Baptist Union of Slovakia (BJB), and the Apostolic Church of Slovakia (ACS). The reason for including the RCC, ECAV, and RKC is based on their importance within the religious context of Slovakia. The inclusion of ECM, BJB, and ACS is based on their sponsoring Katedra Evanjelikálnej Teológie a Misie (KETM), the seminary where the author taught from 1998 to 2005.

Chapter 6, *Identity, Communication, and Participation*, concludes by summarizing and evaluating the data from the variables of identity, communication, and participation. The term "identity" is used to describe the essence or nature of the Romani people of Slovakia as well as those of the Churches of Slovakia. The New Testament does not seem to justify separate ethnic churches; therefore, how the Churches and the Romani people interact and build relationships is addressed.²¹

The conflict between two belief systems, Romani pre-Christian religiosity and the Christian faith, is evaluated regarding the influences upon the Romani and the non-Romani worldviews. For example, as the Christian faith impacts the Roma, their worldview changes accordingly. The organizational structure of the

²¹ Some specific passages that seem to indicate a multicultural church as the biblical model are Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:8, and Acts 6:1-7. Of special interest is the Acts 6 passage where a dispute between two ethnic groups is described. Separation into two different congregations is not suggested as a solution. The solution was to work together in solving the problem, thus keeping the ethnic groups together in the church.

church and that of the Romani communities have a direct effect on how faith is communicated and how it is received or rejected.

1.4 Sources

Two categories of sources and literature are employed in this study: primary and secondary. The primary sources are defined as "the data that lie closest to the source of the Ultimate Truth underlying the phenomenon."²² The secondary sources are distant from the phenomenon being investigated.

1.4.1 Primary Sources

The scarcity of written Romani sources means that much of the research was gathered through oral interviews. Romani church leaders and lay people were interviewed. Listed under Sources, I.1 *Oral Interviews* are the names and locations of each interview. Because of the author's limited Slovak vocabulary and his deficiency with the various Romani languages, an interpreter was used for many of the interviews. All those interviewed were made aware of the purpose of this study and gave approval for their responses to be used.

Mária Atanázia Holubová, RCC nun who is a Rom, was interviewed several times. She gave evidence of the prejudicial treatment of the Roma within the RCC. She indicated that in order for the Christian faith to change the life of Romani children, the parents must change.²³ Viktor Tomčany, a Romani RCC priest, recounted how a non-Romani priest helped him to learn to read the Bible (in Slovak), and that changed his life.²⁴ Laco Duna, a Romani ACS pastor, revealed how a Rom thinks before encountering Christianity and how that thinking could be transformed through a personal relationship with Christ.²⁵

Iveta Radičová, a sociologist who is herself a Rom, has written a book, *Hic Sunt Romales* (Who are the Roma?), that presents the political and socioeconomic situation of the Roma in Slovakia.²⁶ In addition, the author has

²² Leedy, *Practical Research*, 101.

²³ Mária Atanázia Holubová, interviews by author, Bardejov, Slovakia, 21 October 2004, 20 April 2005, and 13 May 2008.

²⁴ Viktor Tomčany, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 17 March 2004.

²⁵ Laco Duna, interviews by author, Košice, Slovakia, 15 July 2003, 6 March 2004, and 12 April 2005.

²⁶ Iveta Radičová, *Hic Sunt Romales* (Who are the Roma?) (Bratislava, Slovakia: Fulbrightova komisia, SR, 2001).

reviewed three Masters' theses written by Slovak Roma. Františk Čurej,²⁷ a Catholic priest, wrote a distinctly non-prejudicial work that is helpful in defining how the Roma perceive God. Mária Atanázia Holubová,²⁸ RCC nun in Bardejov, Slovakia, wrote a Master's thesis about the sacraments and their relation to the Roma. Viktor Tomčany,²⁹ a priest in Martin, Slovakia, wrote a Master's thesis that discusses the pastoral care of Roma. He discusses how the Roma have been helped by the Catholic Church but provides few details as to how this has happened.

1.4.2 Secondary Sources

Oral interviews were also conducted with non-Romani church leaders and lay people. A list of those interviewed can be found under Sources, II.1 Oral Interviews. Of particular importance are several interviews with Peter Bešenyei, a RCC Salesian priest, who began a ministry to young people in Poštárka (a Romani settlement) near Bardejov, Slovakia.³⁰ He noted that many of the Romani parents respected the church and that they needed simple, repetitive instruction regarding their faith. Juraj Brecko, RKC pastor, told how their church was able to instruct Romani families to plant and harvest potatoes.³¹ An ACS pastor to ethnic groups, Igor Láslofi was interviewed several times, and he observed how doctrinal instruction must be given often and in a simple way to the Roma.³²

Furthermore, the Slovak government has produced several publications dealing with the Romani issue.³³ These publications, however, do not address

²⁷ Františk Čurej, "Rómovia a Kresťanská viera" (Roma and Christian faith) (Master's thesis, Universita Komenského, Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovecká fakulta, 1996).

²⁸ Mária Atanázie Holubová, "Kresťan vo sviatostnej starostlivosti cirkvi" (The Christian sacraments of the Church) (Master's thesis, Universita Komenského, Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovecká fakulta, 1996).

²⁹ Viktor Tomčany, "Pastorácia Rómov" (Pastoral care of the Roma) (Master's thesis, Universita Komenského, Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovecká fakulta, 1996).

³⁰ Peter Bešenyei, interviews by author, Michalovce, Slovakia, 22 October 2004 and 13 April 2005.

³¹ Juraj Brecko, interview by author, Tušice, Slovakia, 13 April 2005 and 8 May 2008.

³² Igor Láslofi, interviews by author, Košice, Slovakia, 15 July 2003 and 9 February 2004.

³³ Commissioner of the Government of the SR for Solutions of Problems of Citizens with Special Needs, Conceptual Intends of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Solution of the Problems of Romani Population Under Current Social and Economic Conditions (Bratislava, Slovakia: Publishing House MINOR, 1997); Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Solution of the Problems of the Roma National Minority and Set of Measures for Its Implementation, Stage I, approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic, 27 September 1999; Office of the Government of the

relationships between the Roma and the Christian church nor do they mention what the impact of Christianity might have upon the Romani community.

The history of the Roma in Central Europe through the centuries, including the communist years and the post-communist era, has been investigated by several scholars. Of specific importance is Emília Horváthová's book, *Cigáni na Slovensku* (The Roma in Slovakia).³⁴ She writes, however, from the viewpoint of a scholar whose every word was to be analyzed by communist leaders. Thus, Horváthová presents the plight of the Roma so that the communist government looks good.

A compilation of research reports edited by Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson, *Čačipen pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*,³⁵ is an overview of the Roma of Slovakia. The book includes a historical account of the Romani migration into Europe and the Roma's treatment from the Habsburgs through the communist era. But of major importance is this work's investigation of the Romani situation since the fall of the communist regime in 1989. In addition, a number of Slovak scholars have reviewed issues regarding Romani ethnicity, linguistics, religiosity, culture, politics, and socioeconomics.

Milan Kováč and Arne B. Mann are the editors of *Boh všetko vidí: Duchovný svet Rómov na Slovensku* (God sees everything: the spiritual world of the Roma in Slovakia),³⁶ a report of case studies from nine Romani settlements in Slovakia. The contributing researchers share their observations and conclusions after spending time interacting with members of the various settlements. Topics such as magic, the supernatural, music, folklore, and the conflict between Roman Catholic believers and Protestant believers are explored. However, this study lacks cohesion. While a common set of questions was provided, decisions regarding procedural methods were left up to each individual researcher. As a

Slovak Republic, Elaboration of the Government Strategy for Addressing Problems of the Romani National Minority into a Package of Concrete Measures for Year 2000 – Stage 2, adopted through Governmental Resolution No. 294/2000, 3 May 2000.

³⁴ Emília Horváthová, *Cigáni na Slovensku* (The Gypsies of Slovakia) (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1964).

³⁵ Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson, eds., *Čačipen pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia* (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2003).

³⁶ Milan Kováč and Arne B. Mann, eds., *Boh všetko vidí: Duchovný svet Rómov na Slovensku* (God sees everything: the religious world of the Romanies in Slovakia) (Bratislava: Chronos Publishing, 2003).

result, the report is a potpourri of observations with no connecting continuity. The intentions of this study are commendable, however, the results of its data fall short of providing conclusive evidence regarding the spiritual life of the Roma.

Daniel Mišina, an ECAV priest who has worked directly with the Roma in a church setting, wrote his Master's thesis on the "possibilities of the inculturation of the Gospel into the Romani community of Slovakia."³⁷ His work includes a short history of the Roma in Slovakia and examines their social traditions. Moreover, it gives a brief picture of what the Catholic, Evangelical Lutherans and other denominations are doing in their ministry to the Roma. Although Mišina's study is limited in scope and substance, it gives a glimpse into the relationships between the Slovak church and the Roma.

Several scholarly theses on the Roma have been written by students at the Roman Catholic seminary: *Universita Komenského Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovenská fakulta, Teologický Inštitút na Slovensku*. Bešenyey's³⁸ Master's thesis deals with the customs of the Roma but is limited in scope revealing no new information. The only doctoral dissertation on the Roma was written by Ondrej Porubec.³⁹ His work deals with the legal principles and organization of pastoral care regarding the Roma of Slovakia. Both of these studies seem to be written with a prejudicial tone against the Roma.

The RKC seminary in Komárno, *Katedra teologického inštitútu J. Calvina*, has produced no graduate theses regarding the Roma. The Protestant seminary, *Katedra evanjelíkálnej teológie a misie*, which is part of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica, is a cooperative seminary administrated by four different denominations.⁴⁰ Zuzana Krnová wrote a Master's thesis regarding the Roma titled, "Kresťanská práca medzi Rómami"

³⁷ Daniel Mišina, "Rómovia: Možnosti inkulturácie evanjelia pri rómskom obyvateľstve na Slovensku" (Roma: the possibilities of the inculturation of the gospel into the Romani community of Slovakia) (Master's thesis, Univerzita Komenského, Evanjelická bohoslovecká fakulta, 2001).

³⁸ Peter Bešenyey, "Rómovia a spôsoby pastorácie" (The Roma and ways of pastoral care) (Master's thesis, Univerzita Komenského, Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovecká fakulta, 1997).

³⁹ Ondrej Porubec, "Právne zásady a organizácia dušpastierstva Cigánov na Slovensku" (The principles and organization of counseling Roma in Slovakia) (Ph.D. diss., Katolícki univerzitet Lubeski, 1998).

⁴⁰ The Apoštolská cirkev na Slovensku, Bratská jednota baptistov, Cirkev bratská, and Evanjelická cirkev metodistická.

(Christian work among the Roma).⁴¹ Her thesis is limited in vision and lacks solid field research. The study of Matúš Moyzes, "Špecifická pastorácie Rómov" (Specific pastoral care of the Roma),⁴² clearly states the problems the Roma of Slovakia face and lists specific theological difficulties to pastoral care which these problems present. His work is well-written and is based on good research.

A significant contribution to the political and socioeconomic concerns of the Roma in Central Europe is found in the research of Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies*.⁴³ While the range of this study is to investigate the Romani condition in all of Eastern Europe, information is included which specifically relates to the Slovak Roma.

Donald Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*,⁴⁴ gives a credible accounting of the migration of the Roma from India westward. Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, in their book, *Gypsies Under the Swastika*,⁴⁵ present the situation faced by the Roma throughout Europe under the fascist regime of Adolf Hitler. In the book, *The Gypsies*,⁴⁶ Angus Fraser gives a historical account of the Roma as a people group of Europe by tracing their origins to the present. Furthermore, the bibliography is exhaustive.

Jean-Paul Clébert's book, *The Gypsies*,⁴⁷ gives a basic understanding of traditional Romani beliefs that have been prevalent among many of the Romani groups of Europe. His research is not exhaustive and is limited for the most part to Western Europe since the Eastern part of Europe was under the influence of communism at the time he wrote this work. Josef Kalvoda wrote a chapter in the book edited by David Crowe and John Kolsti, *Gypsies of Eastern Europe*,⁴⁸ titled, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia." The chapter presents the historical background

⁴¹ Zuzana Krnová, "Kresťanská práca medzi Rómami" (Christian work among the Roma) (Master's thesis, Universita Mateja Bela, Pedagogická fakulta, Katedra evanjelíkálnej teológie a misie, 2001).

⁴² Matúš Moyzes, "Špecifická pastorácie Rómov" (Characteristics of pastoral care of the Roma) (Master's thesis, Universita Mateja Bela, Pedagogická fakulta, Katedra evanjelíkálnej teológie a misie, 2004).

⁴³ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*.

⁴⁴ Donald Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean: The Migration of the Gypsies* (Toulouse, France: Gypsy Research Centre, 1993).

⁴⁵ Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *Gypsies under the Swastika* (Hatfield, England: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1998).

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Inc., 1970).

⁴⁸ David Crowe and John Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992).

of the Roma in Eastern Europe, their life under socialism, their socioeconomic place in society, and, of special interest to this study, an overview of their culture and religion. His insights, while limited, are foundational to the study of Romani religiosity from an Eastern European perspective. Clébert's book and Kalvoda's article are likewise important to this study because they contrast the differences between traditional Romani religiosity found in Western Europe and the traditional Romani religiosity that has been influenced by communism. Additional information regarding traditional Romani religiosity came from Internet sources.⁴⁹

Also worthy of note is the Human Rights Watch Report,⁵⁰ which regularly details the plight of the Roma in Slovakia. Only rarely, however, do these articles speak of religious issues related to the Roma.

With reference to the general history of the church of Slovakia, Štefan Poláčik's *Atlas Cirkvi*⁵¹ and David B. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*⁵² were also examined. Dušan Kováč's work, *Dejiny Slovenska* (A history of Slovakia),⁵³ has been helpful in understanding the historical background of the Slovak region.

Jan A. B. Jongeneel's book, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries*,⁵⁴ and David J. Bosch's book, *Transforming Missions*,⁵⁵ were insightful in gaining an understanding of relational and communicative issues. Both works have been helpful in formulating a strategy for evaluating information about the Roma and the Slovak church. Stephen B. Bevans' book, *Models of Contextual Theology*,⁵⁶ is helpful in understanding contextual issues.

⁴⁹ There are a number of Internet resources that are helpful in gaining an introduction to relevant materials. European Roma Rights Center, online at <http://www.errc.org/>; *The Patrin Web Journal*, online at <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/patrin.htm>; and RomNews Society, online at <http://www.romnews.com>.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch reports are available online at <http://www.hrw.org/>. Helsinki Watch reports are a branch of the Human Rights Watch. See also <http://www.hrweb.org/>.

⁵¹ Štefan Poláčik, ed., *Atlas Cirkvi, náboženských spoločností a religiozity Slovenska* (Church atlas: denominations and the religiosity of Slovakia) (Bratislava: Chronos Publishing, 2000).

⁵² David B. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2d ed. (Oxford: University Press, 2001).

⁵³ Dušan Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska* (History of Slovakia) (Praha: Lidové Noviny, 1998).

⁵⁴ Jan A. B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁵⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 14th ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁵⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

The translation of all quoted materials from Slovak was done by the author and verified as to their accuracy by Ľubica Brenkusová, a philologist in English and Slovak at the University of Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS TO 1989

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the historical background critical in answering the first research question concerning the position that the Romani people have in Slovak society. Positioning within the hierarchy of a society may have prejudicial effects on those occupying the lower strata of the social order, which in turn may contribute to their being marginalized politically, socioeconomically, and culturally. The negative attitudes of those in a higher position are not acquired suddenly; rather, they are acquired over a duration of time and can be tracked through historical events. Historically, the Roma have occupied this lower stratum and have experienced the resulting marginalization. This chapter will examine the evolution of pejorative predispositions against the Roma in Europe, and specifically within the Slovak culture.

An understanding of where the Romani people come from offers insights into their present day marginalized relationship with Slovak society. Linguistic studies, anthropological studies, sociological studies, and historical studies aid in making a determination of Romani origin. Linguistic studies on the Romani people give compelling historical evidence associating the Romani people directly with Indian origins. Moreover, anthropological studies have been done in an attempt to verify Romani migration from India. While this research is promising, comparative studies to prove a direct relationship between the European Roma and the Indian people groups are lacking. Additionally, sociological research shows some indication of similarities between European Roma and people groups in India; though the similarities are an indicator of Indian origin, they could not stand alone in proving such a theory. Historical studies of the peregrination of the Roma into Europe are based upon the records kept by cities and regional governments. These records are not consistent in tracking the exact movement of the Roma, but give general indicators of their path. The combined evidence of the different disciplines presents India as the place of origin of the Romani people.

The history of the Roma reveals their initial acceptance in the Slovak region in 1242 to their marginalized position in 1989. The pejorative attitudes against the Roma in Europe increased over this time. This chapter will examine the increase of these attitudes until the collapse of communism in 1989.

2.2 The General History of the Romani People

2.2.1 Linguistic Studies

Most romologists today believe that the Roma originally came from India. This belief is based almost entirely on linguistic evidence. This is not a new concept but one that was realized a number of years ago. Recently, there has been renewed effort by a number of scholars to re-examine the evidence and to identify Romani language origins more precisely. However, before looking at the more recent studies, an examination of past studies provides a more balanced foundation.

Anna Jurova, a Slovak romologist, writes of a Hungarian student of theology, Stefan Valyi, who met students from Malabar in Leyden.¹ "The students' language and appearance reminded Valyi of the Roma living near Komarno...so he compared their language and the Romani tongue. He wrote down more than a thousand words that the students used, most of which the Roma later understood."² Angus Fraser also writes of this incident, which was "based on a third-hand report in the *Wiener Anzeigen* in 1776...that Vali [same as Valyi] obtained a glossary of over 1,000 words [from the students of the Island of Malabar, which]...he confirmed, once he came home, that these words were intelligible to the Gypsies of Raab (Gyor, Hungary)."³

Other researchers, independent of Valyi, came to the same conclusion. Johann Christian Rudiger published a report in 1782 showing the relationship between the Multani language of the Northwest region of India and Romani.⁴ Heinrich Grellman, fascinated by Rudiger's study, did his own research that resulted in a book on the Roma, emphasizing their migration, habits, and language (Romani).⁵ Based on the findings, "Grellman fixed on Hindustan as the origin of the Roma, and believed they belonged to the Shudra caste. He considered Gujarati to be the language most closely related to Romani."⁶ Furthermore, Jakob Bryant and William Marsden, British philologists, conducted a comparison study of

¹ Leiden, Holland.

² Anna Jurova, "From Leaving the Homeland to the First Assimilation Measures," in *Cacipen pal o Roma*, 12.

³ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 192.

⁴ Johann Christian Rudiger, *Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien* (The language and origin of the Gypsies from India) (1782), in Rombase, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 26 May 2005). Also found in Cina, "The Roma Language and Its Standardization."

⁵ Romani is the name used to designate the Roma language.

⁶ Cina, "The Roma Language and Its Standardization," 114-5.

English Romani and Turkish Romani with Hindi in 1785.⁷ Their conclusion is that both English Romani and Turkish Romani are related to the Indian dialect.

One of the most important early studies on the Roma was done by August Fridrich Pott, who examined Romani from a scientific and a historical perspective. His conclusions agree with the theory of the Indian origin of Romani. As a result of his work, he was given the name, "the father of Romani linguistics."⁸

Franz von Miklosich was another important researcher of the Romani dialects. He was a philologist of Slavonic languages, but in later years concentrated his studies on the Romani languages and published his conclusions between 1872 and 1881.⁹ He was the first to identify different dialects and subsequently organized Romani into thirteen dialectal categories. This division was based upon "languages, differentiating, among others, between the Greek, the Romanian, and the Hungarian dialects."¹⁰

In 1926, Ralph L. Turner compared Romani, Sanskrit, and various New-Indian languages.¹¹ He concludes that there is a direct connection between the Romani of Europe and the languages of India. He even determines "that there must have existed early relationships of Romani to the Central-Indian group of Indo-Arian languages."¹²

These past studies, showing the connection between Romani and Indian dialects, provide the foundation for the present studies of Romani origins. The

⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸ Cina, "The Roma Language and Its Standardization," 92. August Fridrich Pott published two studies: *Die Zigeuner in Europe und Asien* (The Gypsies in Europe and Asia) (Hale, 1844-45) and *Neueste Beitrage zur Kenniniss der Zigeuner* (New articles of knowledge about the Gypsies) (Leipzig, 1853).

⁹ Two articles written by Franz von Miklosich, *Über die Mundarten und Wanderungen der Zigeuner Europas*, 12 Teile (The dialects and migrations of the Gypsies of Europe, 12 parts) (1872-81), found in *Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Wien* (Memorandums of the philosophical-historical class of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna), and *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Zigeunermundarten*, 4 Teile (Articles on the knowledge of Gypsy dialects, 4 parts) (1874-78), found in *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Wien* (Minutes of the philosophical-historical class of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna).

¹⁰ Dieter W. Halwachs, "Origins and Denomination," in *Rombase*, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 25 June 2008).

¹¹ Ralph L. Turner, "The Position of Romani in Indo-Aryan," *Gypsy Lore Society Monographs*, no.4. (1927), available at <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/resources/general.html>.

¹² Ibid.

linguistic studies of Rombase¹³ researcher Dieter W. Halwachs¹⁴ confirm the Indian origin of European Romani and classify it as Indo-Arian in nature. Stanislav Cina, Slovak Romani philologist, notes that Marcel Courthiade, through his research of European Romani dialects, concluded that the various dialects can be divided into three different groups:

1. The group of mutually understandable Romani dialects spoken by the majority of Roma around the world;
2. The strongly Germanized sinti-manouche dialects, which are difficult for other groups to understand;
3. Roma ethnolects (pidgin versions) of other languages, such as English, Spanish, or Rumanian, which—even though they contain Romani words—are completely incomprehensible to other groups of Roma.¹⁵

Cina, however, classifies the various Romani dialects into eight different categories (see Appendix II); this categorization seems more complete and logical than Courthiade's three groupings. Of Cina's eight categories only three have significance in Slovakia; Servika Romani (A1, A2, A3), Valchika Romani (B1), and Ungrika Romani (B2). In Slovakia, Cina identifies the dialect of the Slovak Roma, Servika Romani, as being spoken by 85 percent of the Roma of Slovakia. He further divides this group into three distinct regional subgroups:

- A1: The East-Slovak dialect—this is very widespread and is similar to almost all other Slovak Romani dialects. It is the basis of standardized Slovak Romani;
- A2: The Central-Slovak dialect—this dialect is characterized by the use of the past continuous tense with frequent use of the *áhi* ending, and other peculiarities;
- A3: The West-Slovak dialect—this can be identified by the use of palatal speech sounds with a hard pronunciation, and the substitution of the "h" sound of speech for the "s." This dialect also uses a lot of specific words that differ significantly from the words used in the East-Slovak dialect.¹⁶

¹³ Rombase is a Romani research center based at the University of Graz in Austria. Their website, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase/>, includes information regarding the sociocultural and sociohistorical situation of the Roma of Europe.

¹⁴ Halwachs, "Origins and Denomination."

¹⁵ Cina, "The Roma Language and Its Standardization," 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

Cina lists the other two significant Romani dialects that are spoken in Slovakia:

B1: The vlachika dialect—from 5 to 10 percent of Slovak Roma speak this dialect, which uses many Rumanian words;

B2: Romani dialects from the south of Slovakia, ungrika Romani—this is a dialect with many Hungarian words.¹⁷

These divisions give a clear picture of the various Romani dialects that are spoken in Slovakia.

Fraser sets forth an interesting table that shows the similarities among Sanskrit, Hindi, Greek Romani, Welsh Romani and Coppersmith Romani (see Appendix III). He comments specifically on the name *Dom* as an indicator of the Roma's Indian origin. He notes that in Sanskrit the word means "man of low caste living by singing and music."¹⁸ In India today this word carries the same basic meaning in the various dialects: in Sindhi, caste of wandering musicians; in Lahnda, menial; in Punjabi, strolling musician; and in West Pahari, low-caste black-skinned fellow.¹⁹ Fraser concludes that "the resemblance between Sanskrit or Hindi and Romani in these examples of basic vocabulary are clear...Each of the three selected Romani dialects [Greek, Welsh, and Coppersmith] contains 500 words or more which are recognizably of Indic origin."²⁰ Fraser chose seventeen words to place in a chart as examples of the similarity between the three dialects. The comparison of these seventeen words with Servika Romani shows that they are virtually the same (see Appendix III).

Based on both historic and present linguistic studies of Romani, most scholars conclude, therefore, that the Romani language finds its roots in India. The continuing debate, however, is over which region of India the Roma came from. Fraser identifies two different schools of thought on this matter. One group argues for "a North-Western or a Dardic origin for Romani."²¹ The other seeks "to show that Romani belonged originally to the Central group (now typified by Hindi), with which it shares its earliest innovations."²²

A third position, posited by Dieter W. Halwachs, seems the most logical because it explains how both regions of India could have influenced the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid., 21.

development of Romani. He asserts, "The Roma antecedents must have lived in the central Indian area, from where they emigrated to the north-west of India,"²³ and from there peregrinated to Europe.²⁴

While there is strong linguistic evidence that the Romani roots are found in India, there is still much to be researched. Fraser points out that "historical linguistics cannot determine the racial and ethnic origin of the early Romani-speakers."²⁵ The discovery of concrete evidence from other disciplines, such as anthropological, sociological, and historical studies, must be examined to reveal the ethnicity of the Roma.²⁶

2.2.2 Anthropological Studies

There is an assumption that if the Roma came from India, their ancestors would still be living in the region from which the Roma migrated. Additionally, the physical development of ancestors in India and those in Europe would reveal similar factors linking them to a common origin. Researchers in anthropology help to examine these assumptions because physical anthropology is "concerned with the comparative study of human evolution, variation, and classification especially through measurement and observation."²⁷ The available anthropological studies on Roma, though, are invalid and unreliable and neither proves nor disproves a relationship between Roma and Indians.

In 1937, Eugene Pittard published a comparative anthropometric²⁸ survey of the Roma.²⁹ His survey was inclusive and pertained particularly to the Balkan

²³ Halwachs, "Origin and Denomination."

²⁴ Halwachs notes in his research that Ralph L. Turner comes to the same conclusion.

²⁵ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 22.

²⁶ This research is not a linguistic study, though some linguistic facts have been used to help in determining the origin of the Romani people. However, the linguistic facts give rise to a question: If the Roma adopted words into their vocabulary from the countries they peregrinated through, why are there Romani groups in Slovakia that speak national languages that are not Slovak, e.g., the *vlachika* dialect, which is based on Rumanian; and the *ungrika* dialect, which is based on Hungarian? A possible answer to this question is that each of the three major Romani groups in Slovakia identify themselves as first belonging to a specific nationality (*servika* as Slovak, *vlachika* as Rumanian, and *ugrika* as Hungarian) and secondly as being Roma. This distinction could be explained by the forced political division of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following World War One. However, there is a need for further research. See Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: enemies, neighbors, friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) for a more detailed discussion.

²⁷ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "anthropology."

²⁸ Anthropometry is the study of human physical measurements and their comparative relationship.

Roma. He measured "four dimensions of the body and limbs, five of the head, five of the face, and ten of the features."³⁰ Pittard compared these with similar measurements of Indian ethnic groups. He concluded, "The data on the many Indian ethnic groups were too sparse or unreliable to allow...any conclusion as to the origin of the Gypsies, and...that the diversity in some of the Gypsy data might indicate a complex origin."³¹ Thus, the early studies using measurement standards such as Pittard's are inexact and statistically wanting.

In 1999, Ivan and Jarmila Bernasovski, published the results of their auxological³² and anthropogenetical³³ study of the Roma of Slovakia. Their research regarding the auxological and anthropogenetical characteristics is informative, but the research does not aid in establishing a link between India and the Roma of Slovakia since it is not comparative. Rather, Bernasovský and Bernasovská conclude there is no link between Roma and Indians because linguistic evidence alone is not sufficient to prove origin. They write:

There is no inherent or necessary link between language and race: there are indeed many well-attested cases of whole ethnic groups switching language through time. So there can be no assurance that groups of people are racially related simply because they speak related languages.³⁴

Unfortunately, Bernasovský and Bernasovská gave no listing of the "many well-attested cases," which would give support to their assumption. Evidence of such a link could possibly be proved if the study done among the Roma in Slovakia were repeated among people groups in India, and the results comparatively analyzed to determine any similarities.

Fraser suggests, "Physical anthropology and population genetics, in their present state of theory and application, are suggestive but not conclusive."³⁵ There is as yet a need for more conclusive scientific research that uses new methods of study, such as the following:

²⁹ Eugene Pittard, *Les Tziganes ou Bohémiens* (The Gypsies of Bohemia) (Geneva, 1932).

³⁰ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 23.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Auxology is the study of human growth and can include the disciplines of medicine, nutrition, genetics, and anthropology.

³³ Anthropogenetics is the study of the origins and development of human beings.

³⁴ Ivan Bernasovský, Jarmila Bernasovská, *Anthropology of Romanies (Gypsies): Auxological and Anthropogenetical Study* (Brno, Czech Republic: NAUMA and Universitas Masarykiana, 1999), 8.

³⁵ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 25.

the study of blood groups—with their precisely understood genetics—has come to provide an alternative means of classification of the living and has to a great extent supplanted direct body observations. More recently this approach has been extended to include other hereditary biochemical characteristics.³⁶

The use of population genetics to gather evidence has been known to help in tracing the migration of man, and most of the data used in this science come from the analysis of blood groups. A comparative DNA study between European Roma and various people groups in India could potentially give more concrete answers.

2.2.3 Sociological Studies

Milena Hübschmannová presents a sociological study done by Rombase at the University of Graz, Austria, on the Roma of Central Europe. Though the study provides important comparative data linking Roma with Indians, it cannot stand alone as definitive proof. In this study, a comparison is made between Romani social practices and social practices of India.

Hübschmannová contends that "many...important signs point to the Indian origin of the Roma: ...the traditional professions...important socio-cultural institutions and unwritten laws and customs, including remnants of specific religious practices."³⁷ She gives sociological comparative examples of the Romani group court, *kris*, and "*panchayat*, the traditional tribal court in Indian villages."³⁸ She also compared some of the traditional Romani customs, such as "endogamy and the prohibition of commensality," which is "typical of traditional Indian society."³⁹ The caste system of India that prohibits intermarriage between different castes is similar to the Romani laws of marriage. Hübschmannová asserts, "It is thus indisputable that Roma come from India."⁴⁰ The sociological conclusions given by Hübschmannová are interesting and show some similarities between Romani customs and that of Indian society. However, they are not enough on their own to prove the Indian origin of the Roma.

³⁶ Ibid., 23.

³⁷ Milena Hübschmannová, "Origin of Roma," Rombase, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 3 May 2008).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

2.2.4 Historical Studies

Not enough evidence has been produced in anthropological studies and sociological studies to prove a connection between Roma and Indians. But when historical studies are combined together with linguistic studies, anthropological studies, and sociological studies an Indian connection seems certain. When the Persians invaded India in the third century C.E., Ardashir, the Shah of Persia (from 224-241 C.E.), led the Persian armies into northern India (present-day Pakistan) and claimed the region as a colony of Persia (modern-day Iran). As a result, many people from India were brought by the conquerors to Persia as "farmworkers, herdsmen, mercenary soldiers and palace guards, musicians, bookkeepers and traders."⁴¹ The Indian people who immigrated to Persia shared a common religion—Hinduism—and a similar language. It would seem logical that the Persians were hesitant to allow their children to marry the dark-skinned Indians. Thus, these immigrants from India would have become a separate and new ethnic group in Persia.

A second invasion of India by Persians took place during the reign of Bahram Gur, Shah of Persia (he reigned from 420-438 C.E.) and resulted in more Indian people being brought to Persia; specifically, musicians and dancers that Kenrick identifies as being ancestors of the Roma who eventually migrated to Europe. He writes of this in great detail quoting from historians of the Persian era.⁴²

Kenrick establishes an interrelationship between these two Persian invasions of India and the subsequent migration of the Roma into Europe:

It was once supposed that the Romanies of Europe belonged to one group in India and moved as a unit westwards. My own belief is that the Indian immigrants from various tribes intermarried and intermixed in Persia forming into a people there, with the name Dom or Rom, and that a large number of them then moved into Europe and their descendants are the Romani Gypsies of today.⁴³

⁴¹ Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*, 14.

⁴² Ibid. There are several stories that Kenrick relates. They are found on pages 18 and 19.

⁴³ Ibid., 9. Kenrick further comments that "they were to call themselves 'Dom,' an Indian word whose original meaning was 'man' though nowadays in some parts of India it refers only to one of the castes. The 'd' was pronounced with the tongue curled up and it later became an 'r' giving the word 'Rom' which is what most Romanies in continental Europe call themselves in their language.", 15.

Kendrick does not explain why the *Dom* migrated into Europe. However, the movement westward of the Roma was helped by other invading countries. The Arabs invaded Persia and brought the Rom to their land in the Middle East. The Arabs called these Indians *Zott*. Because the *Zott* males were skilled as soldiers, the Arabs used them to help defend the Arab empire from the Greeks. But in 855 C.E., the Greeks captured the city of Ainzarba, and as a result, the *Zott* in that city were deported to Greece.⁴⁴

Kenrick points out that the *Zott* eventually emigrated or were sent elsewhere. Those who still remained in the Arab empire eventually "moved north into Armenia and then into Europe, ending up working in the fields in the Balkans and elsewhere";⁴⁵ some of them remained in Persia; and references are also made to several occasions when Arab rulers sent the *Zott* to Antioch.⁴⁶

The *Dom* share the same name as a distinct lower caste group in India. Kenrick suggests that the Dom of the Arab empire and the Dom of India are the same. He also posits that some from this semi-nomadic group migrated from the Middle East into Europe, while maintaining their original identity. Kenrick concludes, "If so, this would mean that all the Romani Gypsies of Europe are descended from one parent stock, as M. J. de Goeje⁴⁷ wrote, and all the other emigrants from India remained in the Middle East."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27-33. According to Kenrick, there are stories of the Indians living and caring for herds of buffalo on the banks of the Tigris River. Apparently the *Zott* became a powerful group who began to rule themselves and the region in which they lived. Caliph Motasem, ruler of the Arabs during this time, sent General Ojeif Ibn-Anbas in 834 CE to subdue the *Zott*. According to the Arab records, the *Zott* were easily defeated. They were moved to the north-east towns of Khaneikin and Ainzarba. These cities were located on the border of the Greek and Arab empires.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35-7. The *Zott* were not the only ethnic group in the Arab empire to come from India. For example, Arab and Persian literature makes reference to a group called the *Sindhi*. These were Indians from the northwestern part of India from the province of Sindh. The literature makes a distinction between the *Zott* and the *Sindhi*, but some of these writers question whether the *Sindhi* are the same group as those known today as the *Sinti*. The *Sinti*, who are found mostly in Germany, are a group distinct from the other Roma of Europe. Furthermore, the *Sinti* language is noticeably dissimilar from the dialect of other Romani groups in Europe, and this dialect seems also to differ from the modern-day *Sindhi* language.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37. Kenrick notes that M. J. de Goeje was instrumental in contributing information regarding the origin of the Roma at the Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen of Amsterdam in 1875. This information can be found in D. Mac Ritchie, *Accounts of the Gypsies of India* (Delhi: New Society, 1976).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 37

Kenrick explains how it is possible today for these distinct groups all to be called by the same name. "The Dom spent some time in Persia and their name became the common word for other peoples of Indian origin to describe themselves, just as the Arabs called them all Zott."⁴⁹ Over time, the *D* in the name Dom was pronounced like an *R*, and thus the name evolved into Rom. Kenrick points out that in Persia, Syria, and Iraq today, there are nomadic peoples of Indian origin who are called *Dummi* or *Deman*.

Kenrick determines the length of time the Roma spent in various regions by the number of similar words that are found in their Romani dialect. Since there are "less than ten words of Arabic origin in the European Romani,"⁵⁰ but there are a number of Armenian words and an even larger number of Persian words found in European Romani, it would indicate that the Roma spent a considerable amount of time in both Persia and Armenia. Based on this, Kenrick suggests that the Indian immigrants in Persia left for Armenia around 750 C.E. and from there migrated into Europe.

There are some indications that the Roma arrived in Constantinople (Istanbul) around the year 1050 C.E. "There are references from 1050 onwards to astrologers, fortune tellers, acrobats, snake charmers, bear trainers and veterinary surgeons"⁵¹ arriving in Constantinople.

Kenrick suggests the following chronological chart for the arrival of the Romani people in Europe. While his assumptions seem plausible, there is no mention of the Slovak region. Brasov in Transylvania, which is located southeast of present-day Slovakia, is the nearest region on the chart. The logical progression is that the Roma would have arrived in Slovakia sometime after 1416. However, there are some apparent discrepancies in the chart, which seemingly bring into question any chronological path by the Roma from East to West. Note that Roma are first identified as being in Kosovo in the year 1348 and then in Bulgaria in 1378, which is east of Kosovo. This discrepancy seems odd if the Roma were migrating westward. Another seeming flaw in the chart is the mention of Roma in Hildesheim, Germany, in 1407 between their appearance in Nauplie, Greece, (1397) and Brasov, Transylvania (1416). It would seem that the path of the Roma into Europe was not linear but circuitous. Kenrick's chart is based on the records

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

of municipal governments who would not necessarily record the first arrival of immigrants into a region, but would record any significant events involving those immigrants. Since historically the Roma are known for their traveling from place to place, it is logical to assume that in their movement west, they might have revisited an area more than once. This would explain the dates and locations on the chart.

1348	Prizren (Kosovo)
1362	Dubrovnik (Croatia)
1373	Corfu (Greek isle off Northwest corner of Greece)
1378	Rila Monastery (Bulgaria)
1382	Zagreb (Croatia)
1384	Modon (Peloponessos, Greece)
1397	Nauplie (Greece)
1407	Hildesheim (Germany)
1416	Brasov (Transylvania)
1501	Lithuania
1505	Scotland
1513	England

Table 2.1 Recorded Year of Arrival of Roma in Europe⁵²

2.3 The History of the Romani People in the Present Slovak Region

This section is based primarily on the logical progression of history. The history of the Roma in the Slovak region can be divided into five parts, based upon those historical events that impacted the Romani people the most: the arrival of the Roma in the Slovak region, the persecution of the Romani people, the Roma in the Habsburg era, the Roma in the Nazi era, and finally the Roma in the communist era.

2.3.1 Arrival (1217)

Emília Horváthová suggests that "the first group of Roma reached Central Europe probably with Hungarian King Andrew II returning from his Jerusalem crusade."⁵³

⁵² Ibid., 48.

⁵³ Horváthová, *Cigáni na Slovensku*, 380.

Andrew II participated in the fifth crusade in the year 1217; thus, the first Roma could have arrived in the Slovak region in 1217 or 1218.⁵⁴ Dalimil, in his chronicle, mentions the presence of Tatar scouts in Bohemia in 1242. Some feel that he may have mistakenly identified the Roma as Tatar scouts.

The first mention of the Roma in Slovakia occurs halfway through the reign of Charles Robert in the year 1322 C.E.⁵⁵ "Spišská Nová Ves Mayor, Ján Kunch, reported that Cigani were seen in the family Mariassy forest surrounding the town."⁵⁶ Also, there is mention of Roma in the region of Szabolcs-Szatmár (eastern Hungary) in 1329, and Mann notes that there are reports of Romani people in the Zemplín region of Slovakia in the years 1377 and 1381.⁵⁷ Fraser adds that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were a number of Rumanian documents that identified the Gypsies as being slaves in the Danubian principalities, which would include the Carpathian mountain regions of present day Slovakia.⁵⁸

The initial arrival of the Roma in the Slovak region at these early dates would seem to contradict Kenrick's chronological chart. However, Kenrick indicated that "some Romanies may have followed a different route to the northwest and into Europe while others went south into the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and across North Africa."⁵⁹ Kenrick's assumption indicates that the Roma arrived in Slovakia at different times and from different directions.

Such an idea also suggests that the Roma, who peregrinated into Europe, did so not as one large group, but in small groups. In 1417, a group of about 300 Roma traveled from Budína to Košice and continued from there through Levice to Bratislava where they split into groups and continued westward. The leader of this group was named King Sindelomus. There were others in the group with titles of

⁵⁴ Dušan Škvarna et al., *Slovak history: chronology and lexicon* (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 2002), 30.

⁵⁵ There was widespread unrest in the Slovak region during the first part of the fourteenth century. A struggle ensued between Charles Robert and Wenceslas, also called Ladislav, for the throne of Hungary. The Bavarian Duke Otto III was also involved in this struggle between Charles Robert and Ladislav. Each was recognized for a period of time as king of the region: Ladislav from 1301 to 1305, Otto from 1305 to 1307, and Charles Robert from 1308 to 1342.

⁵⁶ Arne B. Mann, *Vybrané kapitoly z dejín Rómov* (A chosen chapter from the history of the Roma) (Bratislava: Štátny pedagogický ústav, 1995), 3. Also see Anna Jurová, "From Leaving the Homeland," 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 58.

⁵⁹ Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*, 46.

nobility as well—Duke Panuel, Duke Michal and Duke Ondrej.⁶⁰ Many of these nomadic Romani groups had leaders with noble titles who somehow obtained letters of safe passage that identified them as penitents, thus allowing them to enter villages and towns where the townspeople were obligated to take care of them.⁶¹

Duke Ladisláv was one such leader, although whether the title of Duke was legitimate is not known. However, Duke Ladisláv received from Emperor Žigmund of Luxemburg⁶² a letter of safe passage. This letter was issued by the Emperor at Spišský Castle in Slovakia on 17 April 1423.⁶³ This incident is recorded in the writings of a priest of Ratisbon (Regensburg) in Bavaria:

[There]...came in person into our presence our faithful Ladislaus *waynoda Ciganorum* [voivode of the Gypsies] with others pertaining to him, who presented their very humble supplications to us, here in Zips in our presence....In consequence we, being persuaded by their supplication, have thought [it] proper to grant them this privilege: each time that they said voivode Ladislaus and his people shall come into our said possessions, be it free cities or fortified towns, from that time we strictly entrust and order to your present fidelities that you may favour and keep without any hindrance or trouble the said voivode Ladislaus and the Cigani who are subject to him; and by all means preserve them from any impediments and vexations. If any variance or trouble should occur among themselves, then neither you nor any other of you, but the same voivode Ladislaus, should have the power of judging and absolving.⁶⁴

Most of the Roma lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place profiting from the political unrest in Europe, as their labor skills were needed by different noblemen vying for property and position. Their skills as blacksmiths were especially in demand; consequently, they made and repaired weapons that were used in the various armed conflicts. Whether they took sides in these conflicts is not known. It would appear that they simply moved wherever they could best utilize their talents and worked for whoever would compensate them

⁶⁰ Mann, *Vybrané kapitoly*, 3.

⁶¹ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 71ff.

⁶² Žigmund or Sigismund ruled over the Slovakia region from 1387 to 1437.

⁶³ Fraser gives the date as 23 April 1423 in *The Gypsies*, 75. Mann gives the date as 17 April 1423 in *Vybrané kapitoly*, 3.

⁶⁴ Presbyter Ratisbonensis Andreas, "Diarium Sexennale," trans. from the Latin in A.F. Oefelius, *Rerum boicarum scriptores*, Augsburg, 1763, vol. 1, 21; quoted in Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 75.

well. However, there were some Roma who were sedentary. One such group lived in the Spiš region and was employed by the Spiš castle nobility.

The Roma not only worked as blacksmiths and musicians, but in the nineteenth century "as locksmiths, bell-founders, bricklayers, lime burners; and they made kettles, troughs, baskets, bricks as well as producing rope and braid."⁶⁵ However, they were also known as beggars, asking for money for their daily needs.

The exact date the Roma arrived in Slovakia is unclear, as is a terminus of their peregrination. If the Roma had arrived as one large group, it would be easier to determine, but because they entered the region in small bands, it is impossible to know for certain. None of the sources researched even suggest a terminus for the Romani migration into Europe.

2.3.2 Persecution (1427)

When the Roma first arrived in the Slovak region, they were accepted by the non-Roma of Europe as a nomadic people who often offered services that were useful and needed. While many Roma claimed they were penitents, at the same time they were telling fortunes, reading palms and performing magic tricks in order to achieve more lucrative benefits from the general population. This deceptive lifestyle, while good for the Roma, became a growing burden to many in Europe. Mann notes that attitudes in Europe towards the Roma began to change with "the excommunication from the church of some Roma by the Archbishop of Paris in 1427 for reasons of infringing on Christian morality."⁶⁶ Though this action took place far from the Slovak region, it increasingly influenced the church leaders of Europe, including those in the Slovak region, to treat the Roma disdainfully from that time on.

While this act of excommunication revealed a negative attitude toward the Roma that would grow in the centuries to follow, it was not until the reign of Emperor Maximilian I that "the Imperial Diet...issued three edicts (in 1497, 1498 and 1500) in which Gypsies were accused of espionage and singled out for expulsion."⁶⁷ Since the Slovak region was at that time part of the Habsburg Empire, which was under Maximilian's rule, these edicts would have directly

⁶⁵ Arne B. Mann, *Neznámi Rómovia: Zo života a kultúry Cigánov—Rómov na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Ister Science Press, 1992), 71.

⁶⁶ Mann, *Vybrané kapitoly*, 4.

⁶⁷ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 85.

affected the Roma living in Slovakia. "Roma who did not leave the region would be caned, if they were found a second time in the same area their bodies would be crippled....If they were found in the region a third time, they would be put to death by hanging, being burnt at the stake or drowning."⁶⁸

If someone killed a Roma, local officials simply ignored it. "Taking the life of a Gypsy...[was] not an act against the policy of the state."⁶⁹ Mann states that this attitude led to "the mass slaughter of Roma in many regions."⁷⁰ This maltreatment of the Roma continued into the middle of the eighteenth century.

Though the Roma were being killed in many places, in other places, they were needed. During this time there were many battles being fought against invading armies and the Roma were not excluded. Historical evidence reveals their participation in the wars and in some cases of their receiving special recognition for their contribution. The Slovaks were fighting against the invading Hussites. Between 1420 and 1431, Emperor Žigmund and his German estates, of which the Slovak region was one, fought against the radical Hussite wing called Taborites or "Orphans." The Roma helped the Emperor along with the native Slovaks in their fight against the Taborites.⁷¹

Matej Korvín, of the Polish house of Jagelov, and Baron Ján Zápoľský, of Transylvania, both used the Roma in military campaigns against the invading Turks. As a result, "the Roma were awarded several protective documents for their services to the town of Sibiu in 1476. Matej Korvín awarded several Roma with a similar document in 1487, also for their participation in the wars."⁷²

Tomáš Polgár was the leader of a group of 25 Romani blacksmiths who received documents of protection from Vladislav Jagelovsky.⁷³ These were issued in 1492 as well as 1496. It is also recorded that this same group of blacksmiths served the bishop of Pécs by manufacturing various military weapons.

When King Louis II was killed in a battle against the Turks near Mohács, a struggle between Transylvanian Baron Ján Zápoľský and Ferdinand I began. Each claimed the Hungarian throne. Zápoľský was crowned king in

⁶⁸ Mann, *Vybrané kapitoly*, 4-5.

⁶⁹ Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 44; quoted in., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, 11-12.

⁷⁰ Mann, *Vybrané kapitoly*, 5

⁷¹ Škvarna, *Slovak history*, 45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷³ This is Vladislav II Jagelovsky (Jagiello), who became king of Hungary on 15 July 1490.

Székesfehérvár on 10 November 1526, and the next day was crowned king by Štefan Podmanický, bishop of Nitra. On 17 December 1526, Ferdinand Habsburg was elected king of Hungary by the Hungarian Diet in Bratislava. A little over a year later in January 1528, the Ottoman sultan Suleyman I recognized Zápoľský as the king of Hungary. This resulted in the two countries joining together in an alliance against Ferdinand even though Zápoľský had fought against the Turks when they first invaded Hungary following the death of Žigmund. There were several cities in eastern Slovakia that were opposed to Zápoľský's alliance with the Sultan. As a result, he took revenge against these cities using the Roma as a part of his army. In 1538, Zápoľský "issued documents ensuring support and respect for the ancient freedoms of the Roma."⁷⁴ In addition, he established noble Roma as dukes whose role was to collect taxes.

Following the sixteenth century, the place which the Roma occupied in society began to change. Up to this time they had been for the most part useful to the European community. But during the seventeenth century, the tolerance in Eastern Europe for the Roma began to wane. "After the Thirty Years' War (1618—1648), Europe was full of wandering, plundering groups...whom the Roma often joined....As a result, the Roma were banished from a number of towns and districts."⁷⁵ These pejorative attitudes remained unchecked until the rise of the Habsburgs.

2.3.3 Habsburg Era (1740—1918)

When Emperor Frances I and Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780) came into power, they sought to bring reform to many areas of their kingdom. One specific area was their attempt to stop the persecution of the Roma through regulatory reforms. "Empress Maria Theresa...adopted policies designed to force the Gypsies to assimilate into Hungarian society."⁷⁶ The first of the regulations restricted the Roma from living a nomadic life, and included with this regulation was a law forbidding the Roma to own or trade horses. They were told to farm the land like everyone else or to find an acceptable craft and, of course, to pay taxes. Another part of this regulation insisted that they dress like the general population. In addition, their children were to be removed from their homes and raised by peasant families, and all school-age children were to attend school. In addition,

⁷⁴ Jurova, "From Leaving the Homeland," 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ David Crowe, "The Gypsies of Hungary," in *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, 117.

Roma were forbidden to use their own language,⁷⁷ and a Rom was not allowed to marry another Rom. They were to marry members of the majority population and in the process to accept the Christian faith.

The goal was to make them a useful and productive part of society. A decree dated 13 November 1761, called for the Roma no longer to call themselves Gypsies but "new peasants," "new Hungarians," or "new citizens." The Romani office of *vajda*⁷⁸ was eliminated. All Roma would come under the jurisdiction of the local authorities. "Local authorities were instructed to supervise the settlement of wandering Gypsies and to build houses for them in the villages."⁷⁹ They were to visit the Roma weekly to make sure that they were abiding by the new regulations. The goal was to bring about a full assimilation of the Roma into society.

Emperor Jozef II, Frances I and Maria Theresa's oldest son, continued these policies when he took the throne in 1780. However, there was a lapse in the policies following his death in 1790. As a result, the Roma in the Czech region went back to their wagons and began roaming as they did before the Habsburg restrictions. They resisted the idea of assimilation and refused to give up their cultural identity. As a result, the Czech authorities tried to force the banishment of the Roma by making them register with local regional authorities who would then lead them to the nearest border telling them never to return.⁸⁰ "In Slovakia, however, most Gypsies settled on the outskirts of villages. The men worked as farm workers, smiths, or musicians, and the women as servants in households."⁸¹ It seems that the Roma found at least a measure of acceptance from the Slovaks, who were in need of the various skills the Roma possessed.⁸²

Following World War I (1918), the Habsburg Empire ceased and Czechoslovakia came into existence. As the nation entered into the industrial revolution, the skills of the Roma became obsolete. This caused some of them to turn to begging or stealing in order to provide for their families.⁸³ In 1921, the

⁷⁷ Josef Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," in *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, 95.

⁷⁸ Also known as *vlivode* or *voivode*. This was a title given to the head of the Roma group/family. If a Roma were caught doing something wrong, they were not tried and punished through the normal court system but through the *vajda*.

⁷⁹ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 94.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Roma "were recognized as a separate nationality"⁸⁴ by the fledgling government, but this did not terminate the problems with the Roma, who continued to beg and steal. Though they were threatened with jail for such behavior, the Roma viewed time in jail without fear, possibly because the Roma did not have to be concerned about shelter or food when incarcerated. The end result was rising tensions between the Roma and the non-Roma. One situation that took place in western Slovakia in 1928 demonstrates this conflict. "There was a pogrom...that resulted in the death of six Gypsies, including two young children—a reprisal for pilfering crops from fields."⁸⁵ Thus the enmity between the non-Roma and the Roma continued and even intensified when the fascist regime of Adolf Hitler came into power in Czechoslovakia.

2.3.4 Nazi Era (1938—1945)

Hitler and the Nazi war machine moved into Prague in 1938, and as a result Czechoslovakia became a puppet state of Germany. Then on 14 March 1939, Father Jozef Tiso⁸⁶ met with Hitler in Berlin, suggesting the separation of the Slovak Republic from the Czech Republic, along with promised allegiance to Nazi Germany. This plan proved to be acceptable to Hitler. Subsequent to that meeting, Hitler offered limited independence to the Slovak Provincial Assembly. This overture was accepted, and Tiso became the president of the newly formed Slovak Republic. Thus "Slovakia became an 'independent' state for the first time and Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map of Europe."⁸⁷ The concept of an independent state is misleading, however, for though Slovakia was declared a separate nation, it was not free to determine its own governmental policies. Instead, its political and social destinies were planned and dictated by Hitler's regime in Berlin.

The Nazi's plan, called the "Final Solution", was to exterminate all of the Roma and all the Jews of Europe. Dr. Johannes Behrendt, of the German Office of Racial Hygiene, wrote, "All Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Jozef Tiso (October 13, 1887–April 18, 1947) was a Roman Catholic priest who became a deputy of the Czechoslovak parliament, a member of the Czechoslovak government, and finally the President of Independent Slovak Republic from 1939-1945, aligned with Nazi Germany. After the end of World War II, Tiso was executed by Czechoslovak authorities.

⁸⁷ Robin H. E. Shepherd, *Czechoslovakia: The Velvet Revolution*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 128.

only solution is elimination. The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population."⁸⁸ Behrendt openly expressed what many all over Europe already believed to be occurring.

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 600,000 of Europe's Roma perished at the hands of the Nazis and their followers. Statistically this represented between 70 and 80 percent of the Romani population of Europe. The Nazis destruction was relentless. "Of the 8,000 Gypsies in Bohemia and Moravia, only about 600 survived."⁸⁹ In the Slovak region only an estimated 1,000 Roma were exterminated. They, however, did suffer "severe discrimination: excluded from restaurants, cinemas, parks, and public transportation, or forced to move their shanties further away from towns and villages or to build new, isolated settlements."⁹⁰ As a result, at the end of World War II, approximately 100,000 Roma remained in the Slovak region.

During the war many Germans were moved into the Czech area by the Nazi government. However, at the end of the war most of those German settlers were forced to leave the Czech Republic and to return to Germany. As a consequence, many Roma from Slovakia resettled in the areas where the Germans once had lived, hoping to find better living conditions and jobs. This, however, only led to increased tension between the Czechs and the Roma. Furthermore, this tension contributed to many of the Roma considering Slovakia as their home but the Czech Republic as their place of employment. This led to many Roma traveling back and forth on a weekly basis between the Czech Republic where they were employed and Slovakia, where their home was.⁹¹

The majority of residents in Slovakia today do not speak favorably of the Nazi regime, but there are some who suggest that Hitler failed to finish the one positive thing he began, the extermination of all Roma.⁹² The Nazi ideology encouraged pejorative attitudes toward the Roma and thus heightened the problem between the Roma and the non-Roma.

⁸⁸ Johannes Behrendt, "Die Wahrheit Uber Die Zigeuner," (The truth about the Gypsies) NS partei Korrespondenz (Nazi party correspondence) 10 March 1939, iii; quoted in Ian Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighboring Lands: A Chronology Leading to the Holocaust and Beyond," in *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, 18.

⁸⁹ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 266.

⁹⁰ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 96.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² The author talked to several people from villages surrounding Banská Bystrica during August 2006 who requested anonymity.

2.3.5 Communist Era (1945—1989)

In 1945, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were united once again into the nation of Czechoslovakia. When the communists took over in 1948, there was no alteration in the Romani status. In fact, the communist leaders viewed the Romani lifestyle as being contrary to their "new socialist order." Thus, the new taskmasters proceeded to try and eliminate the Romani way of life. "The way to do that, the policy makers believed, was to disperse the Gypsies, destroy their social life, and to assimilate them in the general population....The integration of Gypsies was in their own best interest."⁹³

In October 1958, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia set out to eliminate the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma. The new law required that all nomadic people must stop wandering, settle in one place, and become part of the local community. According to the officials, Law 74 was not directed only at the Roma, but was designed for all those who did not live a stationary lifestyle. Obviously, forced assimilation was the goal.

An immediate problem with the new policy, however, was housing for the now non-nomadic Roma. As a consequence, "Some continued to live in their own carts, which were now without wheels, while others were moved by well-intentioned public officials into new, modern apartments."⁹⁴ As might be expected, the Roma did not like their new living arrangement. They attempted, therefore, to keep their old customs of living by gathering each evening around a campfire to sing their traditional songs, while others continued to move between their homes in Slovakia and their place of work in the Czech Republic.

Not only did the government officials attempt to stop the Roma from wandering, they also sought to eliminate the exclusive Romani settlements. Most of these were simply shanties without electricity or water services. The standard of living in these settlements was low. The settlements were, in fact, a breeding ground for disease, and the Roma's living conditions made personal hygiene next to impossible. Many of the Roma who worked in the Czech Republic would come to their settlements in eastern Slovakia and build new homes, also without water or electricity. In general the Roma refused to acquire building permits and soon the new homes were as hazardous as their previous shanties.

⁹³ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 97.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

The communist government set a goal that by 1970 all Romani settlements in eastern Slovakia would be eliminated and the Roma acculturated into Slovak society. It seems that they were not realistic or not truthful in reporting on the progress of their Romani resettlement program. For example, in 1964, Emília Horváthová reports:

According to accurately timed harmonograms [agendas or schedules] gipsy settlements are being gradually liquidated (as a matter of fact, most of them have been liquidated up to now) by allocating building sites or flats to gipsies in communities where they are permanently employed in some work. By the dislocation of gipsy families among the other inhabitants it is aimed to achieve their accelerated acculturation.⁹⁵

By 1965, the communist government realized that its goal of assimilation was not being met, so government officials formed the National Council for Questions of the Gypsy Population. The responsibility of this new department was to make sure that all the Roma had jobs, to eliminate all Romani settlements, and to urge the settlement inhabitants to resettle in government housing. Part of the plan was to relocate the 1,266 large Romani settlements in Slovakia into small villages and towns in the Czech Republic.

Under this plan the Roma were classified into three different groups. The first group was those who were considered "one step away from full assimilation."⁹⁶ These were mainly Roma who no longer lived in areas where there was a high concentration of Roma. The second group consisted of those who had regular jobs and whose children attended school. The third group was made up of those whose children did not attend school and who rarely worked. This third group could be characterized as the poorest of the poor. The process of classifying these Roma was determined in an arbitrary way by government officials, and in most cases, the Roma had no perception as to how they were classified, or often whether or not they had been classified at all.

The result of this planned assimilation was a disaster. Czech local authorities refused to let the Roma move into their regions on the grounds that there were no accommodations available for them. In fact, "fewer than 500 Gypsy families were transferred to Czech districts in the first three years of the

⁹⁵ Horváthová, *Cigáni na Slovensku*, 385-6.

⁹⁶ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 100.

program."⁹⁷ Statistics from 1967 showed little change in the status of the Roma with 10,589 families living in 8,587 shanties.⁹⁸ Three years later, in 1970, over 70,000 Roma still lived in their settlements in shanties, and their living conditions had not improved. "It was reported that 'each adequate well and toilet had to serve over two hundred Gypsies,' and that the lack of basic amenities was reflected in the high rate of infant mortality and tuberculosis, which were 'more than double the national average.'"⁹⁹ The government finally had to admit that their program was a failure.

The difficulty of acculturating the Roma into society can be attested to by many Slovaks. For example, Martina Seleckova remembered her family moving into a new apartment complex that was half non-Roma and half Roma.¹⁰⁰ This new modern apartment complex was Lunik Devät' located in Košice. She recalled being physically accosted many times by Romani children as she came home from school. She also remembered that the Roma would burn anything they could get their hands on, including the cupboards in the new kitchens. Soon the housing project was destroyed. According to Seleckova, one of the happiest days of her young life was when her family was allowed to move to another apartment complex where there were no Roma.

During the spring of 1968, life drastically changed in Czechoslovakia. Under the leadership of a Slovak, Alexander Dubček, and a World War II hero, General Ludvik, radical changes took place. They began an "action program" that allowed democratic and liberal ideas to flourish. Freedom of speech and of the press, along with other extreme changes regarding religion and economics, took place. Non-communist parties were given a greater freedom to participate in the functions of the government.

Some educated Roma took advantage of this unexpected opportunity. Though few, these educated Roma began to write about the plight of the Romani people and the policies that existed, all of which were aimed at liquidating the Roma. They demanded that the Roma be officially recognized as a nationality and that they be given the same rights and privileges as the other minority groups: e.g., Hungarians, Poles, and Ukrainians, who had been recognized in the 1960

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁰ Martina Selecková, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 3 December 2001.

Constitution. "The most articulate defender of the Gypsies' right to their identity was a sociologist, Milena Hübschmannová."¹⁰¹

The media, having found new freedom, consequently began to articulate that the prejudicial treatment of the Roma had to be terminated. In January 1968, the new government allowed the formation of the Union of Gypsy-Romanies. There were two sections to this Union, one in the Czech Republic and one in Slovakia. By the first national conference, which met in 1969, over 5,000 people had joined the Union. They began to publish their own magazine and promoted cultural activities such as Romani festivals, where music and dance of the Romani culture was presented. Miroslav Holomek was president of this organization and promoted the concept of separate Romani nationality.

On 20 August 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, took Dubček and other reformers into custody, and removed them from the country. By 1973, the Union of Gypsy-Romanies no longer existed. The new government, under the leadership of Gustav Husák, said that the Union had failed to fulfill its intended integrative purpose. The government once again began the policy of trying to assimilate the Roma into the general society.

From 1972 to 1981, around 4,000 shanties in Slovakia were destroyed by the government. This meant that over 4,800 families had to be relocated. But by 1983, 400 Romani settlements still existed in Slovakia. It was estimated that these settlements represented 3,018 shanties and around 21,622 people, or over 10 percent of the Romani population. The government plan was to move most of these Roma from the Slovak region to the Czech region. However, the local Czech authorities opposed the relocation of Roma into their regions because of their previous experiences.¹⁰²

Between 1981 and 1984, Romani representatives Samuel Gergel, Dezider Oláh, and Tibor Baláž submitted several requests to President Husák; Antonín Jindra, the chairman of the Federal Assembly; and Jindřich Poledník, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, asking that the Roma receive

¹⁰¹ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 101. Hübschmannová opposed the position that Jaroslav Sus stated in his book, *The Gypsy Question*, of complete assimilation of the Roma as the only solution to the Romani problem. According to Sus, the Romani heritage was "not worthy of preservation."

¹⁰² Ibid.,103.

minority status. They cited specific resolutions of the United Nations (UN)¹⁰³ and asked that the Czechoslovak government recognize the UN decisions. But this bold effort was unsuccessful.

In the 1980s, the World Romani Congress, which met in Geneva, encouraged the Czechoslovak government to give the Romani people minority status. In the 21 June 1986 edition of the communist daily, *Rudé právo*, the request was rejected and the paper "condemned the international organization and others in the West for the charge that Gypsies were being discriminated against in Czechoslovakia."¹⁰⁴ Again, it was a decision that rejected the obvious problems of a government that was unwilling and, in the final analysis, unable to admit its own failure in dealing with the Romani people.

The history of the Romani people in the Slovak region up to the time of the fall of communism (1989) has shown an undercurrent of prejudicial attitudes that prevailed from generation to generation. Attempts by the Habsburgs to assimilate the Roma into the local culture failed as did Hitler's plan of ethnic cleansing. This was followed by the communist program of integrating the Roma into the Marxist ideology, which also failed. The place in society that the Roma occupied on the eve of the communist collapse simply mirrored their position during previous regime changes. They continued to be at the bottom of the social stratum of society.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to an understanding of the historical origin and historical position that the Roma have occupied in the Slovak region since their arrival. Linguistic studies have been the most helpful in giving insight regarding Romani origins. The evidence uncovered by linguistic studies is significant, suggesting that the Roma peregrinated from central India to the northwest part of India and then west through Persia and into Europe. As they moved westward, they picked up bits and pieces of the language of each country. The linguistic evidence also implies that not all Roma took the same route to Europe.

While the linguistic evidence is compelling, it would be more convincing if other disciplines supported these studies. Ivan and Jarmila Bernasovski's

¹⁰³ In particular, they noted the UN resolution of 26 August 1977 in which the Roma nationality was recognized.

¹⁰⁴ Kalvoda, "The Gypsies of Czechoslovakia," 103.

anthropological (auxological and anthropogenetical) study of the Roma of Slovakia is an effort to supply such support, but this study lacks the comparative research with the people groups of India. Such a comparison could either confirm the linguistic studies or perhaps suggest other possibilities.

Milena Hübschmannová proposes that sociologically there are many other indicators of Indian origin. She cites the similarities in professions, customs, and religious tendencies as proof of origin. She concludes that when sociological factors are added to the linguistic evidence, there is no doubt that the Roma came from India. Angus Fraser disagrees with Hübschmannová, observing that to be emphatically conclusive in stating Indian origin, there is a need for more thorough research using other disciplines.

Historical studies also support the theory of an Indian origin. Donald Kenrick's research corroborates the theory that the Roma originally migrated westward from India into Europe. Kendrick's tracing of the path taken by the Romani migration as indicated in historical records in turn reinforces the linguistic evidence. Likewise, the historical records of the Slovak regional municipalities are consistent with his conclusions. The date of the Romani arrival is thought to be 1217 or 1218 C.E. This date coincides with the arrival of Andrew II, who is thought to have brought some Roma with him on his return from the fifth crusade. By contrast, the supposition that the Roma migrated in mass is not supported by romologists. All indications are that the Roma traveled in small groups, with 300 being the largest number mentioned in the Slovak region.

A major problem in tracing the migration of the Roma is establishing a date of their peregrination terminus. Because of the non-sedentary lifestyle of the Roma, it is difficult to determine a precise date when Roma stopped coming from the east. City and regional documents that record the arrival of the Roma do not record whether they were coming into the European region for the first time.

Furthermore, after the Roma's arrival, it did not take long for the Roma to wear out their welcome in the European communities. The first indication of persecution was recorded by the archbishop of Paris in 1427. While this was far from the Slovak region, the feelings expressed in Paris were mirrored across Europe. Pejorative attitudes increased in the years that followed. But it was not until the Habsburg Era (1740—1918) that the governmental powers sought to curb these feelings. For the most part the actions taken by those in power were decidedly discriminating. While the desire to terminate the persecution of the

Roma was genuine, the methods used did not take into consideration the Romani culture or their racial heritage. They were often expected to conform and blend into the culture of the majority. Unfortunately, while the rulers' intentions were usually honorable, the results achieved were not. It is certain that the efforts of the Habsburgs did not decrease the prejudicial attitudes of the regional population.

In much the same way, when Hitler's political policies suggested the annihilation of the Roma along with the Jews, many people in the Slovak region agreed. While some were thankful that the Nazi regime was finally defeated, others lamented that the regime did not succeed in exterminating all of the Roma. It is evident, then, that the Nazi philosophy did nothing to alter the local prejudices toward the Roma; instead, the pejorative attitudes were magnified and increased.

In like manner, the communist's approach to the Romani situation in the Slovak region was to force them to assimilate into the communist ideology. But the Roma resisted the thought of becoming comrades. In fact, every attempt by the communist government of Czechoslovakia to make the Romani part of the general society failed. Thus when the communist regime fell at the end of 1989, an immense, unresolved Romani problem was left in its wake. In spite of the Marxist philosophical claim that communism would rid society of all social classes, the ideology failed to accomplish the task.

3 DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1989

3.1 Introduction

The question of what position the Roma occupy in Slovak society—politically, socioeconomically, and culturally—since the fall of communism is considered in this chapter. An examination of the political context reveals the public's reluctance to include the Roma in the political process. The socioeconomic role of the Roma in the areas of housing, education, employment, and healthcare reveals how they have been marginalized. Romani cultural characteristics also reveal variances between the Slovak culture and the Romani culture that contribute to the pejorative attitudes between the two ethnic groups.

A framework must be created to analyze the position of the Roma in Slovak society. In this framework, there are three distinct ways to deal with the ethnic minorities within a country such as Slovakia: ethnic exclusion, ethnic assimilation, and ethnic inclusion.¹ Exclusion and assimilation of the Roma in Slovakia have historically been determined by ruling governments and the native population while, until recently, inclusion has not been considered as a viable option. The concepts of ethnic exclusion, ethnic assimilation, and ethnic inclusion will be examined and applied to the Romani situation in Slovakia.

3.2 Political Context

During 1989, many changes occurred in Eastern Europe, culminating in the collapse of communism, with each nation following its own individual course of change. In Czechoslovakia the demise was triggered by a student march that took place on 17 November 1989 in Prague. The police attacked the marchers near Václavské náměstí (Wenceslas Square). Václav Havel and the *Občanské fórum* (Civic Forum),² which he led, organized a national strike on the twenty-seventh

¹ These concepts of dealing with ethnic minorities are suggested in the following studies: Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1966); Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996); and Katarína Bezáčková and Jarmila Lajčáková, "Multiculturalism and Inclusion as Solutions to the Roma Issue," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*.

² *Verejnost' proti násiliu* (Public Against Violence) was the counterpart of the Civic Forum in Bratislava.

that effectively shut the country down. By the end of January 1990, the Civic Forum had gained control of the Federal Assembly, and communist rule in Czechoslovakia ceased.³

3.2.1 Czechoslovakia (1989—1992)

According to John Bradley, many of the ethnic people groups in Czechoslovakia formed organizations that joined the Civic Forum in opposing the communist government.⁴ The *Romská občanská iniciativa* (Romani Civic Initiative, ROI) led by Emil Sčuka and Ján Rušenko was the first Romani organization to be formed in Czechoslovakia. In the latter part of November 1989, Sčuka and Rušenko joined the Civic Forum and participated in the discussions that took place in Prague's Magic Lantern Theater.⁵

The formative years of the new government were expected to be the optimum time to address the prejudicial issues that directly affected the Roma. However, the plethora of problems faced by the new Czechoslovak democratic government, combined with the inability of Romani activists to unite, resulted in Romani issues being trivialized. Margaret Brearley points out that under communism "intolerance of Roma had been held in check by strong centralized authority and by the institutions of a police state."⁶ After the collapse, though, these restraints no longer existed, and the non-Roma, frustrated with their own inability to deal with the changes in their society and the move towards capitalism, took their frustrations out on the Roma.⁷

Nationalism between the Czechs and Slovaks escalated over a number of issues, central of which was the country's inability to adopt a new constitution. Lonnie Johnson points out that "in constitutional debates...Czech condescension and the agitation of Slovak separatists, would present a formidable challenge to

³ For more detailed information regarding the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia see John F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Bernard Wheaton, *The Velvet Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1988-1991* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992); Steven Saxonberg, *The Fall: A Comparative Study of the End of Communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001).

⁴ Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 87.

⁵ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 206.

⁶ Margaret Brearley, "The Persecution of Gypsies in Europe," *American Behavioral Scientist* 45, no. 4 (2001): 591, <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/45/4/588> (accessed 26 May 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 591-2.

Czechoslovak unity."⁸ This wave of nationalism had an alarming effect on ethnic groups within Czechoslovakia. Wheaton states:

One further complication of the national problem is the difficulty associated with race, which is closely linked in the public mind with criminality. An overt racism is directed particularly against Gypsies, who are held responsible for the crime wave. There have been racially inspired attacks on Gypsies recently arrived from Slovakia in Prague, Plzeň, and in the industrial towns in the north. In some cases, long-distance truck drivers mistaken for Gypsies have been beaten up and killed. Other groups are not excluded, however. For instance, the slogans at the Slovak nationalist demonstration in Bratislava were conspicuously anti-Semitic as well as anti-Prague.⁹

As nationalistic fervor grew in Slovakia, "racist rhetoric on the part of some separatists only sharpened fears of growing ethnic intolerance on the part of the Slovak majority and seemed to spur pro-federation sentiments in minority communities."¹⁰

Tensions were very high in the face of these nationalistic sentiments. Members of the Helsinki Commission, in a visit to Bratislava, reported seeing anti-Czech, anti-Semitic, anti-Hungarian, and anti-Romani graffiti. The graffiti was not limited to Bratislava; it could be found in a number of other cities as well. Some of the messages said, "Czechs, communists, Gypsies, Hungarians—to the gas!" or "Slovakia for the Slovaks!"¹¹

Nationalistic sentiments finally culminated on 29 October 1992 when Václav Klaus (Czech Prime Minister) and Vladimír Mečiar (Slovak Prime Minister) signed an agreement that outlined the split and the future relations of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. A month later, on 25 November, the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly in Prague voted to accept the Klaus—Mečiar agreement. The separation of the two republics took place on 31 December 1992.

⁸ Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: enemies, neighbors, friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 142.

⁹ Wheaton, *The Velvet Revolution*, 171.

¹⁰ U. S. Congress Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Human Rights and Democratization in Slovakia*, report prepared by the staff of the commission on security and cooperation in Europe, 103d Cong., 2d sess., 1993, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

3.2.2 Slovakia, A New Nation (1993—)

Mečiar Era

The Mečiar rule in Slovakia lasted until 1998 and, in many ways, was a step back from democracy and freedom. When Mečiar first came to power, he portrayed Czech domination as the source of all Slovak problems. Once independence came and he began to govern, his focus changed to the Hungarians and the Roma. The concept of minority rights was simply not part of his government. At times, he gave support to some minority organizations, but only for his political advantage. Most often this support came as giving money to ensure a segment of the ethnic vote. For example, ROI supported Mečiar in return for financial support.¹²

When Mečiar became prime minister in 1992, he vetoed a special Romani housing bill that his predecessor Ján Čarnogursky had prepared. This rejection indicated his plan to deal with ethnic minorities during his tenure. While all of the surrounding countries increased state funding for the Roma, only Slovakia under the Mečiar regime annually reduced its funding from the years 1993 to 1997.

Mečiar's opinion of the Roma was publicly announced in September 1993 when he declared, "The Roma constituted a 'socially un-adaptable population' with a high birth rate of 'children who are poorly adaptable mentally, poorly adaptable socially, children with serious health disorders, children, simply, who are a great burden on this society.'"¹³ His cabinet members maintained that these comments were simply a reflection of the majority of the Slovaks.

Mečiar was not the only government official who made questionable comments about the Roma. Lubomír Javorský, Mečiar's health minister, made the following comment in October 1995: "The government will do everything to assure that more white children than Roma children are born."¹⁴ Another derogatory statement, retold by Barany, was made by Ján Slota, head of the Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party, SNS) which was part of Mečiar's coalition government: "When in August 1995 Mário Goral , a young Rom, died an agonizing death after being set on fire by skinheads,...Slota... allegedly dismissed the crime as a reaction to 'high Gypsy crime rates.'"¹⁵

¹² Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 228.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁴ Minton F. Goldman, *Slovakia Since Independence* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1999), 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The Mečiar government had no department or commission to deal with the Romani issue. When a commissioner for Citizens Requiring Special Assistance was appointed, "Roma activists protested both the institution's name and the fact that [Mečiar] appointed an ethnic Slovak, Branislav Baláž, rather than a Rom."¹⁶ It seemed that the appointment was not substantive, but for appearances only. Ingrid Baumannová, in an interview with Barany stated, "Essentially nothing of substance was done for or about the Roma during Mečiar's reign."¹⁷

In stark contrast to this, Milan Kováč, Slovakia's president from 1993 to 1998, publicly criticized the prime minister's Romani policies even though he came to office because of Mečiar's coalition parliament majority. Romani leaders looked to Kováč as "the only constitutional official who has understanding for our problems and reacts to our letters."¹⁸ Unfortunately for the Roma, in Slovakia's parliamentary system the president has little influence when it comes to establishing governmental policies, and though Kováč understood the Roma's problems, he could do little to alleviate them.

To continue his tenure, Mečiar tried everything short of rigging the election in 1998, but to no avail. He lost the election and his dominance in the Slovak government, although, to a certain extent, not his influence. He has remained a thorn in the side of succeeding Slovak governments, but his popularity seems to be fading as senior citizens, who make up the majority of his support base, are dying and the newer, younger voters are abandoning the past and looking toward the future.

Post Mečiar Era

Mikuláš Dzurinda became prime minister following Mečiar after the national elections of September 1998. Under his new government, significant changes took place. In February 1999, a Council for Minorities was formed with all ethnic minorities being represented. In March 1999, a Romani lawyer, Vincent Danihel, was appointed by the government as the commissioner for Roma issues.

Dzurinda's appointment of an ethnic Hungarian as his deputy prime minister shortly after he took office was probably the most encouraging act for

¹⁶ Ibid., 302.

¹⁷ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 293. Baumannová was an official of a civil rights NGO in Bratislava at the time of the interview, 6 September 1999.

¹⁸ Open Media Research Institute Daily Digest II (26 September 1995), quoted in Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 287.

minority groups. This was done partly to show the European Union that, unlike the former Slovak government, the new government was truly concerned about ethnic minorities and their rights.

On 27 September 1999, the Dzurinda government approved *Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Solution of the Problems of the Roma National Minority and the Set of Measures for Its Implementation, Stage I*. This document states that "[t]he government has...condemned such extreme expressions as intolerance, racism, xenophobia, fascism and all manifestations of animosity against persons belonging to a national minority."¹⁹ The report addressed the issues of human rights, education and training, language and culture, unemployment, housing, the social sector, health, regional development, and the funding of the strategy. This proved to be a step in the right direction, and the European Union, as well as others, took favorable notice.

In 2000, Stage II was published under the title, *Elaboration of the Government Strategy for Addressing Problems of the Romani National Minority into a Package of Concrete Measures for [the] year 2000—Stage II*.²⁰ It discussed the same issues that the first stage identified but gave more concrete direction to specific people and agencies regarding how they were to deal with the Romani issues.

A regional conference on Roma was held in Budapest, Hungary, in 2003. This conference was attended by the prime ministers and senior government officials from Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, FYR Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia. They adopted an initiative called *The Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015*. In this document these countries commit to reducing economic disparity and to increasing the potential for the human development of the Roma. The goal is for each country to implement policy reforms and programs that combat poverty and the exclusion of the Roma in their own country.²¹ Though Slovakia's participation began while Mikuláš Dzurinda was prime minister (1998-2006), the new government, led by Prime Minister Róbert Fico, has continued to participate and support *The Decade of Roma Inclusion*.

¹⁹ Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, *Strategy of the Government, Stage I*, 12.

²⁰ It was adopted by the government as resolution No. 294/2000 on 3 May 2000.

²¹ "The Decade of Roma Inclusion," Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, <http://www.romadecade.ogr/index.php?content=1> (accessed 29 May 2008).

European Union Impact

In July 1997, the European Commission published a list naming which former communist countries should be considered for membership in the European Union. Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania received a negative recommendation, but when Slovakia was recommended for exclusion, the commission's decision needed to be explained since "Slovakia was...roughly on a par with the five... [central and east European countries of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia]...with whom negotiations were to be commenced."²² Why was Slovakia excluded?

Several answers to this question have been purported. Karen Henderson suggests that the problem was political in nature, noting that the European Council in June 1993 required all new member nations be "stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities."²³ Several years later (June 1997) the Commission concluded, "Slovakia fails to meet the required political conditions."²⁴ Henderson feels that this was due to the deficiencies of the Slovak political system under Mečiar, e.g., "the tension between the government and president, and attacks by the government on the fundamental role of the Constitutional Court and the central referendum committee."²⁵

A second possible answer to the exclusion of Slovakia by the EU was the fear of mass Romani migration to the west. Imrich Vašečka and Michal Vašečka conducted a series of interviews, part of an International Organization for Migration survey. As a result they identified that Romani migration from Slovakia to western EU nations was "an attempt to escape from social exclusion."²⁶ However, they note that this was not the only factor behind the Roma moving westward. Besides discrimination, they list "limited chances for personal development" and "a lack of focus on developing local responses"²⁷ as additional

²² Karen Henderson, ed., *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 221.

²³ "Agenda 2000: For a Stronger and Wider Union," Europa, http://ec.europa.eu/agenda2000/rapid/over_en.htm (accessed 4 January 2007).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Henderson, *Back to Europe*, 221.

²⁶ Imrich Vašečka and Michal Vašečka, "Recent Romani Migration from Slovakia to EU Member States: Romani Reaction to Discrimination or Romani Ethno-tourism?", *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 1 (2003): 27.

²⁷ Ibid.

reasons for the westward movement. They conclude that those who migrate are above average within the social structure of the Roma of Slovakia and are more educated than the average Roma. They identify those who are migrating as the "Romani middle class," who feel that in the past they were able to improve their situation but now find obstacles that limit their children's potential to improve their place in society.²⁸

Peter Vermeersch agrees with Imrich and Michal Vašečka that the EU was concerned about the mass migration to the west of Roma from Slovakia, but only after the fact. He notes that the EU member states' initial concern following the European Council decision in 1993 was "the importance of the protection of ethnic and national minorities as a norm and as a political precondition for the accession of central European candidate member states."²⁹ Vermeersch explains that Slovakia did not hesitate to ratify "the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, a text that is widely considered to be the most far-reaching legal instrument for the protection of persons belonging to national minorities."³⁰ At the beginning of 2001, only nine EU countries had ratified this document. Two significant countries that had yet to approve the framework papers were France and Belgium.³¹ In light of this, Vermeersch suggests that the minority-right standards that the EU was requiring of all future central and eastern European members were not being honored by the existing members. "[T]he EU's specific stance towards post-communist central and eastern Europe stems from the popular assumption that the 'ethnic' East is historically more inclined to ethnic conflict than the 'civic' West."³²

What might have annoyed Vermeersch the most was that the EU stated the primary reason for the exclusion of Slovakia was not for human rights failures but for political failures.³³ He notes that it was only after "a significant number of Slovak Roma began seeking asylum in EU member states...[that]...protection of Roma suddenly became a prominent topic of the relationship between Slovakia

²⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁹ Peter Vermeersch, "Ethnic Mobilisation and the Political Conditionality of European Union Accession: The Case of the Roma in Slovakia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 83.

³⁰ Ibid., 89.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 86.

³³ Ibid., 87.

and the EU."³⁴ By 1999, improving the Romani situation "was identified as the single short-term priority under the political criteria (European Commission 2000: 4)"³⁵ by the European Commission. In Vermeersch's mind, the EU seemed to change, halfway through the process, their reasons for excluding Slovakia.

Henderson, Imrich and Michal Vašečka, and Vermeersch all make valid points regarding the EU's initial exclusion of Slovakia. However, their individual reasons for the exclusion should not be viewed separately. The reason for Slovakia's potential exclusion was a combination of political problems, migration problems, and human rights problems. All three issues must be understood as contributing to Slovakia's exclusion. As each of these issues were discussed and analyzed by people like Henderson, Imrich and Michal Vašečka, and Vermeersch, pressure was put on the Slovak government and the EU to make needed adjustments in policies and actions. This has resulted in Slovakia addressing forthrightly the Romani situation and the EU reconsidering its exclusion from membership. Slovakia's progress had made enough of an impact upon the European Commission that on 1 May 2004, Slovakia became an official member of the EU.

Romani Political Participation

The Roma have been politically marginalized by the electoral system of Slovakia. A member of "Slovakia's unicameral parliament is elected through a proportional representation system."³⁶ What this means is that a candidate must be elected nationally rather than regionally in order to be a member of parliament. This has hurt the possibility for Romani candidates to be elected because few of them have national recognition. Understandably, no Romani candidate has been elected to the Slovak Parliament. However, in 2001, regional governments were established. While this gave the Roma a better chance to be elected on a local basis, there is "yet to be a Romani [member of parliament] in any of the eight regional parliaments."³⁷

One problem that affects the Romani voting constituency is the possibility for politicians to buy the votes of the electorate. Candidates have been known to

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 88.

³⁶ Zuzana Dzuriková and Tomáš Hruštič, *Roma Participation in the 2006 Slovak Parliamentary Elections* (Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2006), 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

offer money, alcohol, food, coffee, and cigarettes to Roma for their vote. While this is considered to be highly unethical, according to present Slovak law, it is not illegal.³⁸ Practices like this make it difficult for needy Roma to unite behind a Romani candidate who does not have the means to make such offers.

The inability of the Roma to unite together has contributed to their political marginalization. There have been many Romani political parties, but they have been ineffective in working together in the pursuit of Romani issues.³⁹ As of the 2006 elections, only *Rómska iniciatíva Slovenska* (RIS) was an officially registered party. ROI, which had been a registered party prior to 2005, concluded that by cooperating with mainstream parties it could more effectively promote Romani issues.⁴⁰ *Nová rómska generácia* (New Roma Generation, NRG) is an NGO that has followed the same philosophy as ROI. Such efforts were successful in that a majority of the mainstream political parties included Romani policies in their 2006 election platforms. Following the elections, NRG effectively brought together "more than 50 NGO's" to promote Romani issues in an open letter to the new government.⁴¹ The 2006 elections promise future possibilities for Romani participation in Slovak politics.

Slovakia's entrance into the EU as well as these changes in the political realm will hopefully continue to open new doors for the Roma of Slovakia. Some individuals, such as Martina Jurásková, Tibor Loran, and Ivana Černáková, are of the opinion, however, that these trends do not guarantee Romani inclusion in Slovak society. "The ability of all Slovak citizens to find a job and be successful in the labor market is one of the basic prerequisites of social and occupational integration."⁴² Thus, the socioeconomic context of the Roma of Slovakia also influences the opening of those doors.

3.3 Socioeconomic Context

Mečiar's economic approach of limited privatization with a socialistic control of the major segments of the economy should have been favorable to the plight of the Roma.⁴³ The potential under Mečiar's government for the continuation of 100

³⁸ Ibid., 8.

³⁹ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 205-10.

⁴⁰ Dzuriková, *Roma Participation*, 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴² Martina Jurásková et al., "The Roma and the Labor Market," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 355.

⁴³ Socialism implies the governmental ownership and administration of all manufacturing and distribution of goods.

percent employment, as it was under communism, was greater than under a system of privatization. But Mečiar showed little concern for the Roma. In the early stages of the new democracy, the Roma were marginalized in the areas of housing, education, employment and health care. These areas are socioeconomically interconnected and affect the Roma's "societal standing, prospects for the future, and their general outlook on life."⁴⁴

3.3.1 Housing

After communism fell, "state-subsidized public housing construction programs for the disadvantaged were terminated."⁴⁵ Instead, the new government had many other pressing issues to deal with in forming a new democratic nation with little time or money to spend on Romani issues. As a result, housing assistance for the Roma deteriorated even though on paper the new government seemed to have addressed the minority housing issue. On 9 January 1992, the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Republics adopted article 35 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms*, which states, "Everybody has the right to live in a favorable living environment."⁴⁶

Local municipal authorities were given the responsibility by the federal government for improving Romani housing, but most intentionally ignored implementing these programs. A Helsinki Watch Report published in 1992, states:

[M]any local authorities have rejected projects submitted to them by the Slovak government for the upgrading of Roma housing conditions, claiming that they want to solve the housing problems of all inhabitants, despite the fact that Roma live in significantly worse conditions than *Gadžehanies* [non-Roma].⁴⁷

A specific case in point is the eastern Slovak community of Svinia, which was devastated by a flood in July 1998. The Roma of Svinia, who comprise half of the population, were hit the hardest. Following the flood, several outside non-government organizations (NGO) attempted to help the town and in particular to provide new housing for the Roma. The plan was to build individual homes to house five Romani families, funded by NGOs Habitat for Humanity (HH) and the

⁴⁴ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 172.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁶ Helsinki Watch and Human Rights Watch, *Struggling for Ethnic Identity: Czechoslovakia's Endangered Gypsies* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992), 58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The village of Svinia was to fund rental flats for the remaining Roma. The plan seemed acceptable to the Roma and HH but was repeatedly blocked by the non-Romani citizens of Svinia. The all non-Romani village council voted to suspend all cooperation with HH and CIDA.⁴⁸ The result is that HH has abandoned the project and moved on to other needy places where the local government is more sympathetic to the poor.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Svinia is not an isolated situation in Slovakia.⁵⁰ Non-Romani residents in many other areas of Slovakia often have pressured local officials to keep the Roma from moving too close. For example, Helsinki Watch noted that "[t]he *Gadžehany* population generally uses the power of petition to restrict the movement of Romanies (*sic*) into their neighborhoods."⁵¹ This pressure hinders the Roma from moving out of the slums and into mainstream society.

Needless to say, the majority of the Roma reside in horrendous living conditions. Often large numbers of the Romani people live under the same roof. In many cases there is no indoor plumbing or electricity.⁵² The water supply is often polluted, and garbage is piled everywhere. The walls of many of the homes are thin and poorly insulated, failing to keep the cold out during the winter. In short, living conditions of many of the Roma in Slovakia are not acceptable by any standard.⁵³

Part of the problem is that the non-Roma do not want to live near the Roma. In 1994, a survey led by Zora Bútorová showed that 76 percent of the Slovak respondents would not want Roma moving into their neighborhood.⁵⁴ In Lunik Devät', near Košice, the communist government in the 1980s tried to integrate Roma with non-Roma in a new housing project. When the housing

⁴⁸ Village of Svinia, Slovakia, Village Council, 8th sess., Res. No. 34/2003, 082-32 (1 April 2003).

⁴⁹ "Slovak local council cancels Romani housing," *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 3 (2003): 102. Alexander Mušinka, "Report on the Field Research into the Housing Situation of Roma in the Village of Svinia, Slovakia," *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 4 (2003): 113-4.

⁵⁰ Other places similar to Svinia to investigate are Jarovnice, Hermanovice, and Košice—Lunik Devät'.

⁵¹ Helsinki Watch, *Struggling for Ethnic Identity*, 60.

⁵² Alexander Mušinka, "Report on the Field Research into the Housing Situation of Roma in the Village of Svinia, Slovakia," *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 4 (2003): 109.

⁵³ Alexander Mušinka, "Romani Housing," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 371-90.

⁵⁴ Zora Bútorová, *Current Problems of Slovakia: December 1994* (Bratislava: FOCUS, 1994), 83.

project first opened, 50 percent of the inhabitants were Romani and 50 percent were non-Romani, but by 2003 over 95 percent of the occupants were Romani. Many of the windows are broken out, and garbage is thrown on the ground indiscriminately. The staircases leading to the apartments are covered with excrement and the elevators no longer work.⁵⁵ One person reported that he saw a horse with its head out the window on the sixth floor of one of the apartment buildings.⁵⁶ Others reported that the Roma cooked by open fires on the concrete floors of the apartments.⁵⁷ These reported incidents tend to foster the discriminatory attitudes of the non-Roma and reinforce the objections to having the Roma as neighbors.

Historically, it has been very difficult for the Roma to own property. The process that they must go through to purchase property is, in most cases, more troublesome than what the non-Roma must endure. "The way the Roma settled in the past was rarely spontaneous, but was instead followed and regulated very closely by the local authorities."⁵⁸ A point-in-fact is noted by Helsinki Watch, which referred to the Roma in Bystrany (located in central Slovakia) who wanted to purchase homes among the non-Romani residents. Unlike the general population, the Roma had to receive special permission from the Municipal Council in order to purchase a home or flat. Most often this permission was blocked. Vladimír Pavlík, mayor of Bystrany at the time of Helsinki's report, stated that "*Gadžehanies* have the power of petition-writing against incoming Roma families."⁵⁹

It is obvious that there are no easy answers for the housing problems among the Roma. There are still over 1,500 Romani settlements in Slovakia where more than 120,000 Roma live.⁶⁰ While 91 percent of these settlements have electricity available, only 39 percent have a functioning water supply, 15 percent have gas, and 13 percent have sewage systems.⁶¹ Such low housing standards

⁵⁵ Observed by author in visits to Lunik Devät', March 2004 and April 2005.

⁵⁶ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004.

⁵⁷ Duna, interview, 15 July 2003.

⁵⁸ Mušíinka, "Romani housing," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 387.

⁵⁹ Helsinki Watch, *Struggling for Ethnic Identity*, 64.

⁶⁰ Klára Orgovánová, "Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic" (report given at the International Conference on the Implementation and Harmonization of National Policies on Roma, Sinti and Travellers, Bucharest, 4-5 May 2006), <http://coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/documentation/housing/...?toPrint=yes> (accessed 2 June 2008).

⁶¹ Ibid.

affect all areas of life, making it difficult to function in the non-Romani world and presenting the Roma with problems that seem too large to fix.

3.3.2 Education

One of the most imposing problems for the Roma of Slovakia is their lack of education. There are several factors that contribute to their deficient scholarship. First is the view by many Roma that education is not important. A second factor is the lack of Slovak language skills by Romani children entering school. And a third factor is the sub-standard educational opportunities that are made available for Romani children, e.g., they are often placed in *Špeciálna škola pre mentálne postihnutých* (special remedial schools for mentally handicapped children).⁶²

Under communism it was required that all children, including Romani children, attend school. The socialist regime reported that 85 to 90 percent of the Romani children in Slovakia attended kindergarten.⁶³ But between 1991 and 1999 the percentages dropped drastically to 15 percent in the best regions, with some regions showing no attendance at all by the Romani children. The main factor that contributed to this decline in attendance was the parents who viewed education as unimportant.⁶⁴ "During communism, one's level of education was not the main factor influencing one's standard of living."⁶⁵ In their minds, education was designed for the non-Roma and was "regarded by the Roma as superfluous and undesirable in their lives."⁶⁶ But the importance of education has changed since Slovakia has entered the free-market world. Education has now become a competitive factor in achieving employment. Barany points out that "the socioeconomic impact of the regime change has dealt an additional blow to the Roma owing to their inferior educational status."⁶⁷

Another factor that has caused the Romani children problems in the Slovak education system is their inability to communicate: to read or to write the Slovak language. "The language education of Roma children is...different; many speak only Romani which, although it is sufficient for life in their [own]

⁶² Eva Sobotka, "Slovakia," in *Denied a Future*, vol. 2, ed. Kath Pinnock (London: Save the Children UK, 2001), 179.

⁶³ Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, *Strategy of the Government, Stage I*, 16.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Elena Kriglerová and Natália Kušnieriková, "Educational Attitudes and Aspirations of the Roma," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 449.

⁶⁶ Silvia Rigová et al., "The Roma in the Education System and Alternative Education Projects," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 416.

⁶⁷ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 165.

communities, [it] does not equip them for success in school education."⁶⁸ Because of the lack of language, Romani children from the beginning of their education experience "lag behind the non-Roma children."⁶⁹ The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) report, *Stigmata*, reveals that over 60 percent of the Roma who attend school do so at schools for the mentally handicapped.⁷⁰

Discussions about creating schools that use the Romani language for Romani children have yielded resistance. While there are some leaders among the Roma who favor such a program, the majority oppose it. The *Inštitút pre verejné otázky* (Institute for Public Affairs, IVO) conducted a survey in November 2001 in which 84.6 percent of the Roma in Slovakia felt their children would receive the best education by attending the same schools as the non-Roma.⁷¹ It is believed that schools in the Romani language would only further marginalize the Roma.⁷²

The educational problems that the Roma face affect most directly their ability to find employment. Their lack of education often disqualifies them from jobs, or makes it difficult for them to receive the technical training necessary because of their inability to read and write.

3.3.3 Employment

Prior to the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, unemployment was not a problem. Everyone had a job and the same income, and that income seemed to be enough for them to live on. Petr Mareš makes the following observation:

The communist regime prevented the spread of poverty in many ways. Mass subsidies were allocated especially to those industries with a significant share of unskilled workers, and to those social groups that are traditionally the most susceptible to poverty. Industries such as mining, metallurgy, heavy manufacturing, engineering, and, after collectivization, also agriculture were the main targets of subsidies to compensate their relative disadvantages.⁷³

⁶⁸ Rigová, "The Roma in the Education System," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 416.

⁶⁹ Kriglerová, "Educational Attitudes," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 454.

⁷⁰ Savelina Danova-Russinova, *Stigmata: Segregated Schooling of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest: European Roma Rights Center, 2004), 111.

⁷¹ Kriglerová, "Educational Attitudes," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 453-4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 454.

⁷³ Petr Mareš, *Sociologie nerovnosti a chudoby* (Sociology of inequality and poverty) (Prague: SLON, 1999); quoted in Roman Džambazovič and Martina Jurásková, "Social exclusion of the Roma in Slovakia," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 342, n. 1.

After 1 January 1990 things changed drastically. Suddenly, there were not enough jobs for everyone. Unemployment, unthinkable under communist rule, was now a reality for the Roma and the non-Roma as well.⁷⁴

Once the free-market economy began to take hold, the Roma immediately found that their lack of education and job training kept them from finding jobs.⁷⁵ Because of this, it seems logical to assume the unemployment rate among the Roma soared. However, the statistical data are sketchy at best. The National Labor Office and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family have shown the following unofficial statistics regarding unemployment rates among the Roma of Slovakia.

Year	% of Roma Unemployment
1991	15.5
1992	15.5
1993	14.0
1994	13.5
1995	16.6
1996	19.0
1997	19.2
1998	n/a

Table 3.1 Unemployment Rate among Slovak Roma⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jurásková, "The Roma and the Labor Market," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 345-6. Many Slovak residents, especially senior citizens, have longed to return to the communist ways. A poll taken in Slovakia in the mid-1990s revealed that 49 percent of those questioned thought living conditions had been better prior to 1989, 25 percent thought living conditions were about the same, 21 percent thought living conditions were better, and 4 percent did not know. The majority of those wanting to return to communism were "workers, pensioners and the unemployed" who existed comfortably under the old system where everything was essentially given to them by the government. Those who did not want to turn back the clock tended to be young or people with higher education, in other words, students and professional people as well as those who considered themselves entrepreneurs. Sona Szomolányi and John A. Gould, eds., *Slovakia, Problems of Democratic Consolidation and the Struggle for the Rules of the Game* (Bratislava: Slovak Science Association, Fredrich Ebert Foundation, 1997), 133.

⁷⁵ Jurásková, "The Roma and the Labor Market," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 345-9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 346.

Several problems exist regarding these figures. First, there was no consistency in tracking unemployed Roma. Some labor offices placed an "R" on the job applications of Roma, but there was no governmental policy for following such a procedure, so there is no way to know if all Romani applications were marked or not.⁷⁷ Designating the race of a person seeking employment was officially discontinued in 1998, and the National Labor Office was instructed to no longer keep statistics on the ethnicity of those seeking work. Dzurinda's government, in stopping this practice, stated that the "protection of privacy legislation forbids the collation of most data related to ethnicity."⁷⁸

Year	% of Unemployment
1999	25.0
2000	17.0
2001	19.2
2002	19.0
2003	15.6
2004	13.1
2005	12.1
2006	11.6

Table 3.2 Unemployment Rate for Slovakia⁷⁹

As a point of reference, table 2 shows the overall unemployment rate in Slovakia since this privacy policy began (1999 to 2006). The 1999 figure was high, 25 percent. This would seem understandable in the first year of combining unemployed people of all ethnicities. The fact that the employment rates are going down since 1999 could be an indication that more Roma are finding employment, or it could be that previously unemployed non-Roma are finding jobs. It could also be a combination of both Roma and non-Roma finding work. While the latter assumption would be the most desirable, there is no way to truly know the Romani unemployment rate, or for that matter, the non-Romani unemployment rate. It is

⁷⁷ Ibid..

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Online, www.worldpress.org/profiles/slovakia.cfm; <http://ceemarket.com/>. (Accessed 3 June 2008).

now impossible to compare the number of unemployed Roma to unemployed non-Roma and thus determine if there are any discriminatory hiring practices that might exist.⁸⁰

Many of the unemployed Roma receive monthly welfare from the state. According to Laco Duna, a Romani pastor in Košice, in 2003, the monthly amount of welfare was decreased. "Those on social assistance were getting 14,000 SKK⁸¹ a month [but] now they only get 6,000 SKK a month."⁸² In Lunik Devät' the rent they must pay the government for their apartment is 5,000 SKK a month, which leaves them with only 1,000 SKK to pay utilities and purchase food and clothing.

There is a growing number of Roma who want to be employed, but these Roma are being discriminated against by the government employment offices as well as the employers themselves. From a legal perspective, the Slovak government, on paper, appears not to favor such actions. On 9 April 1991, the Slovak government passed a bill to prevent discrimination against any ethnic minority. A portion of that bill emphasizes:

...the right of the individual to profess ethnic membership and the duty of the state to prevent ethnic discrimination including discrimination of the Romani minority in all adopted, and in the future to be adopted legal norms including the constitution. (Resolution #153, section 1.2)⁸³

While this bill was passed on a national level, it is expected that the local municipalities will obey these laws. Testimony exists, however, that indicates the opposite.

⁸⁰ The unemployment percentages in table 1, which are from the National Labor Office, are questionable as to their accuracy. The Community Force for Change states that unemployment is 80 percent among the Roma in eastern Slovakia. ("On the Margins—Slovakia." Online, <http://www.cfor.info/roma>, 8 January 2004.) Barany notes that the overall unemployment among Roma in Slovakia is 70 percent. (Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 173.) Others, such as The World Bank Group, "estimated that in 1996 [the] Roma accounted for 17 to 18 percent of the total unemployed, with this figure running as high as 40 to 42 percent in eastern districts with large Roma populations." (The World Bank Group, 2001.) Obviously, they cannot all be correct. The general unemployment figures (which include the Roma) according to the National Employment Office were 13.75 percent in October 2003, with the Bratislava region unemployment at 3.68 percent and the Košice region, where most of the Roma live, at 20.36 percent.

⁸¹ At the time 14,000 SKK would have been approximately equivalent to \$400 or 340 euros; 6,000 SKK would have been approximately \$170 or 146 euros.

⁸² Duna, interview, 6 March 2004.

⁸³ Helsinki Watch, *Struggling for Ethnic Identity*, 77-8.

Helsinki Watch tells of a man in Čierny Balog who was told by the local employment office to look for his own job. Another incident is of a man in Brezno who received a referral to a local company from the local employment office. "When he called the company, they asked him if he was a Gypsy...when he said yes, they told him they had no work for him."⁸⁴

The employment office workers interviewed by Helsinki Watch stated that most of the Roma were not interested in finding jobs. Their interest was only in receiving unemployment benefits. At the same time, they indicated that most employers did not want Romani employees, and some had even requested that the employment office not send them Romani applicants. However, "most of the people interviewed by Helsinki Watch at these government employment offices do not see these requests as discriminatory, but as a reaction to 'bad experiences they've had in the past.'"⁸⁵

The marginalization of the Roma on the labor market can be attributed to several things. First is their lack of education, which often disqualifies them for higher end jobs. A second problem is a lack of skills in operating high tech machines. The last is the pejorative attitudes by employers who do not wish to have Roma on their payroll.

3.3.4 Health Care

The health care for the Roma in Slovakia is appalling at best according to Peter Šaško. He reports, "There is a wide range of scientific reports from the period before 1989"⁸⁶ that gives a clear picture of health care among the Roma. However, since the fall of communism, the Slovak government has stopped keeping health statistics based upon the ethnicity of individuals, so it is impossible to determine a clear picture of the health condition of the Roma. This policy modification by the government was passed to protect the human rights of ethnic groups like the Roma, but it has helped to marginalize them instead. Šaško summarizes, "There has been a clear decline in Roma health since 1989."⁸⁷

There are a number of reasons contributing to the poor health care of the Roma in Slovakia. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) lists six factors:

⁸⁴ Ibid., 78-9.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁶ Peter Šaško, "Roma Health," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 391.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

1. Lower degree of finished education, which may possibly predetermine a low level of health and social awareness;
2. Low standard of personal hygiene;
3. Low standard of communal hygiene;
4. The...low standard of housing and ecologically hazardous environment together with related issues of environmental pollution and devastation; ...supplies of drinkable water are virtually non-existent; there are no sewage systems...; sanitary installations are non-existent; Romani dwellings are increasingly overpopulated...;
5. ...bad eating habits, wrong types of diet and insufficient nutrition, the impossibility of purchasing necessary medicines and the inability to afford adequate health care;
6. Increasing consumption of alcoholic beverages and tobacco products.⁸⁸

According to Article 40 of the Slovak Constitution, all Slovak citizens have the right to receive free health care.⁸⁹ Under communism, each Slovak citizen was assigned a primary doctor based upon the location of his or her residency. However, in post-communist Slovakia, each citizen is responsible to register at the office of a doctor of their choosing. Often the Roma are told the doctor does not have room for any more patients.⁹⁰ This discrimination in health care is often rationalized by doctors stating, "If my regular patients come to my office and Roma, who are dirty and stink, are sitting there, they will leave and go to another doctor."⁹¹

Šaško also reports that a number of Romani women have been forced to be sterilized. This practice often happens because doctors and nurses give "misleading or threatening information...with the aim of pressuring and intimidating them into consenting to be sterilized."⁹² The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights published an extensive report in October 2003,

⁸⁸ International Organization for Migration, *Social and Economic Situation to Potential Asylum Seekers from the Slovak Republic* (Bratislava: IOM, 2000), 54.

⁸⁹ Constitution of the Slovak Republic, art. 40 (3 September 1991). "Everyone has a right to the protection of his health. Based on public insurance, citizens have the right to free health care and to medical supplies under conditions defined by law."

⁹⁰ Jozef Brenkus, telephone interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 2 September 2005, written notes.

⁹¹ The author talked to several Slovak doctors, who requested anonymity, in Banská Bystrica, and Košice during February 2003.

⁹² Šaško, "Roma Health," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 406.

titled "Recommendation of the Commissioner for Human Rights Concerning Certain Aspects of Law and Practice Relating to Sterilisation of Women in the Slovak Republic."⁹³ This report suggests the reason behind the sterilization practice is that Slovak officials are concerned about the high birth rate among the Roma, which could result in "an increased proportion of the population living on social benefits."⁹⁴

Šaško suspects that the nutritional intake of the average Rom in Slovakia is below that of the average Slovak non-Rom. His assumption is based on economic reasons rather than statistical information: e.g., the average Romani income is lower than the average non-Romani income. He does note one study conducted by O. Kačala in Zlaté klasy,⁹⁵ but it is atypical because the living standard "does not represent the Slovak average for the Roma, as it has a notably higher standard of living."⁹⁶ This particular study indicates that the Roma eat more meat, more white bakery products, and more sweets than do the non-Roma. The non-Roma eat slightly more brown bakery products than the Roma. The study concluded that the non-Roma consume a healthier diet than the Roma.⁹⁷

According to a study by Igor Seres, the incidence of congenital disease is marginally higher among the Roma than in the non-Romani population: e.g., 2.15 cases per 100 births among the general population as compared to 2.37 cases per 100 births among the Roma.⁹⁸ A significant result of this study is that the congenital diseases among the Romani births were of a much more serious nature than those among the non-Roma. These various diseases can often result in invalidity.⁹⁹

⁹³ Online, <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=979625&BackColorInternet=99B5AD&BackColorIntranet=FABF45&BackColorLogged=FFC679>. (Accessed June 3, 2008)

⁹⁴ "Developments Related to the Coercive Sterilisation of Romani Women in Slovakia, Including Government Failure to Provide Redress to Victims," *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 4 (2003): 93.

⁹⁵ O. Kačala, "Porovnanie výživy Slovákov, Maďarov a Rómov na národnostne zmiešanom území Slovenska" ("Comparison of the nutrition of Slovaks, Hungarians and Roma in ethnically mixed areas of Slovakia"), *Medicínsky monitor*, no. 1 (2002): 22.

⁹⁶ Šaško, "Roma Health," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 397.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁹⁸ Igor Seres, "Špecifické výsledky prenatálnej starostlivosti u rómskej populácie" (Specific results of prenatal care in the Romani population), *Slovenská gynekológia a pôrodnictvo*, no. 5 (1998): 125-31. This study was conducted in the Rožňava district between 1992 and 1997.

⁹⁹ Seres lists the following diseases: congenital glaucoma, phenylketonuria, congenital hypothyreosis, craniostenosis and mental retardation.

In 1992 Marta Kvasnicová released the results of a study on the slow mental development among children in the Banská Bystrica region.¹⁰⁰ The research was done with 6-year-old to 14-year-old children, both Roma and non-Roma. The results show that 21.5 percent of Romani children gave indications of being mentally slow as compared to only 0.9 percent among non-Romani children. One point of information that is missing from this study is the number of Romani children who speak the Slovak language as compared to the number who do not, since the testing was done in Slovak.

Šaško addresses the issue of Romani children being placed in "special schools," which are really schools for the mentally retarded. He states, "So far, no test of sufficient validity has determined that Romani children show slow mental development."¹⁰¹ He notes that the government is monitoring the way in which Romani children are placed in schools, but adds that, "mental retardation is clearly more frequent among the Roma than among the non-Roma."¹⁰² Šaško contradicts himself with this last statement, and he gives no scientific proof to back it up. There is no foundation for such a comment. The only apparent reason for making such a claim is that he was conditioned by his environment to do so.

A number of different diseases in Romani settlements occur due to the lack of children being inoculated against hepatitis A and B. Cerebral palsy and meningitis threaten many of the poorer Romani settlements especially where they are isolated from health clinics. The Minister of Health and others in the government have encouraged regional authorities to address this issue and, according to Šaško, to allocate 800,000 SKK for the task.¹⁰³

All indications are that the health care provided for the Roma of Slovakia is sub-standard to that which the non-Roma receive. Some of the reasons for this can be attributed to sub-standard living conditions, lack of education, and economic struggles. Another contributing factor is the cultural differences that exist between the Roma and non-Roma.

¹⁰⁰ Marta Kvasnicová, "Genetická mentálna retardácia v oblasti Banskej Bystrice" (Genetic mental retardation in the region of Banská Bystrica), *Československá pediatrie*, no. 47 (1992): 25-8.

¹⁰¹ Šaško, "Roma Health," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 402.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 411.

3.4 Cultural Context

In this section several issues dealing with the cultural context of the Roma will be examined. The structure of the Romani culture varies from that of the non-Romani culture. An obvious question is whether it is possible for the Roma to embrace their culture and at the same time find a place of acceptance in Slovak society.

Observations regarding the structure of Romani culture will show how the Roma view the world and the rules and boundaries that order their world. This dissimilarity between the Romani culture and non-Romani culture contributes to the problem of cultural stereotyping. This stereotyping, the majority of which is negative, contributes to the marginalization of the Roma.

There are a number of theories for solving the cultural variances that have contributed to the marginalization of the Roma. Several of these theories will be presented and discussed: nationhood, multiculturalism, exclusion, assimilation, and inclusion.

3.4.1 Structures and Stereotypes

Culture is defined by Charles H. Kraft as "the label anthropologists give to the complex structuring of customs and the assumptions that underlie them in terms of which people govern their lives."¹⁰⁴ This cultural structure is often referred to as worldview. The assumptions of this structure are found below the observable actions of a culture and are what govern behavior on the surface level of life.¹⁰⁵

The structure of the Romani culture that is observable does not permit the *Gadje* to gain a true understanding. Based upon this limited understanding of the Romani culture, non-Roma often place stereotypical labels upon the Roma. This increases the marginalization of the Roma and makes it difficult for them to fully celebrate or practice their cultural structure.

Structures

Historically, the Romani cultural structure is based on collectivism rather than on individualism. This collectivism is demonstrated in the way decisions are made and in how various family responsibilities are distributed throughout the community. Generally, the men have the decision-making power in most Romani

¹⁰⁴ Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

communities. This power can be observed in one of two ways. First, decisions can be made through collectivism of all males within a community, or second, there can be a single leader that the community collectively views as their ruler.¹⁰⁶ The former model is more prevalent within Slovak Romani tribes, while the latter is mostly seen within the Hungarian Romani tribes.¹⁰⁷

The Romani family is the institution that gives structure and "is the means of preserving and passing on Romani culture."¹⁰⁸ The traditional family unit functions within "patriarchal extended families that belong to broader tribal endogamic (i.e. marrying within the tribe) groups."¹⁰⁹ This paternal structure gives the position of authority to the men. Within this large group, one older, dominant male is normally looked upon as the leader. He functions as a judge within the larger group with the husband of each individual family having dominance over his wife and children. Furthermore, the mother of the family has total responsibility for raising the children. She also is responsible to determine how the household functions and to manage the finances. If the husband does not have a job, it is her responsibility to provide food for the family.¹¹⁰

When a bride is chosen for a son, she moves in with her future in-laws to be taught family customs by her future mother-in-law. The future mother-in-law also teaches the bride how to cook. "Sons [are] preferred when children [are] born, and the status of a family increases significantly as its male children [grow] up."¹¹¹ Within the family structure, the young men are not expected to do much of anything, but, by contrast, the daughters are given specific tasks. Generally, this is in the form of being responsible for the younger children.¹¹²

The oldest son is given the responsibility for his siblings, especially his sisters. He is specifically charged to protect their virginity. He also plays a major role in choosing husbands for his sisters. It is important that a marriage be arranged between families that have the same or similar social status.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Stanislava Kompaniková and Michal Šebesta, "Roma Living Strategies," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 357-69.

¹⁰⁷ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Zuzana Kumanová and Roman Džambazovič, "The Roma Family: On the Border Between Tradition and Modernity," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 311.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 315.

In many traditional families, the father begins teaching his sons the family business. If the family is musical, the sons begin to learn to play an instrument, or if they are blacksmiths, they are taught that trade.¹¹⁴

There are certain norms or "social control mechanisms that prevent individuals from dishonoring the family."¹¹⁵ A man who does not take care of his family is confronted by his brother(s) and brothers-in-law. To assist this process, the women of the tribe might sing songs about his mistreatment of his family. If he does not improve his behavior, he can be given a demeaning name that even his own children would call him. In extreme circumstances, he could be beaten by other tribal members.¹¹⁶

In the traditional family structure women do not have rights. It is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife and even his children. But "if a beating exceeds the level of tolerance the community will react, for example with a satirical song."¹¹⁷

The traditional family structure is most prevalent in the Romani settlements. However, as the Roma move to more segregated housing, they are no longer surrounded by Romani families or community, and the pressure of conforming to the traditional Romani family structure is less.¹¹⁸ This has resulted in the development of a more contemporary family structure for many Roma.

The contemporary family unit is smaller and more independent than the traditional one. Though the contemporary family unit is smaller, it is still significantly larger than that of a typical non-Romani family. It would include in many cases a husband and wife, their married sons and their wives, and the unmarried sons and daughters plus the grandchildren all living under one roof. When the married children are able, they move into a place of their own. The concept of independence is now more acceptable to the younger Roma, and this often causes conflict between them and older generations, who have a more traditional mindset.

Though many Roma are leaving the traditional family structure and adopting the contemporary structures, there is still a vast difference between the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 316.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Arne B. Mann, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 20 May 2008, written notes.

structure of the non-Romani family and that of the Roma. Many of the basic assumptions about the world are dissimilar.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is defined by Kraft as "a technique for lumping people into a grouping for the purpose of saving oneself the time and energy that would be necessary to relate to each one personally."¹¹⁹ It can be done from a negative perspective or a positive perspective. The problem with stereotyping groups is that when one encounters a member of that group the stereotypical assumptions make it impossible to relate to that member as a person. This demeans that person and places certain parameters around him that marginalizes him. Within the Slovak context stereotyping happens on the part of both Roma and non-Roma.

One of the reasons this problem exists is that the lack of personal contact results in stereotype attitudes. Zdeněk Uherek and Karel A. Novák published an article on the ethnic identity of the Romani people of Slovakia and suggest a reason why this happens.¹²⁰ In their study they identify two types of social groups: primary and secondary. They define primary groups as those having members who have "frequent personal contacts, strong emotional ties, know each other well, and conduct their relationships according to unwritten rules that they make up themselves."¹²¹ Secondary groups are based on "mutual contacts" and are "governed by reason rather than emotion."¹²² Social connections are not as close as in primary groups and often communication is not done directly, but is mediated by others. The social rules are quite formal and are usually established by outsiders, rather than by group members. Uherek and Novák find that, "the Roma in Slovakia have very little experience of either the creation of secondary groups or existence within such groups. Their basic social links are family ties and face-to-face relationships within their local communities."¹²³ The fact that the Roma struggle with secondary groups helps contribute to the non-Roma stereotyping the Roma as social outcasts.

The world of the Romani family rarely extends beyond the borders of its own community. This was true in the traditional family structure and is still true

¹¹⁹ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 156.

¹²⁰ Zdeněk Uherek and Karel A. Novák, "The Ethnic Identity of the Roma," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 75-89.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

in the contemporary family. Romani identity is best described by this observation: "For the Roma, the human world is divided into two basic categories—the Roma...and the non-Roma."¹²⁴ Little communication is done with those outside the Romani context, and when it is, the Roma are often suspicious of the non-Roma. This suspicion is based on the Roma having stereotyped the non-Roma. The non-Roma are often seen by the Roma as "an opposition group that has to be confronted."¹²⁵ This type of exclusion builds walls and contributes to stereotyping both inside and outside the Romani culture.

Several issues are caused by such pejorative thinking. The most pertinent to this study are categorized by Uherek and Novák as majority population stereotypes and culture of poverty.¹²⁶ They describe majority population stereotypes as the general attitudes that non-Romani society has toward the Roma. "The Slovak majority paint the Roma as a people who cause problems for others, refuse to work, sponge on the social system, live in ghettos, etc."¹²⁷

Oscar Lewis was the first to pose the concept culture of poverty.¹²⁸ The basic idea is that those who live in a culture of poverty are dependent on welfare or other outside help to survive. This describes the situation in which many Roma in Slovakia exist. Uherek and Novák think that "the environment of poverty is not only an unsuitable place to find one's identity, it actually creates an identity crisis."¹²⁹ Escape from a culture of poverty mentality can only come by restoring "people's dignity and consciousness of self—in other words, to restore their 'social identity.'"¹³⁰

3.4.2 Nationhood and Multiculturalism

Nationhood

One of the ways to restore "social identity," according to Uherek and Novák, is through the creation of a Romani nation. While this is the only real solution they present, they spend more time telling of the shortcomings of such an idea than relating its merits. They suggest that the fragmentation of Roma across Europe,

¹²⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty, San Juan and New York* (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1966).

¹²⁹ Uherek and Novák, "The Ethnic Identity of the Roma," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 85.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

and specifically within the borders of Slovakia, makes the creation of a Romani nation almost impossible. In passing, they mention the concepts of integration and assimilation as possible solutions, but only in specific areas, which they fail to suggest. The only hope of success they mention is that "many [Romani] individuals have already chosen independent...choices that allow them to deal with the world around them."¹³¹ These authors may be suggesting that these specific Roma have changed all or at the least, a portion of their identity from an inward, Romani-centric view, to an outward, all-inclusive view.

Multiculturalism

Katarína Bezáčková and Jarmila Lajčáková suggest that multiculturalism is the solution to the Romani situation in Slovakia.¹³² Such a solution would preclude a change in social structure by the Roma as well as the majority of Slovak society. They use Canada, the United States, and Great Britain as examples of the benefits of multiculturalism. The concept calls for six specific criteria to be met by the majority of the Slovak society and of the Roma of Slovakia. These are

1. mutual tolerance;
2. mutual understanding and acceptance of differences;
3. acceptance of the principle of equality on both sides;
4. inclusion of the Roma on the cultural/educational, political, and socioeconomic levels;
5. mutual adaptation by majority society to the Roma, and the Roma to majority society;
6. creation of space for the inclusion of the Roma into society.¹³³

Bezáčková and Lajčáková propose that these changes can be actualized in Slovakia over a period of time. It is their opinion that Slovakia is on the same path that the Western world followed, that of assimilation, integration and segregation,

¹³¹ Ibid., 87.

¹³² Katarína Bezáčková and Jarmila Lajčáková, "Multiculturalism and Inclusion as Solutions to the Roma Issue," in *Čaćipen pal o Roma*, 475-495. They define multiculturalism as a theory that rejects traditional liberalism and instead adopts "group differentiated" rights which ensures freedom and equality for members of minority cultures. This allows the ethnic minorities to evolve and at the same time prevents ethnic violence. This creates a pluralistic society where minorities can achieve more easily "legal and socio-economic equality with the majority population."

¹³³ Ibid., 492-3.

and that the next natural step is multiculturalism. Their hope is that Slovakia can learn from the mistakes made by the United States and Western Europe and thus speed up the process "to modern multiculturalism."¹³⁴ They are cognizant that the declaration of equality and that of making discrimination a crime are only the beginning of the process.

[W]hat is needed is the will and active efforts of individuals to change their attitudes, opinions and prejudices, and above all the effort of major policymakers to change institutional structures to allow the active participation and equality of all.¹³⁵

According to Bezáková and Lajčáková, the next requirement is "reform of the education system to develop individual multicultural skills."¹³⁶ While this is an accepted necessity, changes in governmental policies and laws must precede the teaching or at least coincide with the teaching in order for a curriculum of multiculturalism to truly impact the Slovak society.

Desiring to expedite the process of multiculturalism, Bezáková and Lajčáková ignore one crucial issue—the inevitable resistance that such a process of change will encounter. There is an old adage that expresses the problem clearly: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." The resistance to change—creating a multicultural society in Slovakia—is a natural phenomenon that is to be expected.

Both suggestions, creation of a Romani nation and adopting a multicultural society, have their challenges. The first is unrealistic because it requires all Roma of Europe to join together and physically to move to a specific location. For most if not all Roma, this would mean leaving the roots that they have established over several centuries. It would also mean a change in thinking regarding structures and worldviews. The various Romani groups would need to somehow blend together into one new nationality.

Multiculturalism seems less intrusive for the Roma. They would not have to move and would be dealing with the same structures and worldviews of the Slovak society. In a multicultural society of tolerance, there would be only a limited amount of change to their structures and worldview. These changes are the six criteria that Bezáková and Lajčáková suggest, which promote a mutual

¹³⁴ Ibid., 492.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 493.

change of thought by both the Roma and non-Roma of Slovakia. Historically though, governments and individuals have managed the Roma through the ideologies of exclusion and assimilation.

3.4.3 Exclusion, Assimilation, and Inclusion

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there is a need to create an appropriate framework to analyze the position that the Roma occupy in Slovak society. Ethnic exclusion and ethnic assimilation have been historically how the Roma have been dealt with by non-Roma in the Slovak region. These two concepts will be discussed before a third option is presented, ethnic inclusion.

Exclusion

The concept of ethnic exclusion implies that privileges and rights extended to native inhabitants of a country are withheld from people whose ethnicity is different. This can take on several different forms: ethnic cleansing, ethnic expulsion from a region/country, or ethnic acceptance at the expense of personal ethnicity. Exclusionism precludes the ability of a minority, and specifically its cultural norms, to function within the larger society as an equal. Iveta Radičová describes exclusion as "incompetence...insufficiency, inequality and finally a complete absence in participation in social, economic and cultural life."¹³⁷

Miroslav Volf agrees with this assessment and gives a clear picture of the "two interrelated aspects of exclusion,"¹³⁸ the first of which he describes as "cutting of the bonds that connect."¹³⁹ This implies that those who cut the bonds will remove themselves from a position of interdependence (from other ethnicities) to a position of independent sovereignty. Jarmila Lajčáková suggests that such independent sovereignty is based on the idea that the dominant group "has access to the 'means of interpretation and communication' in a society."¹⁴⁰ It is in this process that those who are identified as opposing the position of the majority will become enemies or nonentities "that can be disregarded and abandoned."¹⁴¹ Volf's second aspect of exclusionism identifies as inferior those

¹³⁷ Radičová, *Hic Sunt Romales*, 263.

¹³⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 67.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Jarmila Lajčáková, "The Uneasy Road towards Remedying the Economic and Cultural Disadvantage of the Roma in Slovakia," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 14 (2007): 59.

¹⁴¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

who do not belong to a specific "pattern of interdependence".¹⁴² These inferior beings are dealt with by the majority in several ways—assimilating them into sameness, subjugating them into conformity, expelling them from the region, or ethnically cleansing them.¹⁴³

Volf identifies two actors that are involved in the process of exclusion: the excluders and the excluded. The excluders of Slovakia are steeped in prejudicial attitudes, which are demonstrated in actions against the Roma. Historical records reflect pejorative attitudes and actions that were taken by the non-Roma toward the Roma prior to the fall of communism in 1989, as well as in post-communist Slovakia. While the excluders in the Slovak region have used exclusionary methods of expulsion and ethnic cleansing,¹⁴⁴ the most commonly used method has been socioeconomic exclusion.

Socioeconomic exclusion is clearly observable in Romani substandard housing, limited access to educational opportunities, marginalized employment, inferior health care, and discouragement in cultural development. The combination of all these exclusionary factors makes the plight of the Roma difficult. An important point to understand is that socioeconomic exclusion precludes political exclusion for the Roma. They have difficulty uniting together for a common political cause because they have been fragmented in all socioeconomic areas.

Assimilation

Volf places assimilation into sameness and subjugating into conformity under the heading of exclusion when, in reality, they fit better within a category of their own—assimilation. The idea of assimilation is "to absorb into the culture or mores of a population or group"¹⁴⁵ those who are considered outsiders prior to being assimilated. Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers describe assimilation as a "realization that one will never return to the society of origin."¹⁴⁶ This implies that there are no other options but to assimilate. In essence, this is a description of the Roma, a people without a homeland to which they can return or even visit.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ The usage of expulsion and ethnic cleansing in Slovakia has been minimal when compared to Volf's native Croatia. But neither is an acceptable solution.

¹⁴⁵ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "assimilate."

¹⁴⁶ Grunlan, *Cultural Anthropology*, 81.

Milton M. Gordon suggests three theories of assimilation. The first theory he calls Anglo-conformity,¹⁴⁷ which is a situation where an ethnic minority is instructed to accept the majority culture of the country where the minority lives because it is considered to be the superior culture. Acceptance of the majority culture will result in the minority group finding acceptance in the general society.¹⁴⁸ The second theory he calls the melting pot. This idea asserts that various cultures and racial groups come together, and through interaction create a new culture that includes elements of all participating cultures.¹⁴⁹ The third theory, cultural pluralism, occurs when each ethnic group keeps the basic elements of its own culture, such as traditional customs and behavior, but at the same time adopts mutual values on a national level, which would include the setting of national goals and the creation of national institutions.¹⁵⁰ While Gordon developed his theories as a means of understanding his native-American multicultural environment, the concepts are useful in understanding the Romani situation in Slovakia.

The Anglo conformity theory is very similar to Volf's concepts of assimilation into sameness and subjugation into conformity. Gordon's idea of instructing the minority to conform seems less forceful than Volf's subjugating, which implies subduing or conquering. However, in the final analysis, Anglo conformity, assimilation into sameness, and subjugation into conformity all come to the same conclusion—"if the immigrant will conform in all...respects, unfavorable attitudes and behavior toward him will disappear."¹⁵¹ This approach is historically how the Roma have been dealt with and the phrase *forced assimilation* seems to be the best description of the concept. The Habsburg Empire demanded that the Roma assimilate into the general Magyar society. They were not given an option. Under the communist regime the same approach of forced assimilation was taken. Both the Habsburg and communist concept of assimilation was to change the orientation of the Roma and their culture

¹⁴⁷ The term Anglo-conformity was first used by Stewart G. Cole and Mildred Wiese Cole, *Minorities and the American Promise*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), chapter 6. The Coles' and Gordon are writing from the perspective of American sociologists who are examining the relationship between Afro-Americans and Caucasian Americans, thus they use the term *Anglo* to refer to the dominant Caucasian race.

¹⁴⁸ Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 85.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 104.

On the other hand, Gordon's melting pot culture implies that "the cultures of the various groups will mix and form a blend somewhat different from the cultures of any one of the groups separately."¹⁵² There is a distinct problem with this concept, which Gordon openly admits. When immigrants enter a new culture, it is assumed that the new culture is dominant. To expect a dominant culture to melt and blend together with an immigrant's culture is unrealistic. In reality, "the melting pot concept may envisage the culture of the immigrants as 'melting' completely into the culture of the host society without leaving any cultural trace at all."¹⁵³ Gordon points out that if this is the case, there is little difference between the melting pot and Anglo-conformity. Gordon comes to the conclusion that a "single melting pot" of cultures is an illusion. He thinks a more realistic concept is the idea that "society has come to be composed of a number of 'pots,' or subsocieties."¹⁵⁴ Within the American context he identifies these subsocieties as "religious containers," "racial groups" and communities who "choose to remain within the ethnic enclosure."¹⁵⁵ The latter of these subsocieties is similar to the traditional Romani family and how they have historically dealt with assimilation.

Cultural pluralism states the need for subsocieties to exist so that ethnic cultural tradition is not damaged. At the same time, cultural pluralism insists that these subsocieties do not interfere with the "standard responsibilities to the general...civic life."¹⁵⁶ For this to happen, Gordon states that "primary group relations across ethnic lines" must be "sufficiently minimal," but at the same time there must be cooperation between "secondary relations" in the "areas of political action, economic life, and civic responsibility."¹⁵⁷ The result will be a group identity by the various ethnic groups while "prejudice and discrimination will disappear or become so slight to scope as to be barely noticeable."¹⁵⁸ Gordon questions whether cultural pluralism in its purest form can take place within a multi-ethnic society. He suggests that structural pluralism is more plausible. This implies that the various ethnic groups would need to adopt the same worldview. However, Gordon would want them to keep their ethnic identity. The question is

¹⁵² Ibid., 124.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 158.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

whether different ethnic groups can have the same worldview. Kraft's definition of worldview implies that the cultural structure must be consistent as are the rules and boundaries. This is a problem between the Roma and non-Roma: their cultural rules and boundaries are very different.

Bezáková and Lajčáková's concept of multiculturalism is similar in some ways to cultural pluralism. The key words to describe multiculturalism are mutual, tolerance, understanding, acceptance, inclusion and adaptation. While cultural pluralism suggests a need for tolerance, understanding, and acceptance the concepts of mutual, inclusion and adaptation do not. It seems that these three words are necessary if different ethnic groups are to come to an understanding and acceptance of a common worldview.

Michal Vašečka notes an important fact regarding the Roma of Slovakia:

Most Roma identify themselves as Slovak, they connect ethnicity to citizenship in a geographically defined state. This primary 'Slovak' self-identification is followed by identification with 'being Roma,' which is perceived more as a cultural trait than an ethnic category.¹⁵⁹

The Roma's Slovak identity evolved from 300 years or more of living in the Slovak region. While on the surface the majority of Roma in Slovakia are willing to be identified as Slovak, they are generally not willing to give up their cultural norms. While the acceptance of Slovak identity could be viewed by some as compromise on the part of the Roma, it is the cultural norms that separate them from the non-Roma and which are at the heart of prejudicial attitudes. These pejorative thoughts make it difficult for the Roma and non-Roma to compromise.

The reason for the inflexibility of both the Roma and the non-Roma is explained by Cuong Nguyen Le in his article, "Assimilation and Ethnic Identity."¹⁶⁰ He lists two main categories of ethnic identity, primordial and situational. Primordial identity asserts that there is an "innate sense of ethnic identity" found in everyone. Man is born with this and it "is instinctive and natural, and is difficult if not impossible to change."¹⁶¹ Situational identity implies

¹⁵⁹ Michal Vašečka, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 21 June 2008, email. An exception to this is the Hungarian Roma in Slovakia who find their identity first in being Hungarian and then in being Roma.

¹⁶⁰ Cuong Nguyen Le, "Assimilation and Ethnic Identity," Asian-Nation, Asian American History, Demographics, and Issues, <http://www.asian-nation.org/assimilation.shtml> (accessed 7 January 2005).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

that ethnicity is a "socially defined phenomena." Thus, ethnic identity is constantly changing based upon "specific situations and sets of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters."¹⁶² It does not seem to be Le's intention to suggest that there must exist one or the other, but rather both concepts of identity may co-exist. Alas, both the Roma and the ethnic Slovaks have a strong primordial identity. This nationalistic identity has kept both from allowing the influences of the Habsburg Empire to obliterate their cultures. The Habsburgs insisted that both the Slovaks and Roma should discard their native languages in favor of Magyar. Both resisted because of their strong primordial affinity. It is the same strong primordial identity that prohibits both the Roma and non-Roma from compromising with each other.

Situational identity seems to help explain why the Roma are willing to compromise regarding appearance and religion but not language or culture. Obviously, the Roma cannot change the color of their skin, but their outer appearance is changeable by the clothes they wear. There is not a big difference between the way the Roma dress and the non-Roma dress. This can be attributed to the "specific situations and set of circumstances" which the Roma have encountered. Most often, they are not able to purchase new clothes but must rely on clothes that are donated by the non-Roma to different charities or churches where the Roma often get their clothing.

The similarities in the religion of the two nationalities can also be attributed to situational identity. The Roma are quite concerned about spiritual things, and they have a tendency to be interested in spirituality in every sense. Thus, they will very likely not only accept the major religious tendencies of the non-Romani Slovaks but will also continue to practice previously acquired beliefs. While the syncretistic practice of mixing together various beliefs and the lack of regular church attendance are considered Romani problems, these habits mirror the actions of many non-Roma who also rarely attend church and who embrace folk-beliefs in addition to their Christian beliefs.¹⁶³

Le proposes that ethnic identity and assimilation can be connected in two different ways: by behavioral assimilation/acculturation and by structural or socioeconomic assimilation. "Behavioral assimilation/acculturation occurs when a newcomer absorbs the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Mann, interview, 20 May, 2008.

'host' society."¹⁶⁴ This is similar to Gordon's Anglo conformity and Volk's assimilating sameness. Le does not seem to indicate a subjugated or forced assimilation but a willing assimilation into the "host society."

Structural or socioeconomic assimilation means the integration of the ethnic minority "into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country." In essence, the ethnic minority begins to function as a member of the host country. Again, the assumption is the willingness on the part of the ethnic minority to fit into the host country's culture and society.

The problem with assimilation as it relates to the Roma can be seen in a number of different ways. Le indicates three factors that will either increase or decrease the speed of assimilation. These three factors reveal some of the problems that the Roma have within Slovak society.

Factor 1.Racial Differences: When people of the same skin color immigrate, while they will undoubtedly face some pejorative attitudes in their new location, because there are similarities in the host country, assimilation occurs faster than those of a different skin color do.

Factor 2.Structure of the Economy: When the economy of the host country is doing well and there are plenty of jobs and economic opportunities, assimilation is easier. But when the economy is not doing well, and there is a scarcity of jobs, hostility by the host population can make it difficult for the minorities to be assimilated.

Factor 3.Class Similarities or Differences: If the minorities are highly educated, have job skills, [and] are proficient in the majority language, then the potential for assimilation is very high.¹⁶⁵

All three factors are interrelated and each either contributes to the speed of assimilation or slows it down. The racial differences between the Roma and non-Roma are noticeable (factor 1). The Roma have darker skin than the non-Roma and are easily identified. Because of this, it is generally not possible for a Roma's nationality to go undetected. This limits their ability to blend into mainstream Slovak society.

The socioeconomic structure of Slovakia makes life quite difficult for the Roma as well (factor 2). There are not enough jobs for all the unemployed, Roma and non-Roma. When positions are available, the Roma are often overlooked and

¹⁶⁴ Le, "Assimilation and Ethnic Identity."

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

the jobs given to the non-Roma. In some cases there are logical reasons why this happens—the Roma are less educated, lack necessary job skills, and struggle with the Slovak language (factor 3). In the case of the Roma of Slovakia, all three factors make the possibility of assimilation into Slovak society doubtful.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a third possible solution for how Slovak society could approach the Romani people. Inclusion infers equality between ethnic groups. Miroslav Volf states that there are certain demands inherent in inclusion: "Every person must have access to all functions, and therefore all persons must have equal access to education, to all available jobs, to political decision-making, and the like."¹⁶⁶

The Laidlaw Foundation lists five perspectives that the founders call the "cornerstones of social inclusion." They are valued recognition, human development, involvement and engagement, proximity, and material well-being.¹⁶⁷ These concepts are helpful in understanding the problems of the Roma *vis-à-vis* their inclusion in the Slovak context. The idea of valued recognition implies the majority identifying various minority groups within a region or country and demonstrating genuine respect toward them. Balázs Jarábik points out that "despite the efforts of the [Slovak] state administration ... attitudes toward minorities have shifted little."¹⁶⁸ He suggests that new policies need to be adopted by the government and that they must be supported by local officials especially in the regions where many Roma live.¹⁶⁹

Encouraging human development among the Roma to improve their specific talents will not be a problem for those Roma who have saleable abilities, e.g., musical talents. However, most Roma in the Slovak context possess skills that can be classified as inferior, while others have no perceivable skills. A major reason for the limited human development among the Roma is their lack of education.

According to The Laidlaw Foundation, community involvement and engagement implies the ability of a minority to take part in setting policies that

¹⁶⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 58.

¹⁶⁷ Andrew Mitchell and Richard Shillington, *Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion* (Toronto: The Laidlaw Foundation, 2002), ix.

¹⁶⁸ Balázs Jarábik, "Perspectives of Affirmative Action in Slovakia," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 179.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

affect it and its community.¹⁷⁰ There is little evidence that the Roma have had any input into the various strategies adopted by the Slovak government. Iveta Radičová states that it is difficult for the Roma to be proactive regarding legislation that would affect them because of their poor living conditions, their lack of civic involvement, and their own cultural standards. "As a consequence, these regions have a limited ability to internally influence their own social development, just as they have a limited ability to adapt to the changed conditions since 1989, and few people [in their midst are] capable of actively, responsibly and creatively [developing] ways [for them] to escape their marginalized position."¹⁷¹

A major issue that impacts the ability of the Roma to participate within the Slovak society is the location of their residence. Proximity is "sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions ...and to reduce social distances between people."¹⁷² Approximately 60 percent of the Romani population of Slovakia lives among the majority population.¹⁷³ While this is encouraging, there are still over 1,500 Romani settlements that are segregated from the non-Romani population. The potential for interaction within Slovak society is limited for those Roma who live in settlements.

Material well-being implies having the financial ability to participate on the same level as the rest of society. This is not possible for the majority of the Roma of Slovakia. Radičová observes that the Roma "survival depends on welfare benefits and other institutions."¹⁷⁴ The idea of government-subsidized income was not designed to bring equality but to limit Romani poverty. The Slovak welfare system has accomplished that goal but at a great expense to the Roma. Imrich Vašečka argues, "This external financial help [has] limited the poverty of the Roma on the one hand, but taught them inactivity on the other."¹⁷⁵ He further notes that the Romani issue is not a situation that can be dealt with in a short period of time. "The [Romani] issue is a long-term one because solving it will require a deep intergenerational change in both the majority and the minority."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion*, viii-ix.

¹⁷¹ Iveta Radičová, "The Roma on the Verge of Transformation," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 72.

¹⁷² Mitchell, *Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion*, ix.

¹⁷³ Orgovánová, "Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic."

¹⁷⁴ Radičová, "The Roma on the Verge," 73.

¹⁷⁵ Imrich Vašečka, "The Roma Issue in Local Social Policy," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 186.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

The reason that inclusion has not happened in Slovakia is obvious from the preceding analysis. But that does not mean that inclusion is not a viable solution to the Romani issue. There are certain steps, however, suggested by Silvia Valná that should be taken before inclusion could be considered an option. She lists the following eight details that must be accomplished:

1. Making employment a right and a possibility for all;
2. ensuring an income and resources that are adequate for a dignified life;
3. removing disadvantages in the field of education;
4. protecting family solidarity and children's rights;
5. providing suitable housing for all;
6. guaranteeing equal access to quality services (health care, law, welfare, culture, transport, etc.);
7. improving the quality of the services provided;
8. reviving areas with accumulated disadvantages.¹⁷⁷

Iveta Radičová led a research project for the World Bank that published a report on "Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic."¹⁷⁸ While this report agrees with Valná's conclusions, it states just two major areas that must be addressed if inclusion is to happen in Slovakia: the need for better living conditions and increased opportunities. The first area, living conditions, speaks of the need to improve housing and the availability of utilities for the Roma. The second area, increased opportunities, includes education, health care, and employment.

This section began by asking the question if it were possible for the Roma to hold on to their culture and at the same time be accepted by the non-Roma. The answer is not clear or easy. The best potential for solving the problem of marginalization is found in the similar concepts of multiculturalism and inclusion. But both require give and take between the Romani culture and the non-Romani culture.

¹⁷⁷ Silvia Valná, "Chudoba a exklúzia—program ich riešenia" (Poverty and exclusion—how to solve them"), *Práca a sociálna politika*, no. 7-8 (2002): 9-10.

¹⁷⁸ The World Bank—Foundation S.P.A.C.E.—INEKO, *Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic* (Bratislava: LUKA, 2002).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter began by examining the position of the Roma within the political, socioeconomic and cultural world of Slovak society after the collapse of the communist regime. What has been discovered is that the Roma are marginalized in all facets of society, facing prejudicial attitudes that contribute to limiting their ability to participate in Slovak society. Under the communist regime, racism toward ethnic minorities was held in check. After the collapse of the socialist government there were new freedoms most had never experienced including the right to express openly their pejorative feelings toward the Roma.

The inability of the Roma to politically organize their cause hindered the potential for addressing inequalities within the new Czechoslovakian government. There were few Romani activists who were capable and had the educational skills to articulate clearly the needs of the Romani people. Those who were capable of leading either abandoned their Romani ethnicity or sought personal gain at the expense of the Romani people as a whole. Forty-four different Romani organizations existed in Czechoslovakia at the time Marxism collapsed. Each had its own agenda and many refused to cooperate with the others. Thus, they failed to present a united front regarding the needs of the Roma. As a result, the Romani cause was lost in the struggle for freedom from communist oppression and the subsequent formation of a democratic Czechoslovakia.

When Czechoslovakia split into two countries, beginning in 1993, the Roma of Slovakia found themselves in an even worse situation. Mečiar, the first prime minister of Slovakia, had little respect for them. He considered the Hungarians and the Roma to be enemies of the state and showed interest in them only when it was to his personal political advantage. It was not until Mikulaš Dzurinda became prime minister that change began to take place for the Roma. The transformation in policy was precipitated by pressure being put upon the Slovak government by the EU, the Council of Europe, and various NGOs, rather than by the Roma themselves.

Socioeconomically the Roma have been marginalized in all sectors—housing, education, employment, and health care. For many Roma their living standards are below those of the majority of non-Roma in Slovakia. There are still over 1,500 Romani settlements, segregating the Roma from the main society of Slovakia.

Educationally the Roma are marginalized by the pedagogy system. There has been no standard program to address the problem of Romani children who lack the Slovak language skills to succeed in school. Instead, the Slovak educational system treats these children as if they are mentally retarded by placing them in special schools for the handicapped. Another factor that affects the education of Romani children is the view by many of their parents that attending school is unimportant.

The lack of education directly affects the employability of the Roma. Many jobs are unattainable for the Roma since they are not able to acquire the needed technical training because of their lack of scholarly preparation. The Roma often face discriminatory hiring practices even when they are as qualified as non-Romani applicants. Thus, many of the Roma are supported by the Slovak welfare system and have developed a culture of poverty mentality.

The Roma are marginalized regarding health care as well, though there are no accurate statistics to prove this. The Slovak Constitution guarantees equal access to health care for all, yet this did not keep some doctors from sterilizing Romani women without their consent or denying the Roma services.

The structure of the Romani culture is based on collectivism as opposed to individualism. Their collectivism is expressed in their strong tribal and family ties. The traditional Romani family unit is based upon a tribal mentality, which is led by one dominant male figure or patriarch. However, there is a shift among young Roma towards a more contemporary family unit, which is smaller. A major reason for this shift has been the forced mixing of the various Romani tribes that first began with the communist regime. This explains why around 60 percent of the Roma in Slovakia are not segregated but live among the non-Roma.

The Roma are often viewed by non-Roma in stereotypical ways. They picture all Roma as lazy troublemakers who abuse the welfare system. While these statements are true of some Roma, they are not true of all Roma.

In the past exclusion and assimilation have been the accepted solutions to the Romani issue by those governing the Slovak region. The Habsburgs were the first to try assimilating the Roma into the existing society, but they failed as did the communist government of Czechoslovakia. Their attempts can best be described as forced assimilation. The Nazis tried exclusion in the form of ethnic cleansing but were unsuccessful. Various forms of exclusion were also tried by the Habsburgs and the communist regime—political exclusion, socioeconomic

exclusion, and cultural exclusion. After the fall of communism, the Roma certainly felt excluded from all aspects of Slovak society.

In searching for a new solution to the Romani situation in post-EU Slovakia, several plans have emerged. The most impractical approach is the proposal of creating a European Romani nation. This idea is unworkable for several logistical reasons. First, there would be an immense problem finding a location for such a nation to exist; second, there is the improbability of all European Roma leaving their present homes to relocate together in one place; and finally, there is the presumed inability of the various Romani groups to unify under one new government of their own.

The concept of multiculturalism that was posited by Bezáková and Lajčáková suggests the creation of an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding between the Roma and non-Roma of Slovakia. Equality would be achieved by the Roma having equal access to the political process, equal right to socioeconomic status, and equal right to practice their social structure. A foundational necessity of multiculturalism would require a complete re-education of both the Romani population and the non-Romani so that there is mutual understanding and an acceptance of their differences. Bezáková and Lajčáková believe that Slovakia can learn from those countries that have adopted multiculturalism (the United States and Western Europe). By evaluating the successes and failures of these countries, it is believed that Slovakia can become a multicultural nation faster than others have done. While a multicultural approach to the Romani situation in Slovakia has favorable possibilities, speeding up the process is very unlikely. The re-education of Roma and non-Roma will take several generations before changes are complete.

Inclusion and multiculturalism is virtually the same thing. The term inclusion, however, implies the concept of membership or belonging.¹⁷⁹ This seems to paint a more acceptable mental image than the word multiculturalism. The reality of inclusion means that there must be a willingness on the part of the various ethnic groups to embrace each other's cultures. In the 1991 and 2001 census only 20 percent of the Roma identified with Romani ethnicity; the rest

¹⁷⁹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "inclusion."

claimed Slovak or Hungarian nationality.¹⁸⁰ It would seem from these census statistics that the majority of Roma already identify themselves as members of the Slovak society. This should be viewed as a positive step. Another positive step forward is that the Slovak government seems to have accepted the fact that Roma are being marginalized within the Slovak context. The next needed step is for the non-Romani Slovaks to realize the same thing. However, it would be unrealistic to expect all non-Roma to have an immediate change of attitude toward the Roma. The keys for inclusion to become a reality have been articulated by many: re-education on the part of all ethnic groups (change in attitude), the prevention of marginalizing practices toward minorities, and a need for equal opportunities in all sectors of society.

One of the sectors of Slovak society that must participate in the implementation of inclusion is the church. In chapters 4 and 5 this study examines the relationship between the Roma and selected churches.

¹⁸⁰ Uherek, "The Ethnic Identity of the Roma" in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 76. The Roma who claim Slovak nationality (85 percent) is much larger than those who claim Hungarian nationality (around 5 percent).

4 RELIGIOSITY OF THE ROMANI PEOPLE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVAKIA

4.1 Introduction

The thesis of this disquisition posits that Christianity has the potential to challenge traditional Romani religiosity and bring about a change from syncretistic faith to non-syncretistic faith thus reducing the prejudicial marginalization of the Roma. A description of traditional Romani religiosity and how non-syncretistic Christianity can affect this traditional belief is presented. This chapter divides Romani religiosity into two categories: religiosity prior to encountering the Christian faith and religiosity after encountering the Christian faith. The pre-Christian category has two distinct aspects: pre-Christian influences and traditional beliefs.¹ The post Christian category is divided into three areas: general characteristics, levels of influence, and levels of faith. The preliminary research question regarding the reality of Romani religiosity is answered, as is the question of how Christianity has impacted Romani spirituality. There is also a segment of the Roma of Slovakia that is becoming secularized. This is briefly discussed at the end of the chapter.

4.2 Religiosity Prior to the Encounter with the Christian Faith

This section examines the present Romani beliefs that are non-Christian and compares them with potential influences from their past. It is an assumption of this study that the origin of the Roma of Slovakia was India and that any pre-Christian religiosity was affected by a number of traditional Indian religions. It is further assumed that various other beliefs encountered by the Roma on their migration into Europe have also had an influence upon them.

Pre-Christian Influences

The Roma originally lived in the Hindu regions of India and were influenced by the teachings of Hinduism. Richard R. Losch suggests that Hinduism is a combination of a number of beliefs and traditions of different ethnic and tribal

¹ Pre-Christian influence refers to indicators from other religions (non-Christian) that are evident within Romani religiosity. Traditional beliefs refer to the belief system of the Roma prior to their encounter with Christianity.

groups found in India. He states, "Since similar beliefs and traditions generally pervade all of these groups, the syncretism of their religions is commonly referred to as Hinduism."² Stephen Evans agrees with Losch, stating, "Hinduism is more a group of religious traditions than a single religious faith."³ This combining of beliefs has been identified by Milan Kováč and Milan Jurík as a religious characteristic of the Roma who live today in Slovakia. They refer to this syncretistic phenomenon as *viacúrovňová viera* (multi-faith level),⁴ stating:

The Roma easily modify or completely change their faith according to the current efforts of the new missionaries...Roma "converts" thus often do not give up their original (also new, but at least earlier) confession completely. And so a multilevel form of faith occurs with the Roma...⁵

The Romani propensity to be syncretistic is very similar to the Hindu practice of combining religious traditions. A logical assumption to make is that the Romani practice of syncretism was influenced by Hindu syncretism. This combining of various religious beliefs is a major factor in the development of Romani pre-Christian religiosity.

An argument that appears to support such a hypothesis is the similarity that exists in the Roma and Hindu expression for God. The Romani word for God, *Devel*,⁶ is very similar to the Hindu name for gods, *Devas*.⁷ Another similarity is the Romani preference of worshipping at home in a familial setting rather than in the larger group setting of a church. In most Romani homes, there is a shrine or specific location where families have placed the items they possess which are connected to their belief system. It is here that they worship or call out for help.⁸ This is similar to the Hindu concept of worship, where "God is worshiped more domestically than publicly."⁹

² Richard R. Losch, *The Many Faces of Faith: A Guide to World Religions and Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 3.

³ C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 54.

⁴ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Other words used by Roma for God are *Devla*, *Del*, and *O Del*.

⁷ David Burnett, *The Spirit of Hinduism* (Tunbridge Wells, England: Monarch Publications, 1992), 44.

⁸ This phenomenon was observed by the author on numerous visits to Romani settlements.

⁹ George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, eds., *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 121.

While these similarities are observable, there are a number of dissimilarities between traditional Romani beliefs and Hinduism that would suggest a limited influence. Though the Romani and Hindu name for the deity is similar, the Romani concept of God varies from the Hindu concept. The Hindu *Devas* does not refer to a single god, but to many gods who have syncretistically been connected into the Hindu faith. However, the Romani *Devel* refers not to multiple gods, but to one supreme deity. This is one area where the Roma seem to have rejected the syncretistic mindset and adopted a faith that is closely related to the Christian understanding of God.

Hinduism embraces monotheism but only in conjunction with monism, believing that all reality comes from one essence.¹⁰ Daniel Mišina writes that the traditional Romani belief rejects this Hindu concept and holds to a combination of dualistic and animistic beliefs.¹¹ Dualism is defined as "any philosophical theory that posits two distinct primary substances or that is built around a fundamental distinction between two elements."¹² In the Romani case, the distinction is between good and evil. Milan Kováč and Arne Mann observed that the Roma adopted dualism while in Persia, which is where they first migrated after leaving India. They believe that the Roma were influenced by "Manichaeistic dualism, which radically divides the world between the forces of Good and Evil."¹³ The forces of good are found in the Romani *Devel*, who fights against the forces of evil or *Beng* (the devil). Thus, *Devel* encompasses all that is good, while *Beng* represents everything that is considered evil. The everlasting battle between good and evil is seen by the Roma as perpetual, with good always winning. This

¹⁰ Ibid., 119. Monotheism is not a term exclusive to Hinduism. Christian theology uses the term to express "the belief that there is one God and only one God." Terry L. Miethe, *The Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 140. The Hindu usage is always coupled together with monism which Evans defines as "the metaphysical view that reality is fundamentally one." Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 77. He continues to explain that from the Hindu viewpoint the oneness is more a matter of appearance than reality. Augustus H. Strong in his *Systematic Theology* uses the term monism, but as an ethical monism. He defines ethical monism as "that method of thought which holds to a single substance, ground, or principle of being, namely, God, but which also holds to the ethical facts of God's transcendence as well as his immanence, and of God's personality as distinct from, and as guaranteeing, the personality of man." Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1969), 105.

¹¹ Mišina, "Rómovia," 39-40.

¹² Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 36.

¹³ Milan Kováč, and Arne B. Mann, "Rómovia a viera" (The Romanies and religious faith), in *Boh všetko vidí*, eds. Milan Kováč, and Arne B. Mann (Bratislava: Chronos Publishing, 2003), 330.

concept of good versus evil, however, is foreign to Hinduism. According to Hindu belief, "The distinction between good and evil is denied."¹⁴ Good and bad things that happen to people are supposedly determined by their actions or inclinations. This experience is called *karma*. Furthermore, the good or bad that is encountered often is the result of a previous life or existence.

This Hindu assumption is based on the concept of reincarnation, which is animistic in nature and implies that everything has a soul or spirit. The Hindu reincarnation concept of animism teaches that "a soul, at the death of the physical body or state of material existence, does not enter into a final state, but reenters the cycle of rebirth."¹⁵ The Romani view rejects the idea of reincarnation and regards animism as "a perspective on the world that sees spiritual powers or forces as residing in and controlling all of the natural world."¹⁶ Romani animism is expressed in the icons, amulets, and talismans that dominate the shrines found in their homes.

Similarly, death offers a difference of belief between Hinduism and Romani beliefs. Death for the Hindu means that a person will reenter the world again in another state. For the Roma, death means that a person will eventually go to heaven and that life there will be "a continuation of life on earth."¹⁷ However, according to Romani beliefs, heaven is different from the earthly life in that it is free of discrimination and a place where there is always enough to eat and drink.¹⁸

While the Roma reject the idea of reincarnation, they do believe in *muló*. This is the belief that dead people can "appear to settle accounts with someone, because [he or she] is missing something in the next world, because [he or she] disapproves of the behavior of survivors, but also to warn a dear survivor of a threat of danger."¹⁹ A *muló* can return unseen as a spirit or can appear as a human or an animal (usually as dogs, cats, birds or butterflies).²⁰ This concept is further developed into what the Roma call *muls*, which is the belief that the dead can come back and harm or haunt their living relatives.²¹ To prevent this, certain

¹⁴ Mather, *Dictionary of Cults*, 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁶ Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 10.

¹⁷ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Milena Hübschmannová, "Mulo," Rombase, <http://romani.uni-gaz.at/rombase>. (Accessed 6 June 2008)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Jana Ľaliková, interview by author, Slavošovce, Slovakia, 11 April 2005, written notes.

actions must be taken by the living family members from the moment a person dies. "All the things the dead person used during their life (e.g. cigarettes, a pipe, alcohol) are placed into the coffin."²² This is done so that the deceased person will find happiness in the afterlife and not return to harm them. The belief of *muló* and *muls* may have been influenced by the concept of reincarnation, but there is no concrete evidence.

The Romani belief in the existence of *bibaxt*, which literally translated means bad luck, parallels the Gnostic idea of an evil that sits juxtaposed to God.²³ It is assumed that Gnosticism came into existence as a deviant of Christianity, but actually, it was a concept that existed prior to Christ's birth. It has been connected to the "dualism of Iranian religion" and the "allegorical idealism of the Middle Platonic philosophers."²⁴ Thus, the Romani concept of *bibaxt* could have come from Persian influences.

There is more evidence of disparity between Romani beliefs and Hinduism than similarities. On the one hand, this disparity may suggest that the Hindu religion's influence on Romani pre-Christian religiosity was minimal. On the other hand, this could suggest that the influence of Christianity was such that it caused Romani religiosity to reject much of Hinduism in favor of Christianity. Further research in this area is needed.

Traditional Beliefs

The Romani belief in animism can be observed in the Roma's view of the spirit world. There are a number of spirits that they have identified as being part of their culture. Some of them are considered good spirits and some are bad spirits. One of the good spirits is *Butyakengo*, a "protective spirit who lives in a person's body and . . . forms a part of a deceased ancestor. It is transferred from the father and mother to the eldest son or daughter."²⁵ Similar to the *Butyakengo* is a good spirit that exists outside of the human body. One example of this kind of spirit is *Djana*, a spirit/fairy, who is thought to wander in the forest near Krásnohorské Podhradie

²² Mišina, "Rómovia," 24. In addition to the items mentioned by Mišina food items or a person's favorite objects can be placed in the coffin.

²³ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1992 ed, s.v. "Gnosticism." See also Mather, *Dictionary of Cults*, 111.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Micha Lindemans, "Butyakengo," *Encyclopedia Mythica*, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/b/butyakengo.html> (accessed 1 July 2008).

in eastern Slovakia. She protects the Roma from evil when they walk in the woods.²⁶

The Romani practice of using good luck charms, amulets, talismans, curses, and healing rituals are by their very nature animistic. Interconnected to these is the Romani concept of magic, both white and black. Magic is used by the Roma to "ward off illnesses or to help with problems of love."²⁷ Magic spells and enchantments are used to keep Roma safe. Such magic acts are thought to overcome a variety of superstitious beliefs. In addition to magic spells, specific actions such as the following are taken to ensure personal safety: "when a baby is born, [the baby] must wear [his or her] clothes inside-out—to keep [the baby] safe from evil spirits and sickness;"²⁸ parents place "scissors and needles around their babies to keep the evil spirits away."²⁹

A number of other beliefs are an important part of Romani traditional religiosity and have been carried into present-day Romani lifestyle. One such belief is seen in the Romani word *Romanipe*—Roma-ness. This is the idea of keeping outsiders, *Gadje*, from entering the Romani world. Included in *Romanipe* are specific purity codes and taboos against anything that might pollute their culture.

An example of purity codes and taboos can be seen in the relationship between men and women. A woman is not to speak to another man unless her husband is with her. If she does, she can be accused of infidelity. Women are seen as subordinate to men in the Romani culture. A violation of these codes means a person will be brought to the *kris* (community court) and if found guilty she can become *mahrimé*³⁰ (excommunicated) from the community.³¹ Romani purity taboos are geared more toward women than men. Women who are menstruating are considered "dirty or polluted" below the waist and must wear long skirts, "the bottom of which must not touch a man other than her husband."³²

²⁶ Anna Lesňáková, interview by author, Rožňava, Slovakia, 11 April 2005, written notes.

²⁷ Mišina, "Rómovia," 27.

²⁸ Lesňáková, interview, 11 April 2005.

²⁹ Holubová, interview, 20 April 2005.

³⁰ Milena Hübschmannová, "Roma—Sub Ethnic Groups," Rombase, <http://romani.uni.at/rombase> (accessed 6 June 2008).

³¹ Milena Hübschmannová, "Vlach-Roma (Vlachi) in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia," Rombase, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 6 June 2008).

³² Ibid.

Another superstition historically found in the Romani culture is the practice of "giving someone the evil eye."³³ When someone has a headache, it is believed by some Roma that it is the result of someone who gave him the evil eye. To find out if this is true, Roma light a match then drop it into standing water. If the match floats, it is just a natural headache, but if the match sinks, they believe that someone has given the sufferer the evil eye. That person must say a specific incantation or cast a new spell in order for the headache to go away.³⁴ Such uses of oaths and curses began in Romani culture prior to their exposure to Christianity but are still often used today.³⁵

The pre-Christian influences of Hinduism, Manichaeistic dualism, and Gnosticism, which they encountered in India, the Middle East and during their travels to Europe, all contributed to the formation of traditional Romani religiosity. It is clear that syncretism is a major component of traditional Romani beliefs and continues to be part of the spiritual identity.

4.3 Encounter with the Christian Faith

Christianity has strongly influenced the Roma of Slovakia. Most likely their first encounter with Christianity took place in Persia or shortly after beginning their western migration toward Europe. Unfortunately, there is little historical evidence of the church reaching out with specificity to the Romani people during this time period (approximately 750 C.E. to 1300 C.E.).

Kenrick argues that the Roma began arriving in Armenia "about the year 750."³⁶ Soon after their arrival, the religious schism between the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church began. One of the major issues of the schism was over the use of icons, which the Roman church wanted forbidden, but the Orthodox Church insisted on keeping. If the time frame that Kenrick suggests is correct, the Roma would have been under the Orthodox influence of icon worship for over 500 years. The puissance of the Byzantine Church influence can be seen in most Romani homes today where shrines of icons are often erected in places of honor.

³³ Duna, 12 April 2005, written notes.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mišina, "Romovia," 25. For example, "the most frequent oath among the Roma is the oath concerning marriage faithfulness." If a wife is thought to have been unfaithful she must swear an oath of faithfulness "in a graveyard, by a cross, or in a church."

³⁶ Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*, 41.

There appears to be some evidence of an effort made by the Orthodox Byzantine church to establish a relationship between the Roma, the *Atsiganoi*, and the Paulicians.³⁷ The connection between the Roma and the *Atsiganoi* is identified by Kováč and Mann, who make the observation that the Persian Manichaeism influence, which first impacted the Roma during their stay in Persia, continued into the eleventh century when the Roma were living under the Byzantine Empire.³⁸ They write, "our knowledge is based on information in records from that period referring to them [Roma] as *Atsiganoi*....this Greek word was used for describing the worshippers of Manichaeism."³⁹ Their contention is that the Slovak word *Cigáni*,⁴⁰ which is the name used by many non-Roma for the Roma in general, comes from the Greek word *Atsiganoi*⁴¹ and thus proves that the Romani dualistic dogma comes from Manichaeism.

Milena Hübschmannová makes the same connection but adds the influence of the Paulicians to the mix. She writes:

The Orthodox Byzantine church considered the "Paulicians" to be heretical because they recognized the dualistic Manichaeist faith...The Paulicians, like the "Athingani", belonged to the lowest orders of society. No mention has been found of the particular religion of the "Athingani", but it was written that they performed magic and that their style of living was different from that of "normal" Byzantines.⁴²

Hübschmannová states that it is certain the term *Atsiganoi* or *Athingani* is referring to the Roma, but there is no clear evidence found in the Byzantine documents that directly connect the *Atsiganoi* with the Roma in Slovakia.⁴³ Even

³⁷ The Paulicians were a Christian heretical sect that came into existence in Armenia during the sixth century. Some connect it to Nestorianism. Its followers rejected the sacraments but placed great importance on baptism. They were iconoclasts who rejected asceticism in its extreme forms.

³⁸ Kováč, "Rómovia a viera," 330. See also Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*, 39.

³⁹ Ibid., 329-30. *Atsiganoi* or *Athingani* is still used today in modern Greek of upper class Roma.

⁴⁰ *Cigáni* is the plural form of *Cigán*. The verb form is *cigánit'* and means to lie, or to deceive.

⁴¹ Milena Hübschmannová, "Roma—Sub Ethnic Groups," Rombase, <http://romani.uni-graz.at/rombase> (accessed 6 June 2008). "There are various opinions about the etymology of the word 'Athingani.' The prevailing explanation is that the term is taken from the root Greek word meaning 'touch' and the negative prefix 'a.' Thus *athingani* must mean 'someone whom we do not touch'—or the reverse: 'someone who does not touch (others).'" In Western Europe Athingani means 'untouchable.'

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

with this uncertainty, it seems obvious that the Roma of Slovakia were influenced by Byzantine icon worship.

The Romani peregrination from India to Europe exposed them to many different religions. Their syncretistic lifestyle ensured that they would arrive in Europe with a spirituality that reflected their journey, and while it is not as easy to track as the linguistic trail, it nevertheless gives compelling evidence of their journey.

Since their arrival in the Slovak region, no records of the church targeting the Roma through missionary programs or outreach activities prior to 1989 have been discovered. Yet the majority of the Roma consider themselves to be Christians and specifically Roman Catholic, which is the dominant church in Slovakia. Zoltan Barany makes an interesting observation regarding the syncretistic mindset of the Roma: "They have adopted the religions of the dominant groups in their environment. Thus, most Roma in Croatia are Roman Catholic, in Bosnia they are Muslim, and in Serbia they are Orthodox Christians."⁴⁴ In the next section we will explore more fully Barany's observation. Since the fall of communism, different groups have attempted missionary work among the Roma. However, most of this activity comes from North American and Western European religious groups rather than from existing churches in Slovakia.

4.4 Romani Christianity

There is a wide spectrum of thought regarding how Romani Christianity should be defined. One end of the spectrum describes Romani Christianity as following religious tradition passed from generation to generation and where church membership equals salvation. By contrast, the other end of the spectrum defines salvation within the context of having a personal relationship with God. Between these two ends are a number of other concepts describing Romani Christianity.

This examination of Romani Christianity begins with a look at general characteristics that are similar to all Roma. Individual spirituality is then discussed in comparison to traditional collectivism. The last part of this section then brings into focus all of the various elements of Romani Christianity and subsequently shows how these characteristics are interrelated by identifying different levels of faith by which the Roma express their spirituality.

⁴⁴ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 14. See also Konrad Bercovici, *The Story of the Gypsies* (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1928).

4.4.1 Characteristics

A few anthropological observations of the Romani culture reveal inclinations that are expressed in the Roma's religious behavior. These cultural propensities reveal some variances between non-Romani culture and Romani culture. They include the Roma's emotive expressions, their understanding of the future, their view of time and spontaneity, and their respect for religious leaders.

Being demonstrative has often been the cause of misunderstanding between the Romani and the non-Romani population of Slovakia. This is especially evident within the context of liturgical gatherings where the Roma often respond verbally in a way that seems inappropriate and offensive to the non-Roma participants.⁴⁵ Pavel Zsolnai explained it this way, "You never have to guess how a Rom feels about something because they will let you know by their actions."⁴⁶

The preferred mode of communication for most Roma is in the form of storytelling. Their stories are often dramatic and colorful in their presentation. Because of this the Roma prefer church meetings where stories are used to convey religious truths. They especially are attracted to the parables of Christ.⁴⁷

The emotive music of the Romani people is also a reflection of how expressive their culture is. Most often Romani songs are stories being told through the medium of music. The melodic tunes grab the listener's heart, and soon the listener is emotionally involved in the story. The Roma have written many songs to express their Christian beliefs. Laco Duna, ACS Romani pastor, who also is a songwriter, uses his songs to reach out to the Roma of Lunik Devät'. "I see the gospel influencing the Roma of Lunik Devät' through music. They like the Christian songs that we sing."⁴⁸

How the Roma view the future is another general characteristic that differs from the non-Roma and which affects their spiritual beliefs. Duna explains that most Roma "live for now, not the future."⁴⁹ He relates the story of a Rom who was hungry and saw a tree with fruit on it. Rather than pick the fruit from the branch, the Rom broke the branches off the tree to get the fruit "giving no thought

⁴⁵ Duna, interview, 6 March 2004; Daniel Mišina, interview by author, Obišovce, Slovakia, 29 October 2004, written notes; Ľubo Behó, interview by author, Rankovce, Slovakia, 4 November 2004, written notes; Františka Ondrášiková, interview by author, Rankovce, Slovakia, 4 November 2004, written notes; and Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005.

⁴⁶ Pavel Zsolnai, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 10 August 2004, written notes.

⁴⁷ Duna, interview, 6 March 2004.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Duna, interview, 15 July 2003.

to the fact that next year there will be no fruit because [he has] destroyed the tree."⁵⁰ The Roma's lack of understanding of the future and their living for the "now" makes such biblical concepts as heaven and eternal life difficult for them to comprehend. They must understand these concepts within the framework of their daily existence; thus, heaven and life after death become an extension of their present life. This often contributes to their rather nominal approach to Christianity.

The Romani concept of time is quite flexible and indefinite. They refuse to be ruled by the clock and consequently place little importance in being on time for events or appointments.⁵¹ This can cause the non-Roma to have antagonistic feelings against the Roma when they arrive late to church activities or leave before a service is finished.⁵²

Spontaneity is still another characteristic that is typical of the Roma. This trait is most often observed among the Christian Roma by the way they react during church services. One native Slovak puts it this way, "Roma people enjoy responding to their faith during the gathering of the believing community...responding to the preaching."⁵³ This is often done by speaking out in response to something that is said. While this can be interpreted by non-Roma as an interruption, the Roma see this as a normal reaction.

Closely related to this penchant for spontaneity is the mystical approach most Roma have toward religion. They tend to seek a paranormal experience in their relationship with God through signs, miracles and healings. The syncretistic practice of mixing superstition and occult behavior with Christian beliefs is one indicator of this phenomenon. Another, which is not syncretic in nature, has been mentioned by Jozef Brenkus who observes, "It seems that the closest spirituality for [the Roma] is Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality."⁵⁴ This is expressed in the various operations of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the Bible,⁵⁵ which include miracles and healings.

Respect for spiritual authority is another important characteristic of Romani Christianity. "It is possible to tell that Romani people pay respect to the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004.

⁵² Ján Liba, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 15 July 2003, written notes.

⁵³ Jozef Brenkus, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, 25 June 2005, email.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12 and 14; and Galatians 5.

officially appointed clergy...especially when they are to provide sacraments such as baptism, unction, or burial."⁵⁶ By their showing respect for those in spiritual authority, the Roma believe that the local priest will then feel obligated to provide the Roma the sacraments. This in turn gives them an assurance regarding their acceptance before God.

4.4.2 Influences

The nature of Romani religiosity has been influenced by many forces over the years. This study identifies the major influences on the Roma since 1989 and how these influences have helped or hindered the impact of Christianity upon Romani spirituality. The specific influences examined are regional influences, tribal/familial influences, and acceptance influences. While the context of this study is primarily Christian in nature, the patterns of influence that will be discussed may be much the same where other forms of religiosity predominate.

*Regional Influences*⁵⁷

The idea of the Roma adopting the dominant regional religion of the country or location where they live has already been discussed in the pre-Christian religiosity section of this chapter (4.2 Religiosity Prior to the Encounter with the Christian Faith). Statistics show that the majority of Slovaks are considered to be Roman Catholic (68.93 percent).⁵⁸ There are no figures available that disclose accurately the religious preferences of various ethnic groups; however, this study has discovered that the Roma of Slovakia mirror the general population in their religious preference, with the vast majority being Roman Catholic. This would confirm Zoltan Barany's theory that the Roma have taken on the accepted religious choice of the majority of the population of the region in which they live.⁵⁹

By contrast to the dominant RCC influence found in most regions of Slovakia, the Roma in a valley west of Rožňava are predominantly ECAV. In this valley, where the towns of Čierna Lehota, Slavošovce, Rochovce, and Ochtiná are located, the ECAV outnumber the RCC. Because of this, the majority of people in

⁵⁶ Brenkus, interview, 25 June 2005.

⁵⁷ The term "regional influence" refers to the various pressures that are put upon a minority people group by the majority people group/s to conform to regional norms.

⁵⁸ Doug Stoner, ed., *Prieskumný projekt o stave cirkví v SR roku 2003* (Research project on the state of the Slovak churches 2003), CD-ROM (Košice, Slovakia: ETC Grafo, 2003), 10.

⁵⁹ Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, 14. See also Bercovici, *The Story of the Gypsies*, 13-4.

this valley are Lutheran. It is no surprise that the majority of Roma in this region are ECAV as well.⁶⁰

The influences of the dominant religion or denomination within a region, though, is often more in name than in practice. Because a majority of Roma approach their spirituality from a syncretistic perspective, strict adherence to a specific faith is not possible. Only certain aspects of the dominant religion which the Roma believe to be important are openly practiced, e.g., child baptism, last rites, and in some instances first communion.⁶¹

The dominant religion is adopted for several reasons. First, the Roma want to blend in with the rest of society. Though some would say this reason is debatable, the fact remains that the Roma, just like all the other persons in a society, desire acceptance by the majority. A second reason the Roma seek to accept the dominant religion has to do with fear. Most of the superstitions which control the Roma are driven by fear. They are afraid of evil spirits, ghosts, or other supernatural beings, specifically when these affect their children and deceased family members.⁶² Thus, their adoption of local religious customs is largely qualified by their desire to make sure they have done everything possible to protect their children and their families from sorrow and any threat of danger. In daily life, however, they are controlled more by their traditions of the past than by the dominant local religion. This is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the Roma rarely attend church services and seldom participate in church activities other than those which directly affect the well-being of their family.⁶³

Tribal/Familial Influences

A second important influence in Romani society is found within the context of group dynamics, e.g., tribal and familial. The first Romani settlements in Europe were characterized as being a close-knit group that resisted outside influence by marrying only within that settlement's tribe. Traditionally, Roma have always been very cohesive in all aspects of life. But the tribal collectivism that, in the past, set the cultural and religious standards is no longer as influential as it once was. One of the contributing factors for this change in recent years is the mixing

⁶⁰ Ondrej Vaško, interview by author, Rožňava, Slovakia, 11 April 2005, written notes; Laco Tomi, interview by author, Slavošovce, Slovakia, 11 April 2005, written notes; Ealíková, interview, 11 April 2005.

⁶¹ Michal Tausk, interview by author, Ružomberok, Slovakia, 14 February 2004, written notes.

⁶² Mišina, "Romovia," 28-31.

⁶³ Tomčany, interview, 17 March 2004.

of the various Romani groups in settlements and housing projects.⁶⁴ This integration of the various Romani tribes was first attempted under the Habsburg Empire in an effort to assimilate the Roma into the general population. The communists also undertook assimilation, forcing many of the Romani groups to co-exist. Following the fall of Marxism in 1989, most of the Roma have continued to live in these co-existing situations. This has led to the fragmentation of the larger tribal community influence and the increase in familial influence.

Zdeněk Uherek and Karel Novák note that "the Roma have preserved the extended family as the basic unit of identification" instead of the Romani tribe.⁶⁵ The extended family defined by Eva Dávidová in the 1960's was a "married couple, the father's parents and siblings, the children of the married couple, the families of their sons and their children, and sometimes also more distant relatives."⁶⁶ Today, research shows that the scope of family influence has narrowed even more.⁶⁷ In many instances, the extended family consists of male siblings and their wives and children living together either in the same house or next door to each other. In other instances, the influence of the extended family is superseded by the immediate family: husband, wife, and their children.

Religious decisions in the Romani culture are generally not made from an individualistic perspective, but rather from a collective perspective within the community/familial structure. David J. Hesselgrave writes that "family loyalty, brotherly responsibility, self-denial, and submission to others" is more important than the individual's rights in a collective system.⁶⁸ Donald A. McGavran suggests that in much of the world, decisions about spirituality are not made individually but corporately as a community or people group.⁶⁹ This describes accurately the Romani system of determining their religiosity. In those cases when a person

⁶⁴ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004, and Duna, interview, 12 April 2005.

⁶⁵ Uherek, "The Ethnic Identity of the Roma," in *Čačipen pal o Rom*, 82.

⁶⁶ Eva Dávidová, *Bez kolíb a šiatrov* (Without Sheds and Tents) (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1965), quoted in Uherek, "The Ethnic Identity of the Roma," 82.

⁶⁷ Kumanová, "The Roma Family," in *Čačipen pal o Roma*, 321-2.

⁶⁸ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Academia Books, 1978), 439.

⁶⁹ Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, rev. ed. (New York: Friendship Press, 1981), 324-5. McGavran discusses the contrast between the Western mindset of missions that is intrinsically individualistic and the mission mindset that is people-group oriented. The former evangelizes in a one-on-one environment, whereas the latter evangelizes an entire people group. McGavran's missionary experience was in India where cultures function collectively. He notes that most missions groups come from a Western individualistic mentality and as such find it difficult to reach people who are group-oriented.

stops identifying himself with the dominant denomination of a region and begins associating with another, this change in identification will normally be done corporately rather than individually.

The leadership style that seems to have the largest influence upon Roma is within the familial structure. When a family leader has a religious experience, he or she can have a great impact upon the religiosity of his or her entire family. In one way, this strong familial leadership role would seem to contradict the collective decision process that is dominant in Romani culture. However, Charles Kraft indicates that even a strong leader must function within the boundaries that the culture places around the behavior of individuals.⁷⁰ These boundaries provide some decision-making options that each individual within a group can make. As an individual, or in this case a family leader, makes a decision, he feels "either pressured or pulled (enticed) to behave in certain ways" by the dynamics of the group.⁷¹ Thus, such a decision by the familial leader would have been thoroughly discussed before the leader made such an important decision, and the decision would fit within the cultural norms of the group.

An example of this can be observed in the case of the Štajer family. In this situation, the family stopped attending the RCC and began identifying with the ACS. The family consisted of a married couple and their two sons. Gejza, the husband, was the first of his family to attend a different denomination other than the RCC. His decision was not considered individualistic by his family, but as a collective decision in which the entire family participated, although his decision to those outside their family unit appeared to have been made individually. This collective decision had a further impact on extended family members who began to attend the ACS church after observing the level of acceptance extended toward the Štajer family.⁷²

An interesting case of tribal/familial collectivism was observed in Lunik Devät', near Košice, where Laco Duna is looked upon by many Romani men as a spiritual authority. To onlookers it might seem that Duna has been able to influence others outside of the collectivism paradigm. However, upon close examination, the opposite is true. His personal decision to serve God was made

⁷⁰ Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, 148-63.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷² To assume from this statement that all ACS churches are accepting of Roma would be an overstatement. The ACS approach of acceptance or rejection regarding the Roma will be discussed fully in the next chapter.

within the collective context of his immediate family.⁷³ He attended the local Bible school at the ACS in Košice and eventually joined the pastoral staff of that church. During this entire time span, his neighbors and peers in Lunik Devät' were observing his personal and family life. They saw the significant changes that took place, resulting in his becoming a person of influence in the Lunik Devät' community. Štefan Krok, Róbert Gaži, Roman Balog, and Ján Berko all testified to how Duna influenced their decision to change their spirituality and leave a lifestyle of alcoholism and gambling. These men now attend church regularly and as a result of Duna's influence have significantly improved their family relationships and work life.⁷⁴ It is important to note, though, that each of these men did not make the decision to follow Duna's example on their own. In each case it was a collective decision made within each man's family. In each instance, the wife along with her husband made a corporate decision to change.

Acceptance Influences

The term acceptance as used in this study refers to the concept of approval that is demonstrated in actions taken and in attitudes expressed. Kováč and Jurík observe that "the success of the missionaries among the Roma is usually not connected with the denomination that comes to the Roma settlement, but with the interest and care the missionaries devote to the Roma."⁷⁵ The success of such efforts has resulted in many Roma rejecting past religious preferences and adopting new ones. At the heart of this shift is the influence of acceptance.

From the stories/myths the Roma tell regarding their past, they evidently feel, and always have felt, unaccepted and at odds with their creator.⁷⁶ The desire to be accepted by their god is a universal phenomenon that is true of all religious people groups, including the Roma. Thus when acceptance and care is demonstrated by non-Romani ministers and missionaries, the result is that the

⁷³ Duna, interview, 15 July 2003. At the time of his decision his immediate family included only his wife and his oldest son who was an infant at the time.

⁷⁴ Štefan Krok, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 April 2005, written notes; Róbert Gaži, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 April 2005, written notes; Roman Balog, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 April 2005, written notes; Ján Berko, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 April 2005, written notes.

⁷⁵ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100.

⁷⁶ One such story is that of a Romani blacksmith who was the one who forged the nails used when Jesus was crucified. The legend concludes that because of this the Romani people have been rejected by God. See Clébert, *The Gypsies*, 23-31; Jean-Pierre Liégeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1986), 18-22.

Roma feel acceptance first by God's messengers and then ultimately by God, which is something most of them have never experienced before.⁷⁷ The feeling of acceptance can cause the Roma to reject their spiritual traditions (syncretistic lifestyle) and make a choice resulting in a conversion experience regarding their relationship with God.

The concept of conversion is generally understood from an individualistic perspective. J. Andrew Kirk suggests that "conversion is a decisive moment of turning from a self-centred life to one centred on God."⁷⁸ David J. Bosch likens conversion to "a change in allegiance in which Christ is accepted as Lord and center of one's life."⁷⁹ While these descriptions of conversion are true within the context of the Western thought process, can the same be said for an environment such as the Roma live in, who make decisions collectively? A description of conversion within a collective system might be better understood as turning from a collective-centered life to a collective God-centered life. But can that truly happen?

Charles H. Kraft gives some insight into this possibility. He states that there are certain "constants in the conversion process."⁸⁰ He lists five such constants of conversion:

1. A conscious allegiance (faith commitment) to God,
2. A dynamic interaction between God and human beings that issues from a person's conscious allegiance to God,
3. Growth or maturation,
4. The need for the conversion-maturation process to take place in community, and
5. The human beings' part of the conversion process is to be in keeping with the culture in which they are immersed.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Jozef Demjan, interview by author, Cinobaňa, Slovakia, 3 September 2005, written notes; Duna, interviews, 6 March 2004 and 12 April 2005; Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005; Vaško, interview, 4 November 2004.

⁷⁸ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2002), 68.

⁷⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 14th ed. (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 488.

⁸⁰ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, reprint 1997), 334.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 334-8.

Constants 4 and 5 suggest a community collectivism aspect to conversion. Actually, there are two different communities that must be considered with new Romani converts. First is the new community of the church where a decision of allegiance to God is made, and the second is the Romani community in which they live on a daily basis. The potential for a struggle between these two communities is real and eventually will affect the process of conversion.⁸² There are three distinct possibilities for the Roma who convert from a traditional faith to a non-syncretistic faith. (1) The Romani community rejects the idea of leaving the traditional syncretistic lifestyle, and the Rom who converted decides to accept the collective decision of his Romani community. (2) The Romani community rejects the idea of leaving the traditional syncretistic lifestyle and the Rom who converted decides to reject the Romani community and become part of the non-syncretistic church community. In this case, the Rom identifies more with the church. On the one hand, it would seem that such a decision would be counter to the collective decision-making mentality of the Rom, but on the other hand, it can be said that the Rom is simply switching from one collective decision-making community to another. (3) The Romani community accepts the non-syncretistic lifestyle and embraces the Rom who converted and the church in which his conversion took place. Several examples of these various possibilities have been observed.

A case that illustrates the first of these possibilities was observed in the village of Tušice, which is located near the eastern Slovak city of Michalovce. Six Romani brothers live in this village with their families in the same settlement. They are the only Roma in the village, and the house where they all live is divided into six parts so that each family has its own space. The daughter of one of the families started attending after-school classes that were taught by a woman from the RKC. At first, the young girl was treated badly by the other students, but the teacher from the RKC took an interest in the Romani girl and began to help her with her homework. Soon, more of the Romani students, cousins of the girl, began to come for tutoring. A Bible club was started for the Romani students, and the mothers of the children came to observe. This led to the local RKC teaching this extended Romani family how to plant potatoes for food. All of the women

⁸² Both Kraft and Kirk state that conversion is not a one-time decision but a process (Kraft) or a series of decisions that need to be made (Kirk). Kirk makes the distinction between regeneration and conversion, stating that "regeneration is certainly a single event in which God brings to birth a new nature within the person who trusts Jesus Christ for salvation. Conversion, however, has both a beginning and many repetitions." Kirk, *What is Mission?*, 68.

and children began to attend the RKC. At the time, the local RKC pastor believed that within a short period of time, the men would begin attending church as well.⁸³

In May 2008, a follow-up interview was done. The RKC pastor, Juraj Brecko, and the after-school teacher, Jarmila Ivanová, were interviewed. While the after-school program has continued as a regular tutoring program for Romani children, the Bible club has ceased and the Roma no longer attend the RKC. The six brothers were skeptical from the beginning regarding the sincerity of the RKC overtures of acceptance. However, when a car of a person working within the Romani settlement was stolen, it was thought by some that the Tušice Roma had been responsible for the theft. Even though it was proved that they were not involved, the six Romani brothers interpreted the situation as a sign of rejection and decided to end their relationship with the local RKC.⁸⁴ The decision to reject the RKC, which was made collectively by the brothers, was accepted by the other family members.

An example of the second possibility is found in the story of Jozef Demjan. He is from the village of Cinobaňa, near Lučenec. Demjan told how he made a personal decision to accept Christ the second time he heard the gospel message. "I was influenced [to accept Christ as my Savior] but the rest of my family did not receive."⁸⁵ Demjan, who at the time was eighteen years old, told how his family and others in the Romani community began to ostracize him because of his acceptance of Christ. He chose to distance himself from his family and friends and their syncretistic style of life and embraced the community of the BJB where he felt acceptance. He stated, "I was looking for relationship, someone who would accept and love me....I found that in Christ."⁸⁶ While his decision might seem to be individualistic rather than collective, he was simply changing communities, from the Romani community that rejected him to the BJB community that accepted him. The collective encouragement from the BJB community was key to his conversion experience.

The third possibility can be seen in the life of Viktor Tomčany, a Rom who is now an RCC priest. He stated that a Roman Catholic priest had made a significant impact upon his life. "My first contact [with the church] was with a

⁸³ Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005.

⁸⁴ Juraj Brecko, interview by author, Tušice, Slovakia, 8 May 2008, written notes; Jarmila Ivanová, interview by author, Tušice, Slovakia, 8 May 2008, written notes.

⁸⁵ Demjan, interview, 3 September 2005.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

priest who helped me [to understand] the truths of the Bible."⁸⁷ Tomčany related how he immediately felt accepted by the priest and the church. At the time, he was ashamed of being a Rom and wanted to distance himself from his heritage. Reading the Bible led him to "a personal relationship with God."⁸⁸ While his decision was an independent choice that was not influenced by his Romani roots, his family accepted his decision and the idea of leaving the traditional syncretistic lifestyle. "The Word of God is the foundation that is needed"⁸⁹ in order for this kind of decision to be made. As the priest revealed to him the truths of the Bible, an interesting thing happened. Tomčany came to "accept his own identity"⁹⁰ as a Rom. Through Christ, he understood the value of his heritage. He admitted that if the priest had not accepted him and shown him God's love, he most likely would not have embraced the truths of the Bible. While Tomčany's decision was made individually, his decision was embraced by his Romani community.

A broader, more community-related conversion can be observed in several other locations. In these situations, while the change from the dominant or heritage religion was initially made in a familial context, the denominational change was eventually accepted by the broader Romani community. Rankovce is an example where the dominant church was rejected. In this instance, though, the Romani community was divided between two new denominations. Half of the Romani settlement chose to identify with the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the other half with the ECAV.⁹¹ In both cases, the people collectively felt rejected by the RCC and collectively found acceptance in the respective churches they now attend.

Many times the principal underlying factor in the collective decision to change is lack of acceptance by the dominant religion and a subsequent acceptance by constituents in the new denomination. When interviewed, Anna Lesňáková, a Romani church worker in Rožňava, spoke of many Roma feeling unwanted in the Catholic Church but finding acceptance in the Christian community of the ACS.⁹² Another example of this lack of acceptance leading to change can be observed in

⁸⁷ Tomčany, interview, 17 March 2004.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Mišina, interview, 29 October 2004.

⁹² Lesňáková, interview, 11 April 2005.

Slavošovce where some of the Roma feel rejection from the ECAV but approval by the ACS.⁹³

The dominant regional churches in Slovakia do not openly encourage a syncretistic spiritual lifestyle, but at the same time, they are doing little to try and stop it. The tribal/familial influence in many cases discourages the abandonment of traditional religiosity and thus hinders the progress of non-syncretistic Christian spirituality among the Romani people. The influence of acceptance by missionaries and churches, in contrast, promotes the conversion decision of individuals and communities and encourages the abandonment of a syncretistic faith lifestyle. In all of these situations collectivism plays a key role in the final decisions that are made. In the next section a description of what a syncretistic faith lifestyle is and how Roma can transition from such a lifestyle to a distinctly Christ-centered faith is discussed.

4.4.3 Faith Levels

This study highlights the fact that not all Roma who label themselves as Christian are equal in their understanding of the Christian faith and in their outward expression and practice of faith. It is also important to note that the selected churches of this study interpret biblical doctrine differently. Both of these facts create problems identifying standard faith levels within the Romani community. The matter of salvation is one such problematic issue. The ECAV, RCC, and RKC view salvation as the result of being born into a believing family,⁹⁴ while the ACS, BJB, CB, and ECM teach that conversion is the result of a personal choice made individually after a person reaches the age of accountability.⁹⁵ This section will introduce a framework in which to study this subject by classifying these varying layers of religiosity.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Milan Kováč and Milan Jurík have labeled the syncretistic spirituality of the Roma as *viacúrovňová viera* (a multi-faith

⁹³ Vaško, interview, 4 November 2004.

⁹⁴ Behó, interview, 4 November 2004; Teodor Gavenda, interview by author, Bardejov, Slovakia, 21 October 2004, written notes; Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005. If a person is born into a Lutheran family, a Roman Catholic family or a Reformed Church of Slovakia family, then that is their faith.

⁹⁵ Ján Lacho, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 10 August 2004, written notes; Pavel Procházka, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 29 September 2004, written notes; Mária Baranová, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 28 October 2004, written notes; Pavel Šinko, interview by author, Lučenec, Slovakia, 28 October 2004, written notes.

level)—the combining of past beliefs with present beliefs.⁹⁶ While this terminology may be adequate to describe the general condition of the Romani Christians, there is a growing number of Roma who are transitioning away from syncretism and adopting a new, non-syncretistic faith.⁹⁷ To help understand this phenomenon and to bring clarity to this spiritual process, three specific faith level models will be presented— *viacúrovňová viera* (multi-faith level), *prechodná úroveň viery* (transitional-faith level) and *jednourovňová viera* (single-faith level). Though adopting such models may not be sufficiently inclusive, these three categories will provide a better understanding of the various levels of faith among the Roma. Each of these levels will be defined and examples will be given based upon the field research.

Multi-Faith Level

The multi-faith level is based on the concept of syncretism.⁹⁸ Syncretism is defined as "the combination of different forms of belief or practice."⁹⁹ In section 4.2, syncretism was discussed regarding the combination of dualistic and animistic beliefs by the Roma. The assumption of the multi-faith level is that dualism, animism, Christianity, and potentially other beliefs that the Roma have adopted previously have been combined to form the present Romani belief system.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the characteristics of the multi-faith level or the traditional religiosity reveal a mixture of various beliefs, which causes conflict. Within this syncretistic environment, the basic tenets of the dominant church seem to take a more important role in the local belief system of the Roma than do the past religious ideas. Thus, in Slovakia the Roman Catholic doctrines of child baptism, first communion, and the last rites for the dead are dominant. At the same time, there are frequent instances of the syncretistic mixing of other beliefs with those of Catholicism. Mária Atanázia Holubová, a Romani nun, says of the Roma she works with in Bardejov and specifically of those who attend their local RCC, "The Roma are steeped in superstition....the mixing of beliefs is a problem."¹⁰¹

When interviewed, Alžbeta Dunková spoke of a Romani man who suffers from epileptic seizures. She and others in the village of Žehra believe that his

⁹⁶ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," i100-3.

⁹⁷ This phenomenon was observed across denominational lines.

⁹⁸ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100-3.

⁹⁹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "syncretism."

¹⁰⁰ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100-3.

¹⁰¹ Holubová, interview, 20 April 2005.

seizures are caused by an evil spirit. This man received a cross from the local priest and was told that the cross would keep the evil spirits away.¹⁰² In fact, the cross is a talisman,¹⁰³ which this man and other Roma in the Žehra community believe to be endowed with magical powers. Almost in the same breath, Dunková explained her belief in the power of prayer and how praying to Mary makes her feel better.¹⁰⁴ This is an obvious mixing of spiritism with Catholicism.

Another example of the multi-faith level in action may be observed in the Roma's worship of icons. Many of the Romani homes visited have a sacred place where icons are placed along with candles. A Romani mother states, "It is a normal thing in the Romani community for icons to be passed from generation to generation."¹⁰⁵ In addition to saints, icons of Mary and Jesus are placed in these sacred locations. Icons are an important aspect of the Greek Orthodox and the Orthodox Church, but icons generally are rejected in the RCC. The combined memberships of the Orthodox Churches of Slovakia represent 5 percent of the population, while the RCC has 68.93 percent of the population.¹⁰⁶ While these percentages are reflective of the numbers of Roma who belong to the respective churches, the worship of icons occurs in the majority of multi-faith level Romani families. This phenomenon is an example of syncretism between eastern Orthodoxy and the dominant Roman Catholicism.¹⁰⁷

Transitional-Faith Level

The transitional-faith level is the most nebulous of the three faith-level categories because it assumes a non-static movement between the multi-faith level and the single-faith level. This transitional stage implies a faith that is increasing as one grows in his knowledge and understanding of God towards a single-faith. However, if growth stops, it does not take long to return to a syncretistic multi-faith level. The passage between a multi-faith level and a single-faith level cannot

¹⁰² Alžbeta Dunková, interview by author, Žehra, Slovakia, 22 April 2005, written notes.

¹⁰³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "talisman." "An object held to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune."

¹⁰⁴ Dunková, interview, 22 April 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Eva Štajerová, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 4 May 2005, written notes.

¹⁰⁶ Stoner, *Prieskumný projekt*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ The inclusion of icons was observed not only in RCC homes but other denominational homes as well.

be defined in terms of a single, definable position, but as many shifting positions that lead from a syncretistic faith to a non-syncretistic faith.¹⁰⁸

Kirk and Kraft both suggest that conversion is a series of decisions to be made. Kirk explains his position by quoting the Apostle Paul's warning to the church in Rome: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."¹⁰⁹ Kirk states that the direction received from the Spirit helps God to "shape and form" in a person "thoughts, ideas and opinions on the truth as it is displayed in Jesus."¹¹⁰ This is a procedure that over time will affect every part of a person's life. Kraft says that this decision process actually begins prior to the point of conversion and continues afterwards.¹¹¹ Each decision is built upon the previous decision. It is our goal to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."¹¹² This process of decision-making describes succinctly the transitional-faith level.

One of the characteristics of the transitional-faith level can be identified as a person's innate dissatisfaction of his or her spirituality and an assumed inability of his or her present church to meet that need. While the possibility for this person's religiosity to change within the context of the church he or she was first associated with, most often that person moves from one denomination to another.¹¹³ So, a general statement can be made that someone who is entering a transitional-faith level will usually leave the dominant church, which has traditionally been called home, and attend a different church.¹¹⁴

This transition is not easy, however, and the Roma tend to retain dominant church practices even in the new church they adopt. Thus, those in the transitional-faith level will often return to the dominant church from which they

¹⁰⁸ Tibor Farkaš, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 15 July 2003, written notes; Duna, interviews, 15 July 2003, 6 March 2004, and 12 April 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Romans 12:2, NIV.

¹¹⁰ Kirk, *What is Mission?*, 69.

¹¹¹ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 337. Kraft refers to a specific "point of conversion" which is preceded by a number of conversion decisions and is then followed by even more conversion decisions. This is somewhat confusing. Kirk, however, uses the term "regeneration" with conversion decisions on either side. This is a more understandable explanation of the process. See Kirk, *What is Mission?*, 68-70.

¹¹² 2 Peter 3:18, TNIV.

¹¹³ Behó, interview, 19 April 2005.

¹¹⁴ Vaško, interview, 11 April 2005.

came for child-baptism, first communion, and last rites.¹¹⁵ These rituals of faith tend not to be available in their new church home, or at least not in the same form. It is understandable, therefore, that the Roma will often return for these sacraments since they believe participation in these practices brings about safety for them and their families.¹¹⁶ However, after the ritual is completed, they return to their new church. In time, they usually come to the realization that the new church they attend is able to meet all of their spiritual needs.¹¹⁷ Additionally, as they move closer to the single-faith level, they stop returning to the dominant church.

An example of this can be observed in Ružomberok where Michal Tausk, a Brethren pastor, leads a ministry to Romani children. Most of the children he works with are from Romani families with an RCC background. Tausk stated, "All the children I minister to have been baptized in the RCC."¹¹⁸ When the children reach the age of ten it is the traditional time for them to receive their first communion. The preparation for this takes one month, and the local priest will not allow the children to attend Tausk's meetings during that time. But once they complete the preparation and partake of their first communion, they return.¹¹⁹

Svetlana Francisti, the ECM pastor in Slavkovce, relates that when there is a death in a Romani family with whom she works, they typically go to the local Greek Catholic priest to perform the burial. Recently, though, she has been able to participate with the Greek Catholic priest in the ceremonies.¹²⁰ This cooperation between pastors of the two congregations is helping the Roma move from a transitional-faith level to a single-faith level.

The second factor that contributes to the Roma entering the transitional-faith stage is their innate desire for acceptance. Many Roma interviewed did not feel welcome in the church to which they had traditionally belonged. Štefan Horváth, who lives in the Romani settlement on the edge of Krásnohorské Podhradie, told how he and his family looked to the RCC for acceptance after the fall of communism but only encountered rejection instead. The Jehovah Witnesses (JW) came to their settlement and accepted them, so he and his family

¹¹⁵ Svetlana Francisti, interview by author, Slavkovce, Slovakia, 22 October 2004, written notes.

¹¹⁶ Tausk, interview, 14 February 2004. Since the interview, Tausk has moved to another city and others have taken over the responsibility for the ministry.

¹¹⁷ Duna, interview, 15 July 2003, 6 March 2004, and 12 April 2005.

¹¹⁸ Tausk, interview, 14 February 2004.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Francisti, interview, 22 October 2004.

began to attend their meetings. He began to read the Bible and realized that the JW did not conform to biblical truths. His search for truth and acceptance came to fruition when he and his family started attending the ACS.¹²¹

A desire for biblical truth, as observed by Horváth, is another characteristic of those in the transitional-faith level. Those in the multi-faith level rarely speak of reading or wanting to understand the Bible. When asked about the Bible, Marián Kalaja, a Romani elder in the Sabinov ACS, spoke of its importance in the salvation of Roma. Many Roma have erroneous ideas about what Christianity really is. As they begin to search for truth or to find answers to their problems, "they become hungry for the word of God...Some of the Roma cannot read, so we have made tapes of the Bible for them to listen to."¹²² Jaroslava Radičová, who grew up in the Romani settlement in Plavecký Štvrtok and now attends the ACS in Banská Bystrica, said, "Studying the Bible had the biggest impact on my life."¹²³

Laco Duna stresses not only the importance of reading the Bible during the transitional-faith level, but also the need for systematic biblical study in order to identify those beliefs that are based on superstition and occult practices. The study of the Bible helps to purify Christian beliefs and keeps them from syncretistic practices.¹²⁴

Single-Faith Level

Single-faith level implies that a person has one faith that sets the standard for his or her lifestyle. There are several characteristics of this stage. The first characteristic is regular church attendance. In most cases, this desire to attend church regularly is based on the degree of acceptance manifested by others in the church. This creates an environment of acceptance that is very attractive to the Roma. Church members who allow the Roma to become part of their community by demonstrating unconditional love provide a cultural atmosphere that transcends ethnicity. Gejza and Eva Štajer started attending the ACS in Banská Bystrica in the latter part of 2004. After becoming members in February 2005, they have

¹²¹ Štefan Horváth, interview by author, Krásnohorské Podhradie, Slovakia, 11 April 2005, written notes.

¹²² Marián Kalaja, interview by author, Pečovská Nová Ves, Slovakia, 21 October 2004, written notes.

¹²³ Jaroslava Radičová, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 18 February 2004, written notes.

¹²⁴ Duna, interview, 6 March 2004.

become faithful church attendees participating in every service and event the church promotes. Their son, Mário, runs the sound system for all services, Eva (wife) helps teach children in Sunday School, and Gejza (husband) leads a home cell group. As the Štajers said, "God showed us that it is very important for us to attend the church and that just reading the Bible at home is not sufficient for us....The church is a family."¹²⁵

Another aspect of church attendance is the potential for the Roma to participate in the various activities of the church. This is a distinct contrast between the single-faith level and the other two faith levels. The Roma are allowed to participate in worship as well as other aspects of their faith. Mária Atanázia Holubová, Romani nun, and Viktor Tomčany, Romani priest, are evidence that the Roma have the opportunity within the RCC to participate on a high level within the RCC structure. Evident in the interviews is that they feel acceptance in their church. Tomčany repeated what the Štajers said, "The church is my family."¹²⁶

Another example is Juraj Turtak, an attendee of the ECAV in Rankovce. He is in preparation to become a member of the church, feels acceptance, and has been encouraged by the local priest as well as the non-Romani members to participate openly in church activities.¹²⁷

A significant characteristic of this stage is the importance given to the Bible. It becomes the standard for Romani Christianity. If Roma are able to read, they want to read the Bible regularly. If they are not able to read, they have someone read the Bible to them. In addition to reading the Bible, the systematic and repetitive study of biblical truths and the doctrines of the church the Roma attend becomes a high priority, foundational for their change from a syncretistic lifestyle to a single-faith lifestyle. In cases where the Bible study reveals a contradiction with their past beliefs, they actively reject the old faith system for the new.¹²⁸ This includes a rejection of superstitions, occult practices, and other beliefs that are considered unbiblical. This practice of rejecting old beliefs and actively applying new beliefs to their lives helps in developing a non-syncretistic faith.

¹²⁵ Gejza and Eva Štajer, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 5 April 2005, written notes.

¹²⁶ Tomčany, interview, 17 March 2004.

¹²⁷ Turtak, interview, 19 April 2005.

¹²⁸ Duna, interview, 6 March 2004; Behó, interview, 19 April 2005.

The single-faith level is also characterized by a change in lifestyle. The most significant is the change in the husband. It is common for a Romani husband to beat his wife and children, but after the husband accepts Christ as his Savior, this practice is stopped.¹²⁹ Juraj Turtak, who attends the ECAV in Rankovce, told the author, "I no longer beat my wife and kids now that I know Christ."¹³⁰ Igor Láslofi, an ACS pastor to ethnic people in Košice, said a specific change that is observable in the lives of Romani men who find Christ is that "they become less aggressive in life... [and] relationships to their wife and children change... It is normal for a Romani man to beat his wife and kids, but Christ changes that."¹³¹

An important lifestyle change by those in the single-faith level is that the respondents stop abusing alcohol,¹³² stop smoking, and stop gambling. This lifestyle change has been reiterated repeatedly. The Roma of Rankovce, Lunik Devät', Sabinov, Krásnohorské Podhradie, and other places, all spoke of their changed behavior with regard to these practices. They attribute the change to having accepted Christ as their Savior, and they credit the change to the power of the gospel.

Another observable lifestyle change is better personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their homes. A marked difference can be seen between those who are practicing the single-faith level compared to those on the multi-faith level. An example of this can be observed in the Duna household in Lunik Devät'. The inside of their apartment is neat and clean, which is a stark contrast to what is found in other apartments in Lunik Devät'.¹³³

The Roma who reached the single-faith level desire to have their children attend school and learn how to read and write. In those observed instances, Romani parents not only wanted their children to attend school, but they preferred

¹²⁹ Balog, interview, 12 April 2005; Berko, interview, 12 April 2005.

¹³⁰ Juraj Turtak, interview by author, Rankovce, Slovakia, 19 April 2005, written notes.

¹³¹ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004.

¹³² In some of the instances the respondents did not stop drinking, but stopped getting drunk. However, a number of them identified that they felt they were alcoholics prior to their conversion experience. It should also be noted that some of the respondents were delivered from their alcoholism, while others were able to admit their addiction. Several of them are now involved in Alcoholics Anonymous of Slovakia. (Balog and Berko, interviews, 12 April 2005; Farkaš, interview, 15 July 2003; Brenkus, interview, 25 April 2005.)

¹³³ Anna Dunová, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 15 July 2003, written notes; Duna, interview, 15 July 2003.

them to attend the best schools with a goal of achieving improved economic and social lifestyle and acceptance into mainstream society.¹³⁴

Being employed and providing for their family becomes an important aspect of Romani life. They no longer want to live on welfare, instead desiring to work to support their family. Along with this comes a desire to gain new job skills that provide them the opportunity to work.¹³⁵

The final characteristic is the Romani acceptance of their ethnicity. Several of the interviewed Roma spoke of being ashamed of their Romani identity before they reached the single-faith level. As their faith grew, they eventually came to terms with their Romani identity. Viktor Tomčany said, "The truths of the Bible helped me to accept who I am, a Rom."¹³⁶ Anna Lesňáková confessed to a desire to be seen by the world as something other than a Rom. Before, "I used to try and avoid other Roma...[but] now I talk to them and embrace them. I love them."¹³⁷

The feelings expressed by the Roma on this level speak of an unconditional love they feel from the churches they attend. They state unequivocally that this is shown by the commitment of kindnesses toward them and the other Roma in their cities or villages. In an interview, Jozef Demjan commented about how Tomáš Kriška, former pastor of the Lučenec BJB, showed concern for him and the others who had accepted Christ in Cinobaňa: Kriška came on a weekly basis teaching the truths of God's word and preparing converts for water baptism. When he was not able to come, he sent others to teach.¹³⁸

In comparing the three faith levels, it seems obvious that the single-faith level creates a lifestyle that is more acceptable to the non-Roma community. The specific areas that change when a Rom lives a single-faith lifestyle as opposed to a multi-level lifestyle including the following:

1. Regular church attendance becomes important;
2. The Bible becomes important;
3. Abusive behavior among family members stops;

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Bohuslav and Emília Baláž, interview by author, Brodské, Slovakia 25 April 2005, written notes.

¹³⁶ Tomčany, interview, 17 March 2004.

¹³⁷ Lesňáková, interview, 11 April 2005.

¹³⁸ Demjan, interview, 3 September 2005.

4. Personal hygiene improves;
5. Education becomes important;
6. Employment and the ability to support their family becomes important;
7. Their Romani heritage becomes important.

There are several things in this list that are comparable to the list suggested in chapter 3 by Valná that would help bring about the inclusion of the Roma in Slovak society, such as the concept of improved hygiene, which suggests better housing as well as better health care; the desire for better education; and the desire for employment. These specific areas demonstrate how living a single-faith lifestyle can help reduce the marginalization of the Roma within Slovak society. Other items on the list, regular church attendance and importance of the Bible, help the church members accept the Roma.

In this section the various aspects of Romani Christianity were discussed. The general characteristics of their Christianity reflect their culture. Specific influences that help determine their spirituality include regional dominant religion influence, tribal/familial influence, and the influence of acceptance. In addition, this section identified collectivism as the main way decisions are made within the Romani context, though there are cases where a Rom seems to violate this collective decision process by choosing a non-syncretistic faith that is contrary to the Romani community. But in reality, he or she is making a choice to identify with the church community and their collective voice rather than the Romani community and their collective voice. This choice may take them from a multi-faith level, to a transitional-faith level, and finally to a single-faith level.

4.5 Secularization Among the Romani People

Despite the religiosity of the Romani ethnicity, there are a growing number of Romani people in Slovakia becoming secularized.¹³⁹ These Romani atheists can be characterized in the following ways: they live mainly in the larger cities of Slovakia, they are university educated, and they are postmodern in their mindset. Although these Roma do not subscribe to the Christian faith in God, some allow their children to be baptized by the local priests, and they have last rites

¹³⁹ Secularized is defined here as "a belief system, attitude or style of life that denies or ignores the reality of God." Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 106.

administered to their deceased family members, not because they believe, but to make peace with believing family members.¹⁴⁰

However, Kováč and Jurík believe it impossible for the Roma to be atheists because of observable evidence and also their narrow definition of *atheism*. They give three reasons for their view:

First, most of the Roma are christened, although they do not live an active religious life...[Second,] it is far more important to note that atheism generally assumes a certain active non-religious attitude. However, among the Roma one finds only the absence of a religious attitude, rather than a conscious or active non-religious attitude.... [Third,] the superstitious ideas, curses and oaths one finds among the Roma implicitly include the idea of the sanction of God and the transcendent roots of being.¹⁴¹

These three reasons are generalities that can be applied to a large portion of the Romani population, but not to all Roma. Kováč and Jurík, in using the word *most* rather than *all*, suggest that their statement of no atheists existing among the Roma is false. Furthermore, their definition of atheism is narrow and does not give a complete understanding of the concept—"atheism...assumes a certain active non-religious attitude."¹⁴² A better definition of atheism is "the philosophical position that denies the reality of the God of theism or other divine beings."¹⁴³ There is no activism that is required in being an atheist, nor should it be assumed that all Roma have an underlying belief in God that would prevent them from becoming atheists as Kováč and Jurík suggest. They also confuse their position by contradicting themselves—"atheism is...becoming increasingly common for the scattered Roma population of big towns."¹⁴⁴

Thus, atheistic Roma do exist. The secularized Roma of Slovakia can be divided into two groups. The first group demonstrates a desire to lose their Roma-ness through integration into Slovak society. The second group seeks to embrace their Roma-ness through political activism.¹⁴⁵ Though they represent a small portion of the larger Romani population in Slovakia, both segments are seeking their identity. The one does so by rejecting the Romani culture and

¹⁴⁰ Brenkus, interview, 30 July 2005.

¹⁴¹ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma,"104.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma,"104.

¹⁴⁵ Brenkus, interview, 30 July 2005.

embracing the Slovak culture. The other embraces their Romani heritage and actively works at helping improve and reshape the Romani community within the Slovak society.

4.6 Conclusion

Traditional Romani religiosity and the impact of Christianity upon it has been examined in this chapter. It has been observed that Romani religiosity does not fit neatly within an organizational framework; instead it is complex and changing. Wherever the Roma have lived, they have been influenced by the surrounding culture and its beliefs. This is evident in their syncretistic approach to spirituality. Romani religiosity, prior to encountering Christianity, can best be described as animistic dualism. This reflects the influence of the countries where they have lived and the various religions they have encountered on their peregrination from India to Europe.

The strongest pre-Christian influence on the Romani people is that of dualism. This influence finds expression in their concept of the struggle between good and evil. It seems most logical that the Roma adopted this dualistic viewpoint while in Persia and that this concept is the driving force behind much of their belief system and practices.

According to Kenrick, the first Roma to encounter Christianity lived in Armenia around 750.¹⁴⁶ The Christian influence continued as the Roma slowly migrated into Europe proper. While there is no record of any intentional missionary work by any of the churches among the Roma as they moved westward, there is clear evidence that the church contributed to the development of their spirituality, such as icon worship, which was observed in a number of the Romani settlements, e.g., Tušice, Lunik Devät', and Angimlyn (near Michalovce).

There are several factors that have influenced the Romani population of Slovakia. The first, regional influence, implies that the dominant church or denomination within a region usually determines what the Roma will identify with spiritually. Their desire for approval and their fear of offending local spirits is the main reason the Roma adopt the dominant religion of the region where they reside. However, their spiritual conformity is done in their own way by combining local

¹⁴⁶ Kenrick, *From India to the Mediterranean*, 41.

religious beliefs with their own traditional beliefs. Kováč and Jurík labeled this syncretistic approach to spirituality as a multi-faith level.¹⁴⁷

The influence of leadership on their spirituality within the larger tribal community is minimal. Community leadership, which in the past influenced all aspects of life, now has more influence on their economics than on their religious beliefs. This change can be attributed to the mixing of different Romani tribes into the same settlements or public housing projects. This has caused their leadership influence to shift to the familial level rather than the community level on spiritual matters. Within this familial framework, most spiritual decisions are made collectively. Individual rights are superseded by the collective, familial-group rights.

The last factor of influence is that of acceptance. Historically, the Roma have been outcasts and unwanted wherever they go. Thus, when they are shown concern and love by others, they usually gravitate toward that acceptance. If they are in an environment that presents a God who loves them and wants relationship with them, they will often change their entire belief system.

The Roma of Slovakia function on several different faith levels. The vast majority of Roma who identify with the dominant church or denomination exist on a syncretistic multi-faith level. One of the major contributing factors for the Romani syncretistic lifestyle is the lack of acceptance on the part of some non-Romani religious people (priests, pastors, and lay people).¹⁴⁸

There is a growing number of Roma that is willing to leave the practice of a multi-faith belief system in favor of an instinctive search for acceptance. In doing so, Roma typically go through a time of transition. The transitional-faith level, which is identified as a movement away from the multi-faith level, helps to bring about a change in the Roma's marginalized societal position, moving them into a place of acceptance, meaning, and purpose. The transitional-faith level may lead to a single-faith level. It is not possible to stay in the transitional-faith level without either moving forward into the non-syncretistic single-faith level or moving back into the syncretistic multi-faith level. The single-faith level is usually characterized by the Roma's acceptance within the church and leads to systematic biblical instruction that influences the Roma away from syncretism. It also increases their ability to express their faith through participation in the church.

¹⁴⁷ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 100.

¹⁴⁸ This issue is discussed in more detail in 5.6 *Crucial Relational Problems*.

The movement among these various levels of faith is affected, in varying degrees, by regional, tribal/familial, and acceptance influences. The regional and tribal influences are more prevalent for those who are practicing the multi-faith level than for those at the transitional-faith or the single-faith level. As the Roma enter the transitional-faith level, regional and tribal influences decrease, while familial and acceptance influences increase. At the single-faith level, however, the Roma are less concerned with the outside regional and tribal influences and focus more upon biblical and congregational practices. In doing so, they are accepting the collectivism of the congregation they are now identifying with. The majority of the Roma is classified as having a multi-faith belief system, though the numbers of Roma that are moving from the multi-faith level, through the transitional-faith level, to a single-faith level are increasing. This increase can be accounted for by a new willingness on the part of various denominations to open their church doors and hearts to the Roma of Slovakia.

There is a secularized segment of the Romani population of Slovakia. For the most part, they are university educated and generally fall into one of two of the following categories: those rejecting their Romani heritage or those embracing their Romani traditions. Those who reject their heritage tend to assimilate into the Slovak culture better than those seeking to be identified as Roma rather than Slovak. By contrast, the Roma who embrace their traditional heritage actively labor at improving their Romani situation in Slovakia, often creating NGOs or becoming more active politically.

This chapter began by restating the thesis statement and asking what traditional Romani religiosity is and how the Christian message has affected Romani spirituality. An underlying question is whether either has affected the prejudicial marginalization of the Roma within Slovakia. It seems clear that marginalization of Roma within the church does in fact encourage pejorative attitudes within the other sectors of Slovak society, e.g., political, socio-economical, and cultural.

The reality of Romani religiosity cannot be separated from syncretism. This combination of different beliefs most likely finds its roots in Hinduism. A question that must be asked and answered is whether this syncretistic lifestyle is a contributing factor to the prejudice and marginalization of the Roma. On the one hand, there is no evidence to suggest that a multi-faith lifestyle contributes to such

attitudes or increases the level of prejudice and marginalization, though there is evidence that a syncretistic faith does nothing to decrease such pejorative feelings.

On the other hand, Christianity that opposes a syncretistic lifestyle and promotes a single-faith lifestyle can have a limiting affect upon the prejudice and marginalization of the Roma. The evidence shows that it is in an atmosphere of acceptance that the Roma have the potential to develop a single-faith lifestyle. Whether the desire on the part of the Roma for a single-faith experience comes before acceptance is extended to them or after is not clear at this point in the research. However, the next chapter examines the difference between those selected churches who demonstrate acceptance of the Roma and those who do not, and how this affects the participation opportunities for the Roma in the selected churches.

5 PARTICIPATION OF THE ROMANI PEOPLE IN CHURCH LIFE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVAKIA

5.1 Introduction

The premise of this study is that Christianity can directly affect, in a positive way, the prejudicial marginalization of the Romani people of Slovakia. An indicator of how the church treats its Romani members is evidenced by how the Roma are allowed to participate in the church. This chapter will examine this issue beginning with a historical review of the church during the communist regime and how this affected its ability to perform *missio Dei*.¹ Furthermore, the attitude that is displayed toward the Roma by the selected denominations is indicated by their official policies and programs. This discussion will be followed by a look at the participation of the Roma within the selected churches. Participation will be examined from the perspective of how inclusive the selected churches are regarding the Roma—e.g., multi-ethnic congregations or indigenous congregations; member feedback within each denomination; and the ability of the Roma to participate in contextual theology. Finally, this chapter will discuss crucial relational problems that exist between the Romani people and the selected churches of Slovakia.

5.2 Church Life in Communist and Post-Communist Slovakia

Following World War II, the position of the church within the social and political scene of Czechoslovakia was altered as a result of the influences of Marxism. The church's concept of mission changed from outward to inward during the communist years. Repression against the Catholic Church began after 1948, though the Protestant church was spared for a period of time.² "The communist party ordered crosses to be taken out of the schools, removed teachers and professors who belonged to religious orders, eliminated religious instruction in the

¹ To perform *missio Dei* is to accomplish God's purpose. God's purpose is to have relationship with his creation and specifically with mankind. The church performs *missio Dei* by presenting this revelation to those who do not have a relationship with God. A more detailed discussion of *missio Dei* can be found in 6.1 *The Identity of the Christian Church and the Romani People*.

² Augustin Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire & the Revolutions in Eastern Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Sturges Publishing, 1992), 21.

middle schools, abolished the Central Catholic Agency, and banned the League of Catholic Women."³ By April 1950, all religious orders were dissolved by the communist government. The communist officials feared the influence that the church might have on the people.⁴ To those outside communist walls, the socialist leaders spoke of religious freedom, but the "Christians living under the communist regime knew the religious freedom promised and promoted by the Party was a clear lie and hypocrisy."⁵

Václav Malý, a Catholic priest, states that under communism the people of Czechoslovakia lived what he calls "the two-faced life."⁶ He explains that "our children were taught at home about the events of the year 1968, and about Alexander Dubček, but simultaneously, they were told, please, keep silent at the school because it could be dangerous for your further studies."⁷ Thus, in private they proclaimed one thing, but in public something entirely different. "We tended to overlook God's precepts about justice or truth."⁸ Forty years of living such a hypocritical lifestyle had a distinct effect upon the people and their faith.

Malý further comments that the understanding of a number of concepts such as penance, hope, and forgiveness was warped under communism. As a result, he explains, "To forgive, in the mind of an ordinary citizen today means: I am weak. I have no choice, therefore I must forgive,"⁹ when, in fact, the opposite is actually true—"forgiveness is the choice to give another chance to a person, to open a new future to him and cleanse him of his past."¹⁰ To a certain degree, the communists were able to fragment the RCC. For example, "one of the most important institutional instruments of regime control was the priests' association,

³ Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998), 117.

⁴ Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire*, 54.

⁵ Juraj Kušnierik, *Evangelicals in Central Europe: A Case Study from Slovakia*, (Bratislava: Združenie CityGate, 1997), 14.

⁶ Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire*, 11. In 1968, Alexander Dubček became the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He instituted economic changes, revised the constitution regarding civil rights and began to introduce democratic reforms to the communist party. The prospect of a social-democratic Czechoslovakia was not acceptable to the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact countries. In August of 1968, the Soviet Union army invaded Czechoslovakia, removed Dubček from power, and reestablished hard-line communism. For further study see Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kušnierik, *Evangelicals In Central Europe*, 15.

⁹ Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire*, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Pacem in Terris."¹¹ Some of the priests, however, refused to become a part of this communist-backed association. Alois Kánsky asserts, "I knew that I couldn't become a member of *Pacem in Terris*, which was an organization of the priests who were loyal to the Communist regime."¹² The Marxist government allowed only priests who were sympathetic to the communist ideology to be licensed. As a result, those priests who did not cooperate with the communist regime were stripped of their authority and placed in jobs and locations outside of the church. Some worked in mines, others in factories, and some cleaned the toilets in the subway system of Prague.

Pastors and members of the Protestant church suffered as well. If a person openly proclaimed to be a Christian, there was a price to be paid. "To say, 'I am a Christian,' was usually a brave act, sometimes with detrimental consequences (e.g., being dismissed from university or scientific institutes, lower wages, or children not allowed to study)."¹³ There are accounts of some Protestant ministers who did spend time in prison, such as Rudolf Bubik, who refused to compromise his faith.¹⁴

By contrast, Christians who compromised their faith found life easier. For many years, it was required of Czechoslovak citizens to attend the May Day demonstrations; many Christians felt pressured to participate. "They gain[ed] no benefit from this but only save[d] themselves from possible future problems."¹⁵ Such compromise brought confusion among Czechoslovak Christians. One frustrated man asked, "What [is] the difference...between bowing down to Marx and going to the heathen temple to bow to the Roman Caesar?"¹⁶

For Protestants, evangelization is a key component of their belief system. Under communism, evangelization of those outside the church was forbidden and often dangerous. Ján Lacho, bishop of the ACS, states, "The only time we could

¹¹ Ramet, *Nihil Obstat*, 124. The official name of this organization was the Association of Catholic Clergy *Pacem in Terris* and was a communist regime-sponsored organisation of Catholic clergy in Czechoslovakia between 1971 and 1989. Its purpose was to control and spy on the clergy and influence the life of the church.

¹² Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire*, 31-2.

¹³ Juraj Kušnierik and Milan Čičel, *Shadows of the Past: The impact of communism on the way people think in postcommunist society* (Bratislava: Združenie CityGate, 2004), 30.

¹⁴ Rudolf Bubik, *Prisoner Cell 304* (Nottingham, England: LifeStream Publications, 1993).

¹⁵ Marsh Moyle, *The Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission In Central and Eastern Europe* (Bratislava: Združenie CityGate, 1997), 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

evangelize was at weddings and funerals."¹⁷ He notes that church weddings were not recognized by the state, so all couples getting married had to have a civil ceremony at City Hall. The church, however, was allowed to have a special service of blessing for the newly married couple. It was during these celebrations that the minister could share a message of salvation through Christ. The same was true of funerals. This same scenario was repeated in other churches as well.

The government forbade and actively restricted any perceived indoctrination of children or young people by the churches. Sunday schools and youth meetings had to be conducted illegally or in secret, some clandestine or deep within the forests of Slovakia.

There were religious classes allowed at public schools, but they were monitored closely by the communist leaders, who determined the content of the classes. Records were kept of the students who attended these classes and often were used against them when they applied to attend a university.¹⁸

During the communist regime, both the Catholics and the ACS, as well as all other Protestant churches, had government informers among them who reported to the socialist leaders regarding the different activities within the church. Ján Lacho remembers:

There were some who attended our services during the communist years who we would call lukewarm Christians. These are the people whom the Communists would enlist to report on the Apostolic Church's activities. At a baptism in Lehota, the communists were there taking pictures of everyone who was baptized.¹⁹

Protestant pastors were periodically brought into communist offices to be interrogated. Jozef Brenkus, former pastor of the ACS church in Košice, told of the communist officials keeping detailed notes of their interviews with pastors. At the end of these interviews, pastors would be asked to sign the interview form confirming their discussion. The government official would try to give them money following some of the interviews as a form of influence. After the fall of communism, the names of the pastors who were called in to the communist offices were found on the list of informers. By placing the pastors' names on the list, the socialist regime hoped to undermine the influence of church leaders.²⁰

¹⁷ Lacho, interview, 10 August 2004.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Brenkus, interview, 25 April 2005.

When Ján Lacho was asked how he and his family were punished by the government for their religious activities, he replied, "They kept our children from going to good schools or to the university."²¹ Lýdia Sečová took the entrance exam for medical school, which she passed with a high score. But she was denied admittance into the university program because her father was the pastor of a church in Bratislava.²²

Following the fall of communism, Václav Havel observed that "the tendency of the state [under communism] was to simply manipulate the church. Not to forbid it, but to make it just some kind of slave."²³ Kánsky noted the disappointment of people toward the church following the fall of communism when asked whether the church had been a "source of resistance to the Communist authority".²⁴

[W]hen people realized that the representatives of the church, the priests, were speaking the same way they spoke during the Communist years...[they were deeply disappointed that the church; specifically, individual priests] didn't show joy and euphoria over the fact that they could now openly tell people what is the truth.²⁵

The priests who were suppressed under communist rule found it difficult to function in a free society and simply continued speaking as they had been instructed under the Marxist regime. This ability of the state to control the RCC left an indelible mark upon the post-communist church.

Pavel Hanes wrote an article, "Residual Marxism or the Need for Demarxification in Eastern Europe,"²⁶ which emphasizes that the most troubling aftermath of communism is "that which has been left in the people's minds—Marxism, [and] its official ideology."²⁷ He notes that following the fall of communism no attempt was made to try to counter this influence, either by the government or by the churches. The result has been that church leaders, government leaders, and people in general have been disabled regarding three

²¹ Lacho interview, 10 August 2004.

²² Lýdia Sečová, telephone interview by author, 11 August 2005, written notes.

²³ Hedberg, *Faith Under Fire*, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Pavel Hanes, "Residual Marxism or the Need for Demarxification in Eastern Europe," *The Journal of European Baptist Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (May 2008). The same article was published under a different title, "Christianity in the Post-Marxist Context," *The European Journal of Theology*, XVII (2008).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

specific concepts: (1) in trying to replace the Marxist worldview with a new, more democratic worldview; (2) in the "revengeful indignation caused by exploitation of man by man,"²⁸ brought about by a free market system, which led to competition in the market place, and resulted in a misunderstood and very upsetting scenario for many who grew up under Marxism; and (3) in defining absolute truth.

Pavel Zsolnai, national youth leader for the ACS, thinks that Hanes is correct in his first two points regarding people who have spent the majority of their life under communism. But "those who were born after 1989 are not [so] influenced by Marxism and have acquired a more western worldview and one less likely to exploit their neighbor."²⁹ However, to think that those born after the fall of communism would have no Marxist tendencies is unlikely. The post-1989 babies are influenced by their parents and other older family members. Geert Hofstede writes, "All people start acquiring their mental software [e.g. way of thinking] immediately after birth from the elders in whose presence they grow up, modeling themselves after the examples set by these elders."³⁰ While the degree of socialistic impact upon each succeeding generation will lessen, at present the results of communism still exist.³¹

The perception of absolute truth, however, is another matter. To a Marxist absolute truth is not a reality because absolute truth can never be dialectical, which is an important part of Marxism.³² Hanes points out that in the end it is the will of the Marxist leader that determines what truth is and what is not.³³ In other words, truth is a changing concept and thus, can never be absolute. By contrast, a Christian maintains that God and the Bible represent absolute truth. Truth that is unchangeable in the fact that God does not change, e.g., "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."³⁴ This differing view of truth is at the heart of the problem between the communist ideology and Christianity. Hanes posits that the influence of Marxism made it difficult for the church and Christians to understand and comprehend the concept of absolute truth. When communism

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Zsolnai, interview, 10 August 2004.

³⁰ Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 32.

³¹ Pavel Hanes, interview by author, 29 September 2004, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, written notes.

³² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2008 ed., s.v. "Marxism."

³³ Hanes, "Residual Marxism."

³⁴ Hebrews 13:8, NIV.

fell, the church was conflicted in its understanding of truth, and in the minds of many failed to fulfill its purpose. Ladislav Hejdánek, professor of Protestant theology at Charles University in Prague, commented on Christians and society three years after the fall of communism:

Now is the time when Christians should go forward with their mission of helping the people to understand the situation in a moral sense. But they have nothing to do and nothing to say to others. The Christians seem not to be able to help society. And I think it's a consequence of the incapability to see their own role in the last 20 or 40 years.³⁵

Generally under communism, the church's task was surviving and keeping its identity. "To keep the faith and pass it on to one's children was the supreme goal."³⁶ Christians viewed themselves as being a minority group. They were discriminated against and persecuted, and it took all of their energy just to survive the communist years. As a result, the church emerged from communism somewhat paralyzed and unequipped for its freedom to accomplish *missio Dei*. Just like everyone else, believers had to learn what to do with their new-found freedom of religion. They were used to having the communist regime control and provide everything they needed. Having to provide for themselves, think for themselves, believe for themselves, and plan for the future was a new and often frustrating experience.

It is understandable then, that in the midst of this struggle with freedom, the plight of the Roma was overlooked. It was not that the churches were intentionally insensitive to the needy; it was simply that the churches themselves were needy. As a result, purposeful evangelizing of an ethnic group such as the Roma was non-existent and only occurred accidentally. According to Lacho, there were a few times when their clandestine forest meetings were close to Romani settlements and resulted in the youth making contact with the Roma. But these encounters were never planned.³⁷

³⁵ Hedberg, *Faith under Fire*, 25.

³⁶ Kušnierik, *Shadows of the Past*, 30.

³⁷ Lacho, interview, 10 August 2004.

5.3 The Attitude of Selected Churches Toward the Romani People

The individual selected churches³⁸ that this study has chosen to observe are each unique. In this section we will look at the approach each denomination has taken regarding the Roma, which will reveal the basic attitude each has for the Roma. The order of presentation of the selected churches is based on the percentage of the Slovak population who claimed affiliation with the various denominations in the 2001 census. These percentages are as follows: RCC, 68.93 percent; ECAV, 6.93 percent; RKC, 2.04 percent; ECM, 0.14 percent; BJB, 0.07 percent; and ACS, 0.03 percent.³⁹

5.3.1 Roman Catholic Church

In 1990, a year after the fall of communism, each diocese within the Slovak RCC was asked by the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia to appoint a priest to care for the Roma. In 1993, at the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia, a Committee for Ministering to the Roma was established. The name was later changed to the Council for Ministering to the Roma.⁴⁰ Bernard Bober, a priest from Košice, was assigned to lead this council. The council was responsible for publishing several books for use with the Roma: *Blahoslavený Róm*,⁴¹ the biography of a sainted Rom from Spain named Zeffirino Jiménez Malla; *Božie Deti: Deloškere Čhave* (God's Children),⁴² a religious primer for children; and *Miri jekhto Biblija*,⁴³ a children's Bible.

The Conference of Bishops of Slovakia in 2001 published the "Pastoral and Evangelization Plan, 2001—2006", which lists the goals for the RCC in all areas of ministry. It includes a section on the Roma, in which the following seven recommendations are set forth:

³⁸ The following churches have been chosen for this study: Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAV), Reformed Church of Slovakia (RKC), Evangelical Methodist Church (ECM), Baptist Union Church (BJB), and Apostolic Church of Slovakia (ACS).

³⁹ See Appendix IV Religious Affiliation of Slovak Citizens, for a listing of all churches in Slovakia.

⁴⁰ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 106.

⁴¹ Don Mario Riboldi, *Blahoslavený Róm* (The blessed Rom) (Milan: La VOCE, 1993).

⁴² Peter Bešenyei, *Božie Deti: Deloškere Čhave* (Poprad, Slovakia: SLZA, 1995).

⁴³ Kenneth N. Taylor, *Miri Jekhto Biblija Andro Obrazki* (Herrljunga, Sweden: International Bible Society, 1998).

1. To enlarge and deepen the cooperation between the Council for Ministering to the Roma and the local priests who are responsible for Romani ministry.
2. To gain an understanding of the values of the Romani culture and use these values to aid in evangelization efforts. If the parish is to exist as a living and growing organism, all its members need to learn to share their responsibilities and sources as well as their joys and problems.
3. To use a system of prevention with the Roma, point to the values such as respect for a person, trust, honesty, interest in others, willingness to listen, solidarity, etc.
4. To build centers of pastoral care among the Roma that organize processions, contests, and which are examples to other centers.
5. To build the parish as a core of the community, by creating or reestablishing local groups of lay ministers and to use these lay ministers among the Romani settlements in establishing mission stations.
6. To deepen the education of priests and others by focusing upon the Romani culture.
7. To create a project of personal development and formation of the Roma in those parishes with a large Romani population.⁴⁴

Seemingly, the RCC took a proactive position in approaching the Roma of Slovakia. But Kováč and Jurík noted in 2003 that the "requirement...[to appoint in each diocese a priest to oversee the Roma]...has not yet been met."⁴⁵ This confirms the opinion of Peter Bešenyei, RCC priest involved in ministering to the Roma, who said, "Today there is still little done to reach the Roma. It is not a priority."⁴⁶ While it may not be a priority, at least the RCC has put into writing a policy of its intentions.

Bernard Bober was asked in May 2008 if the RCC had accomplished everything it set forth in its "Pastoral and Evangelization Plan, 2001-2006." He answered, "This was never directed specifically for the Roma, but for all activities

⁴⁴ Oficiálna stránka Katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku (official website of the Catholic church of Slovakia), "Pastoračný a evanjelizačný plán Katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku, 2001—2006," (Pastoral and evangelization plan for the Catholic Church of Slovakia, 2001—2006), <http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1117735904> (accessed 1 July 2008).

⁴⁵ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 106.

⁴⁶ Bešenyei, interview, 13 April 2005.

of the church."⁴⁷ Bober stated that there is a new "Pastoral and Evangelization Plan, 2007-2013,"⁴⁸ but that "it does not contain any concrete plans for the Roma."⁴⁹ Bober, in his interview, did not articulate the same opinion that Bešenyei expressed that the Roma were not a priority of the RCC or that little was being done to minister to the Roma. However, it was obvious from the interview that Bober has an intense love for the Romani people and that he wished more was being done to minister to the Roma.

The RCC has not yet accomplished its written goals for the Romani population in Slovakia. It appears that these goals, written in 2001, were not included in the new written statement of goals for 2007-2013. However, there are RCC ministers actively involved in ministering to the Roma of their parish.

5.3.2 Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession

The ECAV has no specific written policy regarding ministry to the Roma.⁵⁰ That being said, the former bishop of the eastern district of the ECAV, Igor Mišina, has been an active supporter of ministry by the local church to the Romani people. Mišina was the priest in Rankovce before becoming a bishop and began the ministry there to the Roma. Additionally, the ECAV have a strong Romani ministry in Slavošovce. This was begun by Miroslav Hvožd'ara, who turned the ministry over to the leadership of a German missionary, Hans Martin Dern. Dern was involved in preparing the Roma for confirmation in the ECAV at Slavošovce and Rankovce. In addition, he had developed "a group of Roma leaders/evangelists with whom he visited other locations and performed missionary work."⁵¹ Larry C. Merino, an American Lutheran pastor who is a Rom, began visiting Slovakia in 1996. He has "organized successful evangelization sessions for Roma,"⁵² and continues to return to Slovakia each year.

⁴⁷ Bernard Bober, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 May 2008, written notes.

⁴⁸ Oficiálna stránka Katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku (official website of the Catholic church of Slovakia), "Pastoračný a evanjelizačný plán Katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku, 2001—2006," (Pastoral and evangelization plan for the Catholic Church of Slovakia, 2007—2013), <http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1117735904> (accessed 1 July 2008).

⁴⁹ Bober, interview, 12 May 2008.

⁵⁰ Daniel Mišina, telephone interview with author, 27 September 2005, written notes.

⁵¹ Kováč, "The Religious Life of the Roma," 108. In 2007, Dern moved back to Germany where he is working with Sinti Roma. The work of preparing Roma for confirmation is continuing and is being led by local ministers and laypeople.

⁵² Ibid.

5.3.3 Reformed Church of Slovakia⁵³

The RKC of Slovakia has no official policy regarding the Roma. Kováč and Jurík state that the RKC "does missionary work mainly among children and youth in southern Slovakia."⁵⁴ However, in 1999, when the author spoke with the Reformed bishop at the time, Géza Erdélyi, he knew of no RKC that were working with the Roma.⁵⁵ The only RKC this study could locate that works with the Roma was in the village of Tušice. Juraj Brecko, the pastor, knows of "no mission outreach to the Roma"⁵⁶ by any other RKC congregation.

5.3.4 Evangelical Methodist Church of Slovakia

Pavel Procházka was the superintendent of the ECM in Slovakia until 2007.⁵⁷ In an interview, he stated, "While we have no specific written policy regarding ministry to the Roma, we are not opposed to doing so... [in fact] we want to work with them."⁵⁸ He noted that they have one church in the eastern village of Slavkovce, which is primarily Roma. A number of other ECM churches have some Roma in attendance each week. According to Procházka, the Roma are encouraged to participate fully in the functions of the church. Regarding church membership, Procházka stated, "No difference is made between the Roma and non-Roma."⁵⁹

Ministry to the Roma is done through *diaconia* or church charity. This humanitarian work provides clothing and household items for the Roma. Procházka stressed, "We do separate *diaconia* from the preaching and presentation of the gospel. We don't want people to think accepting the gospel means they will get things."⁶⁰

5.3.5 Baptist Union of Slovakia

The BJB also has no official written policy regarding the Roma, but according to Tomáš Kriška, bishop of the BJB, churches are encouraged to reach out to the

⁵³ A majority of members in the Reformed Church of Slovakia are closely linked to the Reformed Church in Hungary.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Géza Erdélyi, interview by author, Komárno, Slovakia, October 1999, written notes.

⁵⁶ Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005.

⁵⁷ Róbert Zachar is now superintendent of the ECM of Slovakia.

⁵⁸ Procházka, interview, 29 September, 2004.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Roma.⁶¹ Before becoming the bishop, he was the pastor in Lučenec and was instrumental in helping begin a ministry to the Roma in the village of Cinobaňa. One other Romani ministry is Nádej Deťom, which is loosely connected to the BJB church in Banská Bystrica. In 2004, an American missionary, Shane McNary, moved to Košice to coordinate Roma ministries for the BJB in Slovakia.⁶² His specific title is Strategic Coordinator for Roma Ministry in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. His job includes helping facilitate cooperation between Romani ministries. While this is specifically directed toward BJB ministries, McNary also networks with other denominations that are involved with the Roma.⁶³

5.3.6 Apostolic Church of Slovakia

The ACS has no official policy regarding the Roma. However, the General Presbytery meeting in 1989 "adopted a resolution to deal systematically with the problems of the Roma in Slovakia."⁶⁴ There were no details regarding what was meant by problems of the Roma or what the systematic solutions to these problems were. Again in 1994, the General Presbytery discussed ministry to the Roma. Minutes from the meeting reveal that, though no official policy was formulated, ministry to the Roma was identified as an important and valid need within the ACS.⁶⁵ One specific ministry identified was the need to minister in the prisons to the incarcerated Roma. The ACS has since partnered with Prison Fellowship International to reach prisoners, both Romani and non-Romani. This has created an open door for the ACS to reach into the Romani community. Tibor Farkaš, ACS pastor in Košice who visits the jail two to three times each week, relates how the Roma have come to trust the church because "they really need help, and we try to be there to assist them."⁶⁶

⁶¹ Tomáš Kriška, telephone interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 9 September 2005, written notes.

⁶² Shane McNary, telephone interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 9 September 2005, written notes.

⁶³ Shane McNary, telephone interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 7 July 2008, written notes.

⁶⁴ Ján Lacho, assistant bishop, Apostolic Church of Slovakia, letter to PaedDr. Milan Holečko, head of the church department, Ministry of Culture SR, Bratislava, Slovakia, 20 September 1999.

⁶⁵ Lacho and Zsolnai, interviews, 10 August 2004. A follow-up telephone interview was done with Zsolnai, 8 August 2005, by the author.

⁶⁶ Farkaš, interview, 15 July 2003.

The ACS General Presbytery minutes from 1994 also state that it is the responsibility of each existing church to reach out to the Roma in their region.⁶⁷ Home Bible studies were suggested as an effective way to minister to the Roma. However, the specifics of whether a church would become involved and exactly how this would be accomplished were left to the discretion of each local church.⁶⁸

In 1999, a letter was sent by Ján Lacho (at the time he was Assistant bishop of the ACS) to Milan Holečko, director of church affairs in the Ministry of Culture, outlining the pastoral care the ACS should be extending to the Roma. In this letter Lacho told of twelve ACS churches who were working directly with the Roma. No list of the specific churches was given, however, Lacho did indicate the amount of money that the ACS had expended in their work with the Roma during 1999, 300,000 SKK, and what the ACS projected expenditures in 2000 would be, 870,000 SKK.⁶⁹

5.4 Participation Levels of the Romani People in Church Life

In this section the different elements that are required for participation within the selected churches will be examined. Following denominational descriptions of potential involvement, examples of how the Roma are actually involved in specific churches within the denomination is presented.

5.4.1 Roman Catholic Church

Membership in the RCC starts at the point of baptism. Thus, when a child is baptized, he or she is considered to be a member of the church. This baptism allows the child to later participate in first communion (normally when he or she is 10 years of age) and catechism (when he or she reaches 15 years of age). This results in the child's confirmation as an adult member in the RCC. Adults who were not born into a RCC family can become members by being baptized, partaking of first communion and being confirmed. Lay members of the church can then volunteer to help in various areas of ministry in the church. Classes are available for special training in certain areas such as children's ministry and youth ministry. The priesthood is available for those men who feel called, and becoming a nun is possible for those women who desire to dedicate their lives to the church.

⁶⁷ General Presbytery minutes, 1994, located at the ACS national office, Bratislava, Slovakia.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ 300,000 SKK in 1999 equaled \$6,800 and 6,666 euros. 870,000 SKK equaled \$19,773 and 19,333 euros.

There are several Romani priests and at least one Romani nun in Slovakia. Most of these have graduated from the University of Komenského Roman Catholic Seminary in Bratislava.⁷⁰ There seem to be no limitations on the Roma progressing from church member to priesthood.

Bardejov

In the northeastern Slovak city of Bardejov, the rejection of the Roma by the non-Roma in the local RCC was dealt with in a unique way. Rather than discouraging the Roma from attending the RCC, Peter Bešenyei, began a special ministry to the Roma in Poštárka, a Romani settlement on the outskirts of Bardejov, in 1991.

Initially, the main focus of the ministry was to work with the children and to teach them life skills and character development. The church found, however, that parental values superseded the values taught by the RCC. Bešenyei noted that the Roma of Poštárka were open to the church's teaching and ministry. "The parents respected the church...and I was able to get the adults as well as the kids involved."⁷¹ The largest project that the RCC undertook was the construction of a church building in Poštárka. The Romani adults worked alongside the priests during the project. "As a result, they took ownership in the church. This built values into their lives—both the parents and kids."⁷² Teodor Gavenda, who took the place of Bešenyei as priest in Poštárka in the latter part of 2003, agreed that they must "deal with the parents as well as the kids."⁷³

The program in Poštárka consists of regular mass along with various religious classes for adults, youth, and children. The church also provides a pre-school program where the children learn the Slovak language so that they are prepared for an elementary education. In addition, the RCC has started a private school for grades 1 and 2. In 2004, the church began construction of a new building that continues to house an activity center for kids of all ages and has enough classrooms to expand the school through the 4th grade. When the church first started the children's education program in 1991, none of the Romani youth had graduated from high school, but gradually this has changed; presently, each

⁷⁰ Univerzita Komenského, Rímskokatolícka cyrilometodská bohoslovecká fakulta.

⁷¹ Bešenyei, interview, 22 October 2004.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gavenda, interview, 21 October 2004.

year Romani youth are graduating. "We have been teaching the importance of education, and slowly the Roma understand how important it is."⁷⁴

The RCC's Poštárka program also offers team sports in which young people are encouraged to participate. These teams travel to other towns to compete. After-school activities are also available for students, which include music classes and tutoring to help with their homework. There is a special mass for the youth each month. During the summer, camps are offered for the children and youth. Special pilgrimages are also provided for the adults. The children and adults are very active and excited to be able to participate in these programs.⁷⁵

Gavenda and Mária Atanázia Holubová were asked in 2004 about the Romani involvement in the RCC. According to Gavenda, the level of participation available to the Roma who attend the Poštárka church is not restricted. For example, Romani young men serve as altar boys during the services. Indeed, the majority of those who attend the church are Roma. However, it should be noted that the Roma do not have the same level of participation available to them in the Bardejov church, which is predominantly non-Romani.

Gavenda and Holubová describe the spirituality of the Roma who attend the RCC in Poštárka as being a multi-faith level. Both speak of how the practice of religion has changed the Roma—they have become more responsible. At the same time they note that the Roma continue to mix various traditional beliefs with RCC doctrines.⁷⁶ However, Peter Bešenyeyi, the founder of the ministry in Poštárka, speaks in contrasting terms: he describes the Roma who embrace Roman Catholicism as moving from a syncretistic lifestyle toward a single faith lifestyle. Individual Roma who develop a personal relationship with God that supercedes all other beliefs no longer have a syncretistic faith.⁷⁷ Bešenyeyi places great importance upon the Bible as a key to the Roma's spiritual development.

Neither Gavenda nor Holubová mention such a personal relationship with God. They comment only on the fact that the Roma participate in the religious rituals such as baptism and first communion. Gavenda and Holubová make no mention of learning biblical truths but stress the importance of ritualistic practices. Gavenda expresses difficulty in believing that the Roma have the ability to discern

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Holubová, interview, 21 October 2004.

⁷⁷ Bešenyeyi, interview, 22 October 2004.

spiritual truth on their own; thus, they only are capable of following ritualistic patterns. Holubová expresses the same viewpoint. However, she herself is a Rom, so her belief seems to be inconsistent with what has happened in her own life.⁷⁸

A return visit to Bardejov was made in May 2008. Both Gavenda and Holubová were interviewed, though Bešenyei was not available. Both agreed with the conclusions of this study. Holubová stated, "Proof of your thesis would be our chapel here in Poštárká. We have whites and Roma sitting side by side during mass. The influence of the RCC has brought this about. They do everything together."⁷⁹ Gavenda responded, "I think the thesis is clearly true. The influence of Christianity is helping to diminish prejudicial feelings between the Roma and non-Roma. But only in the cases where the Roma demonstrate true faith and are persistent in their pursuit of it."⁸⁰

In response to the validity of the three faith levels—multi-faith level, transitional-faith level, and single-faith level—Holubová said:

It is true, these levels. The reality is that some are searching and moving from level to level. But most Roma are unstable and live on a multi-faith level. When a Rom is living a single-faith lifestyle, he or she feels less prejudice toward the Gadje and the Gadje are less prejudiced toward the Rom. The single-faith Roma are accepted because they believe and behave.⁸¹

Gavenda replied, "I can only speak of Poštárká. Only a certain group is trying to live their faith in a conscious [single-faith] way. The majority are still living a multi-faith life, but there are those who are transitioning from this to a single-faith."⁸²

Since they were first interviewed, there has been a significant change in how Gavenda and Holubová view the Roma. They now agree with Bešenyei's assesment that the Roma can experience conversion and become non-syncretistic in their faith. Gavenda specifically mentioned that building a personal relationship between himself and the Roma has helped them to overcome their syncretistic tendencies.

⁷⁸ The interview of Holubová was possibly influenced by the fact that Gavenda insisted on being present, though he did not make any comments.

⁷⁹ Holubová, interview, 13 May 2008.

⁸⁰ Teodor Gavenda, interview by author, 13 May 2008, Bardejov, Slovakia, written notes.

⁸¹ Holubová, interview, 13 May 2008.

⁸² Gavenda, interview, 13 May 2008.

Lunik Devät'

Jozef Červeň and Emanuel Čurík are priests who minister among the Roma of Lunik Devät', a Romani settlement on the western edge of Košice. In 2004, these priests were interviewed regarding their goal of working with all Romani age groups. Since most of the five thousand Roma in Lunik Devät' were not accustomed to attending mass on a regular basis, the priests established a point system in an attempt to create interest, responsibility, and values among the children and the youth.

At that time, each child or youth received points for attending each church service and other activities sponsored by the church. Once they had received a certain number of points, they were given a card granting them entrance to one of three computer rooms, each requiring a greater amount of points. The child's card remained valid as long as church attendance was maintained. There were three different computer rooms. Computers in the first room had limited games. Access to this room required a minimum number of points. The second room had computers with limited Internet access, and access required more points than the first room. The third room was a lab with state-of-the-art computers and full Internet access, and its use required the highest number of points.⁸³

The concept was that the children and youth would attend church regularly in order to gain access to the third computer room and in the process develop a habit of church attendance. Červeň stated, "We must start with the youngest and build for the future."⁸⁴ He felt that the program was successful in its beginning stages.

At the time of the 2004 interview, all church activities used school rooms located at Lunik Devät'. Architectural drawings had been prepared for a new church the priests were hoping to build at Lunik Devät' in the future. Land was given to them by the city for this project. A former nun and several Roma were assisting Červeň and Čurík in their work. The majority of those who attended mass were Roma.

The faith level of those Roma observed was multi-level. Červeň made no mention of a personal salvation experience through Christ nor did he mention the Bible. His concern was regular church attendance and participation in the various

⁸³ Jozef Červeň, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 29 October 2004, written notes.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

RCC rituals and activities. There seemed little concern about the Roma's syncretistic faith as long as they identified themselves with the RCC.

Červeň was interviewed a second time in May 2008. He stated that he agreed with the thesis of this study that all Roma are on one of three different faith levels. He identified the faith levels as a reality among the Roma that he works with. However, he noted "most Roma have a multi-faith level."⁸⁵ He suggested that the Roma who live integrated among the non-Roma find it easier to adopt a single-faith lifestyle. While Lunik Devät' is almost entirely Roma, he stated, "We are beginning to see some adopt a single-faith level here in Lunik Devät'."⁸⁶ He attributed this to a growing number of Roma within the Lunik Devät' community who are willing to put aside their traditional beliefs. Because "the influence of the community is great," moving from a multi-faith level to a transitional-faith level to a single-faith level must be acceptable to the Romani community.⁸⁷ Červeň stated that there are two key elements that help convince the Roma to put aside their traditional beliefs: "The repetition of doctrine and making the Roma feel accepted within the church."⁸⁸

In the 2004 interview, Červeň was more interested in talking about the program he was implementing than in the Romani people he was helping. But presently, he is more focused on the people and what is needed for them to develop a genuine relationship with the church and with God.

5.4.2 Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession

The participation structure of the ECAV varies locally. In many of the smaller churches where the pastors are older, ministry functions as a "one man show."⁸⁹ In other churches, members are encouraged to help the pastor with various ministry opportunities. Membership in the church normally happens when a child is baptized. As they grow older, they attend catechism classes before being "confirmed" as an adult ECAV member. For adults who want to join the church, such as the Roma of Rankovce, they attend special catechism classes before being confirmed as members. Once a person is a member, he or she can volunteer to

⁸⁵ Jozef Červeň, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia, 12 May 2008, written notes.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ján Gondol, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 27 September 2005, email.

help the pastor in various ministries. An example would be Kveta Flit'árová, a Rom, who ministers to children in Rankovce.

If church members desire to become pastors, they must attend the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the University of Komenskeho in Bratislava. There have been no Romani graduates to this point, but at present, there is one Romani student in the seminary.⁹⁰

Rankovce

In 1992, a small group of Romani adults began to attend the ECAV in Rankovce. This was because the RCC in their nearby village, Herľany, would not allow the Roma to attend services. The ECAV priest at the time, Igor Mišina, began working with the adults while his wife worked with the children. Mrs. Mišinová trained Kveta Flit'árová, a Rom, to work with the children.⁹¹

In 2000, after her graduation from KETM, Františka Ondrášiková began to help Mrs. Mišinová and Flit'árová with the children in Rankovce. Her husband began a youth group at the same time. By 2004, there were 40 Romani children and 20 Romani youth who attended these weekly clubs. "Our goal is to build workers among the Roma," Ondrášiková stated.⁹²

Lubo Behó became the priest in 2003 and continued the ministry to the Roma that Igor Mišina had begun. The church started an NGO shortly after his arrival to help expand the ministry to the Roma. The programs of the NGO include classes for pre-school children in order to teach them the Slovak language to prepare them for school, and programs to help train adults for work.⁹³

In 2004, there were seven Romani adults who met weekly in confirmation classes. Juraj Turtak was the first Rom to come to the church and was the leading Rom among this group. He told how the church introduced him to Christ and that this changed his life and his family. "I no longer beat my wife or kids now that I know Christ."⁹⁴

In the 2004 interview, Behó stated that the goal of the church was to help the Roma find Christ, to encourage them to become active in the ministries of the

⁹⁰ Slávka Danielová, interview by author, Bratislava, Slovakia, 27 September 2005, email. Danielová at the time was student chaplain at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the University of Komenskeho in Bratislava.

⁹¹ Mišina, interview, 29 October 2004.

⁹² Ondrášiková, interview, 4 November 2004.

⁹³ Behó, interview, 4 November 2004.

⁹⁴ Turtak, interview, 19 April 2005.

church, and to help them find their place in the community. He further stated, "We are also hopeful that we can help all the unemployed of Rankovce find work."⁹⁵

According to Behó, the faith level of the Roma who were attending the ECAV in Rankovce had moved from a multi-faith level to a transition-faith level and was heading to a single-faith level. The key elements directly responsible for this move were regular Bible studies and consistent love and care given to the Roma by church leaders. Salvation through Christ was stressed, as was the importance of the Bible.⁹⁶

In a follow-up visit to Rankovce in May 2008, a number of changes were observed regarding ministry to the Roma by the local ECAV. The Roma who had been attending the church stopped coming to the ECAV, and are now attending the local Seventh Day Adventist church. Behó gave several reasons why this has happened:

First, the non-Romani Lutherans in our parish rejected the idea of Roma attending services. Because of this the Roma did not feel welcome in our church. Second, the Adventist Church in Rankovce has only Roma attending, except for the leaders who come from another Adventist Church. The Roma feel acceptance and not rejection, so they attend there.⁹⁷

However, the NGO that was started to help Romani children is still functioning. They have developed a Romani leadership team that is in charge of this ministry. Františka Ondrášiková, a non-Romani lay person, is the leader of this team. All other members are Roma.

Regarding the conclusions of this study, Behó said, "I believe that the thesis is correct and that the faith levels are true. In our local Lutheran church, there are some who are born again and who are more tolerant of the Roma than those who are Lutheran because of tradition."⁹⁸ He related how those who are "born again" invite the Roma into their homes for Bible studies, but the "traditional Lutherans reject all contact with the Roma."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Behó interview, 4 November 2004.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Behó, interview, 12 May 2008.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Ondrášiková, in addition to her work as a lay person with the Roma in Rankovce, works as the healthcare community manager for the Roma in the Rankovce region. She regularly visits Romani settlements to assess and assist with their health needs. Ondrášiková agreed with Behó that there is truth in the conclusions of this study. However, she added a rather interesting observation:

There is a great difference in how faith is understood between the Roma who live in a closed community (settlement) and those who live integrated into the Slovak society. When a community is marginalized by those outside and then outsiders come presenting a different faith than the traditional Romani spirituality, the message most often falls on deaf ears. It is difficult to have a single-faith level in a marginalized community. But it is true that those Roma who have a single-faith level are less marginalized than those who are caught in their traditional multi-faith beliefs.¹⁰⁰

An important observation regarding the Rankovce ECAV is that even though the church leaders embraced the Roma, the majority of lay people within the church did not. In the end, the lack of acceptance by these regular church attendees drove the Roma to another church where they felt more accepted.

5.4.3 Reformed Church of Slovakia

Membership in the RKC "has three stages."¹⁰¹ The first stage is baptism. When a child is born, he or she is baptized and becomes a member of the church. The next stage is confirmation, when a child reaches the age of 13 or 14. These children are then "taught the basics of Reformed faith based on a catechism, make a personal acknowledgement of his or her baptism, and make a vow to be a Reformed Christian for the rest of his or her life."¹⁰² They are then considered to be "an adolescent member of the congregation."¹⁰³ The third stage happens at the age of 18 when an adolescent member "renews his or her confirmation vow."¹⁰⁴ They then become an adult member of the church. Anyone who was not baptized as a child can be baptized as an adult, go through an adult version of confirmation—

¹⁰⁰ Františka Ondrášiková, interview by author, 12 May 2008, Rankovce, Slovakia, written notes.

¹⁰¹ Marián Hamari, interview by author, Košice, Slovakia 8 October 2005, email.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

special adult catechism—and then "make a vow to be a good Reformed Christian and [become] a member of a congregation."¹⁰⁵

The ministry in a local RKC is fourfold—"ministry of the word and sacraments; ministry of teaching; ministry of an elder; and the ministry of diakonia."¹⁰⁶ In practice, these ministries are divided between the pastor and lay people. The specifics vary from congregation to congregation. It is the pastors' responsibility to preach, to administer the sacraments, and to teach; however, often there is "a catechist" (teacher) who is responsible for teaching doctrine as well as helping the pastor. Each local church has a board of elders elected by the members of the local church. A pastor must have a theological education and be ordained. "The official church catechist must be trained at a [Reformed] catechetical seminary, or at least [have] the approval of a pastor."¹⁰⁷ An elder must be at least 21 years old and have a "good testimony of faith in the church and family life."¹⁰⁸

At present, there are no Roma in the RKC of Slovakia who meet any of these requirements. But according to Juraj Brecko, there would be no restriction on a Rom holding one of these positions if he or she met the qualifications¹⁰⁹

Tušice

The RKC in Tušice began ministering to the Roma in the fall of 2003. One of the local Romani girls started visiting the religious classes the RKC held at the elementary school. She came from a Roman Catholic background. However, when she tried to attend the Catholic religious classes, she was told she was not welcome. In the RKC class, though, she found help.

At first, our [RKC] kids made fun of her—talking about how stupid she was. Then one day the Romani girl said, "Your mothers are helping you with your school work, but there is no one to help me." The woman from our church who teaches the class overheard what the Romani girl said and told me what happened. We decided that we needed to do something. So, the woman began to help this girl with

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005.

her homework each day. Soon other Romani children were coming for help.¹¹⁰

The Romani students' school grades improved as a result of the church workers, but Brecko felt that his congregation should be doing more for the 30 Roma in their village. Through the students who were attending the religious classes, he discovered that the Romani families did not have enough food to eat. "We offered to help them grow potatoes."¹¹¹ But they had never grown potatoes before and knew nothing about farming. When Brecko informed the church what he wanted to do, many people in the church and village made fun of his plan. He was told by town people, "These Roma will never be able to grow potatoes. They will dig them up to eat before they can grow."¹¹² Since the Roma had never done anything like this before, even they were not sure they could do it. "But their poverty pushed them to try."¹¹³

In the local RKC a charity fund was established to finance this potato project. Around ten people in the church began to give 100 to 200 crowns a month.¹¹⁴ Brecko said, "I have a group of born-again Christians who attend my church...they are the ones who first gave."¹¹⁵

Before we helped them plant the potatoes, I talked to the Roma from Proverbs about how the worker in the field always has enough bread to eat. I told them that from one planted potato God would bless them and they would receive 5, 6 or more...These potatoes are yours, but think what is better, to dig up the planted potatoes to eat now, or to wait until they grow and you then have [more than] what you planted. The Roma decided it was best to let the potatoes grow. When they saw the result of waiting, they were very happy. The people in town, who had been laughing before, stopped.¹¹⁶

From the beginning of the project, it was Brecko's plan to help them not only practically, but spiritually. He met weekly with the adults to study the Bible. At the time only the Romani women attended these meetings, but "the men were not against us; their pride would not let them come."¹¹⁷ In visiting this settlement,

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ In 2003, 100 crowns equaled \$3.00 or 2.50 euro.

¹¹⁵ Brecko, interview, 13 April 2005.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

it was noted that the children and women were in the front wanting to see and hear, while the men stood in the background. But it was obvious that they, too, wanted to see and hear what Brecko was saying.

Brecko believed they were beginning to move toward a transitional-faith level even though there were icons and other symbols placed in prominent places in the Romani houses, which seemed to indicate a multi-faith level.¹¹⁸ This shift was observable in their willingness to attend church and the weekly Bible studies taught by Brecko. The importance placed upon the Bible, the emphases upon the need for salvation through Christ, acceptance by the local RKC, and demonstrated concern were the key factors encouraging this move.

This case was discussed in the previous chapter, 4.4.2 *Acceptance Influences*. As noted there, when a return visit was made in May 2008, there had been a significant change in the situation at the Tušice RKC. One change was the suspension of the potato planting project. Several reasons were given for this stoppage—bad weather and bad soil. Most likely, however, the main factor was the city receiving enough money from the EU for the mayor to provide work for the Roma. Their salaries are such that they now receive enough income to feed their families. Brecko also noted that the Roma are receiving on-the-job training which is raising their skill level. He mentioned that several of the Roma have been able to take their new skills and find work outside of the immediate area.¹¹⁹

While the Roma who live in Tušice no longer attend the RKC (see 4.4.2 Influence of Acceptance), there are Roma who live in the Horovce settlement, a nearby village, who do. The Tušice RKC has joined together with a group from Vranov nad Topľou to evangelize the Horovce Roma.

Brecko commented on the conclusions of this study, "The gospel helps to improve the Romani situation. Those Roma who are closed to the Word of God have no hope, but those who are open to the Word of God and allow it to influence their lives have hope."¹²⁰ When the Roma are accepted by the local church, they are open to the gospel message. However, when there is little or no acceptance demonstrated, the Roma are closed to the Word of God and to leaving their traditional Romani spirituality.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Brecko, interview, 8 May 2008.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

5.4.4 Evangelical Methodist Church of Slovakia

Unlike the RCC, ECAV, and RKC, the ECM "offer parents the possibility to either baptize a child or... [to pray for]...God to bless the child."¹²¹ For children who are not baptized, when they reach the age of accountability they are then baptized. Membership in the church is not given according to family heritage but is a personal decision by the individual. There is a period of time after a person requests membership when their life and doctrine is examined to see if they are consistent with Methodist dogma. These evaluation qualifications are confessing Christ as Lord and Savior, participating in worship, and giving financially to the church in the form of tithes and offerings. The elders of the local church will then meet to discuss and suggest whether the individual should become a member or not. The opportunity for participation in the church is limited until one becomes a member. Once a member, however, there are few restrictions on the believer's participation. Each individual church organizes the lay people's functions within the local church. Much of the ministry is done on a volunteer basis. The possibility to attend seminary and become a pastor is open to all.

In fact, there is the potential for a Rom to attend the Evangelical Theological and Mission Seminary (KETM), which is part of the University of Matej Bela Pedagogy in Banská Bystrica.¹²² At the present time there are no Romani students who attend KETM. However, there has been one Romani student who attended over a two-year period but for personal reasons had to drop out.

Slavkovce

Since 1995, the ECM church in Slavkovce has been in existence. It began with Jozef Horváth, a Romani man, who asked the pastor of the ECM in nearby Michalovce to come weekly and hold Bible studies in the Slavkovce Romani settlement. The Bible study has since become a church, which is attended by all Roma with the exception of Svetlana Francisti, who is the pastor, and Jarmila Nagyová (a Slovak who is married to a Rom, Jozef Nagy), who teaches the children.

¹²¹ Pavel Procházka, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 27 September 2005, email.

¹²² The ECM, BJB, ACS, and Brethren Church, in cooperation, administer the seminary.

Much of the work that is done is with the children: "Seventy-five percent of those we work with are below the age of 14."¹²³ The ECM workers help the Romani children with their homework and teach social skills as well as Bible stories. Nagyová adds, "We now have a kid's worship team and they are great."¹²⁴ A weekly Bible study for the parents of the Romani children is offered as well.

According to Francisti, the majority of Romani adults in Slavkovce, though they attend the ECM, still take their spiritual direction from the RCC. Thus, even though they come to ECM services weekly, they believe they must go to the RCC priest for important matters, e.g., burial of the dead. Many think if they go to a church other than the RCC, they will have no place to bury their dead. "We tell them that they will have a place of burial."¹²⁵ One Greek-Catholic priest in the area is helping the ECM with this dilemma. "He comes to our funerals...we stand next to each other in our priestly robes."¹²⁶ The Roma feel good about this. "Our biggest problem [in the Slavkovce community] is to show...that we are a real church." Standing next to the priest at funerals helps to "identify us as a church authority."¹²⁷

While most of the Roma in the Slavkovce settlement identify with Catholicism, they do not feel welcome in the local RCC. There is a place for them to sit, but it is separate from the non-Roma. This has caused many of them to look to other sources for spiritual acceptance and fulfillment. The ECM has helped to fill that spiritual void.

Most of the adults that Francisti works with could be described as having a multi-faith level, which is indicated by their icon worship, belief in talismans, and superstitions. Some, though, are entering into the transitional-faith level as they seek spiritual fulfillment. It was observed that the Romani man, Nagy, has moved from a multi-faith level through a transitional-faith level to a single-faith level. This was precipitated by the teaching of biblical principles, placing importance upon Bible study and salvation through Christ.

In May 2008, Svetlana Francisti was contacted to discover how the church in Slavkovce has progressed. She began by telling of the reconstruction of the

¹²³ Francisti, interview, 22 October 2004.

¹²⁴ Jarmila Nagyová, interview by author, Slavkovce, Slovakia, 22 October 2004, written notes.

¹²⁵ Francisti interview, 22 October 2004.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

home where they had been meeting. She and the members increased the size of the building, making a sanctuary that holds 40 people. Francisti stated:

In the past our ministry was mainly with children. We have seen these children grow into teenagers. Most of them are actively involved in ministry in the church. Some are leading small groups among the children. Others are involved in worship and the various functions of the church.¹²⁸

Francisti remarked that Christianity gives hope to many in the Romani settlement. This is mainly among young families. "They pray to God and identify that their past ways of thinking and acting were wrong."¹²⁹

Francisti commented that there are two distinct groups within the Romani settlement at Slavkovce. "First are those who hear about Christ and combine their past beliefs with new ones. The second group [of believers] find Christ in a personal way and do not want to keep their old ways. They see their old ways as limiting them in their spirituality and socially." Her implication was that those Roma who live a multi-faith life continue to be marginalized both in the church and society, while those who move into a transitional-faith level seeking a single-faith level are less marginalized by the church and by society.

5.4.5 Baptist Union of Slovakia

The BJB concept of church membership is the same as the ECM view though the baptizing of children is never considered appropriate. Participation in the local church is limited until a person is baptized as an adult member. Once a member, each person is then able to participate initially through various "lay ministries" that are practical in nature, such as cleaning the church, or helping those who are leading ministries to children, youth, and adults. After the individual has proven to be faithful in ministry, he or she has the potential to become a leader of lay ministries based upon individual gifts—e.g., Sunday School, home cells/Bible studies, or leading the worship team.¹³⁰

Being an elder is the next level of potential participation. He or she is elected to this office by the church members. The responsibility of an elder is to help the pastor oversee the ministry of the local church. This includes setting local church policies and evaluating and approving potential members. It is also the

¹²⁸ Svetlana Francisti, interview by author, Michalovce, Slovakia, 8 May 2008, written notes.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Albin Masarik, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, 29 September 2005, email.

elders' responsibility to oversee the finances of the church and periodically to preach.¹³¹

As far as Romani participation within the BJB, there are some who are members, but none who function as elders or pastors. To become a pastor in the BJB, one must receive theological training from an approved seminary such as KETM or The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.¹³²

Cinobaňa

The work in Cinobaňa began in 2004. Tomáš Kriška and Pavel Šinko were told by a woman in the Lučenec BJB church that something was happening among the Roma of her village. When they went to investigate, they met a young Romani man, Jozef Demjan. He told them how he had found Christ several years prior, but had struggled in his relationship with Christ. He explained that by reading the Bible daily and praying, he had found stability for his life. This resulted in changes in his lifestyle. He stopped stealing and participating in other unacceptable activities. Some of his friends were curious about the changes in his life, and they began to meet and discuss what had happened. Demjan shared with his friends what had brought about the dramatic changes in his life. This resulted in a number of his friends accepting Christ as their Savior.¹³³

As Kriška and Šinko asked more questions, they realized that Demjan needed some help. They offered to come and lead a Bible study. This offer was accepted and weekly meetings began. The BJB used the Alpha Course¹³⁴ for the meetings. The number of Roma attending increased with many of them confessing a personal relationship with Christ. Recently, a number of the attendees were baptized in water by Kriška.

Demjan stated that he came from a multi-faith level background. He at first found it difficult to give up some of his past beliefs, but the more he studied the Bible and prayed, the easier it was to leave the multi-faith level lifestyle and adopt a single-faith level lifestyle. Others who were observed demonstrated either a single-faith level or a transitional-faith level.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Kriška, telephone interview, 9 September 2005.

¹³³ Demjan, interview, 3 September 2005.

¹³⁴ The Alpha Course was developed in the United Kingdom. It is designed to introduce people to Christian concepts in a non-threatening way. For more information visit the Alpha Course online site: <http://alphacourse.org/>.

In a telephone interview with Shane McNary (BJB Strategic Coordinator for Romani Ministry in Slovakia and the Czech Republic), 7 July 2008, it was revealed that Demjan is still actively involved in the Cinobaňa Bible study. While the goal is to eventually plant a church in Cinobaňa, this has not yet happened. Those who attend the Bible study are supported by the BJB in Lučenec, where all new believers are baptised.¹³⁵

5.4.6 Apostolic Church of Slovakia

Baptism and church membership are virtually the same in the ACS, as it is in the BJB church. The potential for church participation is also the same as in the BJB with the exception that the ACS has deacons who function between the lay ministers and the elders. Their responsibility is to handle organizational issues, social care, and other practical ministries such as taking care of the financial matters of the church.

There are a number of Roma who participate in local ACS churches. Of special interest is Laco Duna, who is the first Romani pastor in the ACS. He pastors a Romani ACS church in Lunik Devät' on the outskirts of Košice. There are a number of Roma who are members of local churches in Vranov nad Topľou, Sabinov, Banská Bystrica, Rožňava, Lunik Devät', and Senica. Also, the churches in Sabinov and Lunik Devät' have Romani elders. Additionally, there are a number of Roma who function as lay ministers in various positions in these churches. However, to become an ACS pastor, a person must receive theological training from an approved institution then spend at least one year under the supervision of an established pastor of an ACS church.

Lunik Devät'

The ACS of Košice has been working with the Roma of Lunik Devät' since 1998. Igor Láslofi and Laco Duna are the pastors who work with the Roma. Láslofi is the pastor responsible for ministry to all ethnic people groups of Slovakia, and Duna is the pastor to the Roma in Lunik Devät'. Duna and his family live in an apartment in Lunik Devät'. The Romani ministry began when Roma from Lunik Devät' started attending the Sunday services at the Košice ACS. As of 2004, an average of 50 Roma were in attendance. In addition, three home Bible studies and a ministry to the Romani children took place each week. Anna Dunová,

¹³⁵ McNary, interview, 7 July 2008.

Duna's wife, led the children's ministry. In March 2005, Duna began to hold Sunday services at Lunik Devät' for the Roma, rather than having them attend the Košice ACS. Presently, they rent a room from the elementary school in Lunik Devät' that accommodates around 60 adults. In 2007, property was acquired in front of the Lunik Devät' settlement for the construction of a church building. They are presently raising funds to begin construction.

In 2004, Láslofi stated, "The gospel is God's power to change things." Both he and Duna testify that this is what they have seen in Lunik Devät'. According to Láslofi and Duna, the norm for a Romani man is to beat his wife and children, but this practice changes after Romani men find Christ. Láslofi noted these transformations in the lives of Romani men who found Christ through their church: "Violence in families is less. They become less aggressive in life. Relationships with their wives and children change....The man realizes that Christ is the head [of the family] not himself....They become aware of the future and the need to take care of their children."¹³⁶ Duna noted that his own life changed drastically when he found Christ. "One of the biggest lifestyle changes is in the relationship between a husband and wife, and specifically regarding communication between the two. Others [in Lunik Devät'] see this and are attracted [to the gospel]."¹³⁷

Most Roma placed little importance on education. Because of this, many of the people Duna ministered to at Lunik Devät' were not able to read. When they began to grow in their relationship with Christ, they wanted to learn so that they could read the Bible. They began to recognize the importance of a good education. Thus, participants in the home Bible studies were more diligent in making their children attend school regularly so that they would be able to read the Bible. Duna and his wife Anna sent their children to Slovak schools. It was not easy for their children being Roma in a school of primarily non-Roma, but Duna and Anna believed their children would receive a better education there.

Many of the men that Duna worked with were unemployed, so they had special prayer meetings for those without jobs. According to Duna, as a result many found jobs.¹³⁸ An additional benefit that Duna observed was that when the Romani men found Christ as their Savior, they wanted to find work and support

¹³⁶ Láslofi, interview, 9 February 2004.

¹³⁷ Duna, interview, 6 March 2004.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

their families. They did not want to have the government supporting them any longer. Many of their wives also were eager to find jobs.

According to Láslofi and Duna, the majority of the Roma in Lunik Devät had a multi-faith level. However, those who began to attend the ACS church did so because they were searching for a more meaningful spiritual experience, and thus they entered into a transitional-faith level. It was the goal of the ACS to see them reach a single-faith level. The main contributing factor that encouraged this movement was the weekly Bible studies, which emphasized foundational biblical principles for all areas of life. The home Bible studies included "worship, testimonies, discussion of the problems of life, the teaching of the Word of God and prayer, and application of biblical principles to their life situation."¹³⁹ Salvation through Christ, and the importance of having a personal relationship with Christ, was the major theme of all meetings. The significance of the Bible as the standard for life was also taught. These messages were repeated often so that the Roma comprehended the magnitude of knowing Christ and the value of the Bible. The problem of mixing faiths was addressed by emphasizing that "they can get everything they need from Jesus."¹⁴⁰ As a result, both Láslofi and Duna stated that they see few Roma who regularly attend the ACS living a multi-faith level.

Rožňava

The ACS in Rožňava had been working with the Roma since 2001. In a 2004 interview, Pastor Ondrej Vaško stated, "We have focused on one...key family [in each community] to reach the entire Romani settlement."¹⁴¹ Vaško worked in the Romani settlement near Krásnohorské Podhradie and among the Roma who lived in the village of Slavošovce. In addition, some upper-class Roma, who lived in Rožňava, attended the services at the local ACS.

Vaško's philosophy in ministering to the Roma was to teach godly principles to key people within the Romani community who would then teach others. He and his wife spent time each month with these leaders, not only training them, but also helping them to wisely use the financial resources they had. Each unemployed Romani family received some compensation from the Slovak government. Vaško and his wife were teaching the Roma how they could exist on

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ondrej Vaško, interview by author, Rožňava, Slovakia, 4 November 2004, written notes.

this amount of income. At the same time, they were encouraging them to gain special training to better their situation.

In both Krásnohorské Podhradie and Slavošovce, weekly home Bible studies and prayer meetings had been established. Those who attended the Bible study and prayer meetings were encouraged to attend church services in Rožňava regularly. The ultimate goal was to establish ACS churches in each place.

Each summer the Rožňava ACS sponsored a kids' week.¹⁴² The teachers focused on teaching biblical truths to the children and the youth, as well as basic hygiene and cooking. The use of worship songs was a key ingredient in helping the Romani children and youth to understand biblical principles.¹⁴³

Vaško, during his interview, made the point that ministry to the Roma is a long-term commitment. "Some church leaders do not want to spend time ministering to the Roma."¹⁴⁴ He mentioned that this difference of opinion creates tension between those leaders who see little value in ministering to the Roma and those, like himself, who believe that God commands they preach the gospel message to the Roma.

Several of the Roma who attended the ACS in Rožňava were interviewed. It was observed that each was either on the transitional-faith level or the single-faith level.¹⁴⁵ All of them spoke of coming out of a multi-faith level. They abandoned a multi-faith level for a single-faith level for three distinct reasons: consistent Bible study, emphasis on salvation through Christ, and the possibility of having a personal relationship with Christ.

A return visit was made to Rožňava in May 2008. Ondrej Vaško commented that Christianity potentially can reduce the prejudice and marginalization of the Roma by helping them transition from a multi-faith level to a single-faith level. He stated that he agrees with the basic principles of the thesis. However, he defined a single-faith level in the following way:

I would refer to the single-faith level as personal faith, one that leaves behind all the Romani traditional beliefs. There certainly is a period of transition when they are leaving their traditional past beliefs and moving into a Christ-centered faith. The influences of cultural and family traditions make it difficult for many to transition to a personal

¹⁴² Korean Christians who live in Bratislava have helped facilitate the kids' week each year.

¹⁴³ Vaško, interview, 4 November 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Horváth, Lesňáková, and Tomi, interviews; 11 April 2005.

faith. However, when a Rom is willing to leave their traditional beliefs for a Christ-centered faith, they have real genuine faith in Christ.¹⁴⁶

Vaško related how Christianity helps to improve the social position of some of the Roma he works with. In Slavošovce, the Roma who have a personal faith not only want to improve their spiritual life, but their social life as well. They do not live in a settlement, but in apartment housing alongside non-Roma. The non-Roma are able to see the change that Christ has made in the lives of the Roma. These changes have made them more acceptable to the community.¹⁴⁷

An interesting observation made by Vaško is that the Roma who live in Slavošovce, who are integrated among the non-Roma, find it easier to transition to a single-faith level than do the Roma in Krásnohorské Podhradie, who live in a settlement segregated from the non-Roma. He suggests that the pressure against change is greater in a Romani settlement than it is for Roma living integrated with the non-Roma.

Each of the individual churches observed have contributed to an overall understanding of the Romani spiritual situation in Slovakia. It is clear that the Roma face prejudicial marginalization in the church just as they do in Slovak society. But an even more important fact, which reinforces the premise of this study, is that prejudicial marginalization within the church is reduced when the Roma put aside their traditional multi-faith lifestyle and adopt a single-faith lifestyle.

5.5 Participation Models in Church Structure and the Formation of Theology

Of particular interest to this study is how the selected churches are structured when their congregation includes several different ethnic groups. The answers to two specific questions, which are addressed in this section of chapter 5, help us to understand this structure. First, do the selected churches use a multi-ethnic congregation model or an indigenous congregation model in their incorporation of

¹⁴⁶ Ondrej Vaško, interview by author, Rožňava, Slovakia, 9 May 2008, written notes.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

the Roma into the church?¹⁴⁸ Second, in what ways are the Roma involved in the formation of theology?

5.5.1 Congregational Models: Multiethnic and Indigenous

The two congregational models are presented and discussed. A description of how each of the selected churches has developed their Romani ministry in relation to the two models follows.

Multiethnic Congregations

Manuel Ortiz emphasizes that there are three scriptural concepts that describe a multiethnic congregation: Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2-4 and Luke 4; and Acts 2. In Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8, Ortiz envisions a church that wants to fulfill the mandate of Christ by reaching the lost. The church members act upon this specifically within the church's immediate community. The idea is to train indigenous leaders within the various ethnic groups of a community who will then reach the lost within their own ethnicity. The issues of "justice and righteousness" are not as important as the "missiological imperative to see the lost found and discipled."¹⁴⁹ Because this can result in the mixing of various ethnic groups, the issue of reconciliation often becomes a major concern.

Ephesians 2-4 and Luke 4 are "primarily concerned with correcting the injustices of society and the church by intentionally working toward reconciliation."¹⁵⁰ Church members embrace the various cultures that surround the local church and articulate that God is not pleased with racism in the church or outside of the church. This concept leans heavily on Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:14 regarding Christ's actions that "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (NIV). It follows, then, that the church is to demonstrate "reconciliation both vertically and horizontally."¹⁵¹ The goal is for people to find Christ as their Savior (vertically) and at the same time to "grow in relationship to others" (horizontally). The theological issues of justice and justification are major themes.

¹⁴⁸ See the following for discussions on this topic: Keith E. Eitel, "To Be or Not to Be?: The Indigenous Church Question," in *Missiology*, eds. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998). James Breckenridge and Lillian Breckenridge, *What Color Is Your God?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997). Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Ortiz, *One New People*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

The multiethnic congregation of Acts 2 is clearly charismatic according to Ortiz. It is concerned with preaching the gospel message with signs following. While there will be some importance placed on cultures, the central issue is seeing how God "brings diversity together in both forms of ministry and quantity."¹⁵² In this model, Ortiz believes that the Holy Spirit, in a Pentecostal context, will reconcile people together as they worship and serve the Lord. Worship is the central theme with "multicultural dynamics" happening unintentionally.

The Matthew 28/Acts 1:8 concept is applicable to the Slovak context, and in fact, several churches are using it. In Rožňava the ACS is using this concept, to reach the Roma in Krásnohorské Podhradie and Slavošovce. Ondrej Vaško, pastor in Rožňava, has identified a key Romani family in each town that is being trained to minister in the Romani community. One variation from Ortiz's model is that the two Romani communities join together with the non-Romani congregation each Sunday in Rožňava. As a result, many of the prejudicial issues are confronted at least on a weekly basis. Vaško relates that they are working to overcome these racial feelings by teaching the biblical principle of loving your neighbor.

Ortiz's Ephesians 2-4/Luke 4 idea of reconciliation is a concept that the selected churches are not intentionally addressing. However, there are some churches that have unintentionally dealt with this issue. The various churches that fall into this category are the ECAV in Rankovce, the RKC in Tušice, the ECM in Slavkovce, the BJB in Cinobaňa, and the ACS in Banská Bystrica.¹⁵³ It seems that it would be advantageous that the churches of Slovakia initiate reconciliation between the Roma and the non-Roma, making it a priority of their mission activities.

The Acts 2 model proposed by Ortiz of Pentecostal-charismatic mission has a narrow application for obvious theological reasons. However, the mystical-emotive tendency of the Roma is similar to the expressions of liturgy that are found in Pentecostal-charismatic churches. Jean-Pierre Liégeois states that the dynamics of the Romani culture are attracted to the Pentecostal experience. In France, for example, this has resulted in a large number of Roma becoming Pentecostal believers over the last 50 years.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid., 54.

¹⁵³ The author attended the Banská Bystrica church. It had an African pastor, and members from America, England, Palestine, Romania, Serbia, as well as Roma.

¹⁵⁴ Jean-Pierre Liégeois, *Rómovia-Cigáni-Kočovníci* (Roma-Gypsies-Travellers) (Bratislava: Rada Európy, 1995), 83.

Indigenous Churches

In the nineteenth century the term indigenous churches was used by the Congregational missionary, Rufus Anderson, and the Anglican missionaries, Henry Venn and Roland Allen.¹⁵⁵ The concept was to plant a church while training a national to be the pastor and then turning the church over to the national as soon as possible. The missionaries would then move to another location and repeat the process. The idea was to plant the church based on the culture of the nationals rather than the culture of the missionaries.

Melvin Hodges authored a book, *The Indigenous Church*,¹⁵⁶ in which he emphasizes the three classical principles of the indigenous church: self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting.¹⁵⁷ The self-governing concept "means that missionaries relinquish the control of decisions to the local or national church"¹⁵⁸ as soon as nationals are able to function in leadership roles. The self-propagating concept "is the utilization of the local church as the best vehicle for evangelism."¹⁵⁹ The self-supporting concept means that the local church is not funded by foreign money from the missionaries. The indigenous congregation is taught from the beginning to support their own national pastor as well as the other costs of a functioning church.

The indigenous church principle can be seen in several local situations in Slovakia. In Bardejov, an indigenous RCC has been established because of pejorative attitudes between the Roma and the non-Roma.¹⁶⁰ While it is good to see Romani participation in the Poštárka RCC, it is also troubling that nothing is being done to overcome the existing prejudices between the Roma and non-Roma.

The ACS churches in Sabinov and Lunik Devät' are both indigenous. The Sabinov church was established in a Romani settlement and had a non-Romani pastor initially. At present, that congregation is without a pastor. The lead elder, Marián Kalaja (a Rom), is functioning as the pastor. Recently, when the author

¹⁵⁵ George M. Flattery, *Current Frontiers in Theological Education: A Missions Strategy* (Irving, TX: GMF, 1986), 4.

¹⁵⁶ Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953).

¹⁵⁷ These three principles were first suggested by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn in the nineteenth century.

¹⁵⁸ Gary L. Royer, *Models for Fulfilling Missions*, 2d ed. (Springfield, MO: ICI University, 2000), 69.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁶⁰ Holubová, interview, 21 October 2004. Gavenda, interview, 21 October 2004.

talked with Kalaja, he commented that it is not the intention of the church to be a Romani church. The ACS Romani church in Lunik Devät' was started in March 2005 by the Košice ACS church. The pastor of the Lunik Devät' church is Laco Duna, a Rom, who has been on the pastoral staff of the Košice ACS for several years. While this church is indigenous in that it is intended to reach the thousands of Roma in Lunik Devät', there is still a strong bond with the founding Košice ACS church.

The indigenous church principle was developed for a specific situation: a missionary from one culture going to minister in a country or region where there is a single culture that is different from the missionaries. It presupposes that an indigenous believer, who understands the culture, is better prepared to proclaim the gospel message at that location than someone from a different culture. The indigenous principle is functional in such a situation. However, in today's world it is rare to find a single cultural setting. In most situations, there are multiple cultures that must be considered and this fact makes the indigenous concept obsolete.

Some basic observations about the multiethnic congregation and the indigenous congregation are needed. The multiethnic congregation concept, by its very nature, means that any feelings of prejudice that exist between various ethnic groups will be exposed and as a result will need to be neutralized. The indigenous church principle implies that the various ethnic groups will be segregated from one another and any negative attitudes between the groups will generally be ignored. However, the church is to be actively participating in the "ministry of reconciliation."¹⁶¹ There are two aspects to reconciliation that the Bible presents. One is vertical, between God and man, and the other is horizontal, between man and man. Reconciliation between God and man is defined as a change of relationship between the two based upon the changed status of man through the redemptive work of Christ.¹⁶² Reconciliation between man and man addresses the overcoming of prejudicial issues.¹⁶³ Because of this, the multiethnic congregation

¹⁶¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18, NIV.

¹⁶² Thoralf Gilbrant, intl. ed., *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 13, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (Springfield, MO: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 271. See 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

¹⁶³ See John 13:34-35; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 2:11-22.

fits the biblical concept of church ministry better than does the indigenous congregation.

Roman Catholic Church

The RCC philosophy regarding ethnicity is to have multiethnic congregations rather than indigenous congregations. However, prejudicial attitudes hinder the creation of multiethnic congregations. The church in Bardejov is a good example of this. While there is a RCC in Bardejov that the Roma could attend, they do not feel welcome there. Therefore, in the Romani settlement of Poštárka, which is located on the edge of Bardejov, a RCC was built specifically for the Roma. While this is not the normal practice of the RCC, according to Peter Bešenyei (founding priest) and Teodor Gavenda (present priest), it works well. Both priests point out that neither the Bardejov church nor the Poštárka church is restricted regarding attendance by ethnic groups. But they convey that the churches are functioning better separately than if they were combined.¹⁶⁴

The initial visits to Bardejov were made in 2004 and 2005. In a more recent visit, significant changes occurred in the ethnicity of the Poštárka congregation. The congregation is now a mixture of non-Romani and Romani parishioners. It has become a multiethnic congregation.¹⁶⁵ However, the main RCC in Bardejov is still predominantly non-Romani.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession

While there is no official church policy regarding the ethnic constituency of the local church, Daniel Mišina, an ECAV priest, states that the preference of most Lutheran priests is to have a multiethnic church rather than an indigenous one. He and a number of other ECAV priests believe that a multiethnic congregation helps to build bridges and open the door for reconciliation between ethnic groups while indigenous churches tend to enhance marginalization.¹⁶⁶

The ECAV church in Rankovce was an example of a multiethnic congregation. The pastor, non-Romani lay ministers, and the Roma who attended explained that things at first were not so favorable, but as time passed, the Roma and non-Roma of the church began to gain new positive respect for each other.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Holubová, interview, 21 October 2004. Gavenda, interview, 21 October 2004.

¹⁶⁵ Holubová, interview, 13 May 2008.

¹⁶⁶ Mišina, telephone interview.

¹⁶⁷ See 5.3.2 ECAV, Rankovce.

In a subsequent visit to Rankovce, it was observed that the Roma have stopped attending the ECAV services. The majority of these Roma now attend a Seventh-Day Adventist Church that is indigenous. Ľubo Behó, ECAV priest, attributes this change to the fact that the majority of people who attend his church are traditional Lutherans.¹⁶⁸ However, there is a segment of his congregation that he identifies as being born again. He commented that they "are more tolerant of the Roma than those who are Lutheran out of tradition."¹⁶⁹ In the end, the pejorative attitudes of the traditional Lutherans drove the Romani people away.

Reformed Church of Slovakia

The RKC of Slovakia has no written statement regarding multethnic or indigenous churches. While there are a number of Roma in those regions of Slovakia where RKC churches are located, only one church, located in Tušice, was found that was actually ministering to the Roma. The ministry in Tušice has experienced some of the same issues as the ECAV in Rankovce. While the philosophy of Pastor Juraj Brecko is for the Roma to become part of the existing church—the multiethnic congregation—the reality is that part of his congregation are traditional in their thinking and as such, do not want Roma attending the church. In contrast to this thinking, there is another segment of the church, which Brecko identified as being born again, who welcome the Roma into the church.

Evangelical Methodist Church

Pavel Procházka, former superintendent of the Slovak ECM, comments on having ethnic Roma in their church, "A mixed church is preferred, but sometimes this is impossible....Some non-Roma do not want to go to church with Roma."¹⁷⁰ He adds, however, that mixing the ethnic groups causes everyone to deal with their prejudices. They intentionally encourage the Roma to attend all of their meetings and conferences so that this ethnic mixing will happen. "We have noticed that after some time the non-Roma have become more tolerant of the Roma...I think

¹⁶⁸ Behó, interview, 12 May 2008. Behó defined "traditional Lutheran" as people whose family heritage is Lutheran. He makes a distinction between these "traditional Lutherans" and those that he calls "born again" Lutherans. The "born again" Lutherans, according to Behó, have a personal relationship with Christ, while the "traditional Lutherans" only have a historical connection.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Procházka, interview, 29 September 2004.

the non-Roma see that the Roma are serious about serving God and this helps their attitudes."¹⁷¹

The ECM congregation in Slavkovce has mainly Roma in attendance. The pastor of the church, Svetlana Francisti, a non-Roma, expresses a desire for the church to be a multiethnic congregation of Roma and non-Roma. Procházka notes that there are other ECM churches that have some Roma attending, but that Slavkovce has the largest number.

Baptist Union

The BJB has no formal position regarding the ethnic constituency of churches. However, Albin Masarik, BJB pastor and teacher at KETM, believes that dividing ethnic groups into separate churches is theologically incorrect. He believes the apostle Paul spoke against ethnically segregated churches when he wrote of Jesus breaking down "the dividing wall of hostility" between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14).¹⁷²

Apostolic Church of Slovakia

The ACS has no specific guidelines regarding how their churches should be organized ethnically. This is left up to each individual church to determine.¹⁷³ As a result, there are some ACS churches that are multiethnic congregations—e.g., Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Vranov nad Topľou—and some that are indigenous—e.g., Sabinov and Lunik Devät'.

5.5.2 Participation in Contextual Theology

The contextualization of theology implies an understanding of Christian faith from a specific context. It is different from classical theology, which understands faith from two perspectives—Scripture and tradition. From the classical perspective, Scripture and tradition are perceived as being unchangeable, thus theology is unchangeable.¹⁷⁴ In contrast to this, a theology that is contextual begins with scripture and tradition, but then adds the element of "present human experience."¹⁷⁵ This experience would include cultural and historical issues as well as contemporary thought patterns. This implies that theology will change or

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Masarik, interview, 29 September 2004.

¹⁷³ Zsolnai, telephone interview, 28 September 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

evolve as the human experience changes. The ability to develop a contextual theology may be viewed as an indicator of acceptance and participation for any ethnic group within a particular context.

Of particular importance for this study is the possibility for the Roma to develop their own theology that is contextualized with scripture, tradition, culture, history, and contemporary thought patterns. In this section these issues will be examined as well as the potential challenges that arise from the process of contextualizing theology from a Romani perspective.

Contextual theology by definition assumes that different contexts will affect how theology evolves. David J. Bosch writes of the difference between historical theology and contextual theology. He points out that historical theology followed the top-down approach:

Theology was conducted from above as an elitist enterprise...its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was philosophy, and its main interlocutor the educated non-believer, contextual theology is theology "from below", "from the underside of history", its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is social sciences, and its main interlocutor the poor or the culturally marginalized.¹⁷⁶

Stephen B. Bevans defines contextual theology as "experiences of the past... [and] experiences of the present."¹⁷⁷ The experiences of the past include the Scriptures and biblical-based traditions that have been preserved. Experiences of the present take into account experience that is both personal and communal, as well as cultural, social location, and social change.¹⁷⁸ Bevans explains social location as the various roles which identify who a person is—e.g., "male or female, rich or poor, from North America or Latin America."¹⁷⁹ This concept of contextual theology allows everyone to participate equally, bringing a balance of various experiences into theological formation.

Contextual theology cannot be done by others for the Roma; they must participate in the process for theology to be relevant to them. However, the past for most Roma does not include a clear biblical foundation such as Bevans suggests, but instead a syncretistic understanding of faith. Building a contextual theology from such a perspective will only lead to syncretistic theology. To

¹⁷⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 423.

¹⁷⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

prevent this, it is important for the Roma who leave the multi-faith level to receive clear biblical instruction so that their contextual theology has a firm foundation.

One problem in developing theology contextually is the potential tendency to form theology around a single issue. This can be seen in liberation theology, feminist theology and black theology. The one issue that is most important to the theologian can cause him to develop a contextual theology that ignores or dilutes foundational biblical truths. Bosch points out that while there are some contextual theologians who are unbalanced, there are others who espouse liberation theology, feminist theology and black theology who are not.¹⁸⁰ His point is well taken.

On the one hand, the present potential for the Roma to participate in the formation of theology appears to be very limited. It would seem that few Roma have enough theological training to be able to contribute in a positive way. There are several Roma within the RCC who do have theological training and who potentially could participate in such an intellectual exercise. On the other hand, the development of contextual theology does not require a theological degree and as Bosch suggested, it comes from a social science perspective that finds its voice in the people who are poor and marginalized culturally. The Roma of Slovakia certainly qualify. However, it is important that the churches of Slovakia come alongside the Roma to help bring balance so that the Roma do not develop a contextual theology that mimics their traditional religiosity of syncretism.

Paul G. Hiebert suggests that critical contextualization is a proactive way to balance effectively the development of contextual theology. His four-step concept was developed for use by missionaries ministering in a foreign culture, but these concepts are easily adaptable to the situation of the Roma of Slovakia, and this would eventually be helpful in making sure that the development of a Romani contextual theology remains properly balanced. Hiebert's critical contextualization encourages the participation of all members within a church. The first step is to "recognize the need to deal biblically with all areas of life."¹⁸¹ Step two is for the congregation to meet and analyze the cultural issues they confront from an uncritical perspective. The third step is to conduct a Bible study that is relevant to the particular cultural issue being considered. The final step "is for the

¹⁸⁰ See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 432-47.

¹⁸¹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 186-7.

congregation to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings and to make a decision regarding their use."¹⁸²

One significant issue mentioned by Bevans and Bosch, but not mentioned by Hiebert, is the importance of the Christian tradition to support faith.¹⁸³ In the case of the Roma, Christian tradition can be unclear because of the problem of syncretism. It is important that the churches help the Roma to develop a contextual theology that is free from syncretistic traditions that could compromise biblical truth.

The transitional-faith level is a time of searching and developing new religious paradigms (e.g. a contextual theology in progress) and in the process, experimenting with, and eventually adopting, biblical doctrines. This is an optimum time for the church to speak balance into the lives of the Roma. Specific themes that would be helpful for the Roma during this time are the authority of the Bible and salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Other doctrinal beliefs are reflective of the particular denomination with which they affiliate.

Contextual theology among the Roma of Slovakia should be encouraged by the church. Such an exercise with the proper biblical foundation would actually help the Roma to overcome a syncretistic faith and allow them to gain a new understanding of biblical faith. This process must be based on a mutual understanding of the gospel and its message. It has the potential to become a point of acceptance between the church and the Roma, as the church assists them in developing their contextual theology.

5.6 Crucial Relational Problems

Chapter two and chapter three of the present study reveal that relational problems have always existed between the Roma and the non-Roma of the Slovak region. This study states that the same derogatory attitudes toward the Roma, which are found in Slovak society, are also found in the churches of Slovakia. While these prejudicial thoughts are expressed openly outside of the church, they are generally masked within the church. A possible reason for hiding such a viewpoint in the church could be the basic biblical understanding that prejudice is wrong. But the non-Roma are not the sole perpetrators of a pejorative mindset in Slovakia. The

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427, and Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

Romani people have prejudicial notions as well toward the non-Roma and the church.

Prejudice is defined as "an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics."¹⁸⁴ However, both Roma and non-Roma who have such attitudes toward one another would insist that their feelings are very rational. In the sections that follow the prejudicial thinking of the Roma will be examined more closely, followed by the churches' views regarding the Roma.

5.6.1 Prejudices from the Romani People's Perspective

Mária Atanázia Holubová, a Romani nun, speaks about growing up in a non-Roma world and feeling rejected by society:

I attended a normal school, but I was viewed differently by the teachers and other students. We were not treated well. For instance, we had to sit in the back of the bus. But in school, eventually, I became friends with some of the non-Roma. I was a good student and some of the non-Roma wanted to use my homework. It was obvious that the friendship was based upon the non-Roma needing something I had—my homework. This kind of separation was very painful and still is today. I did not understand this when I was young, and I do not understand it today. I did visit some Romani settlements when I was young, and I saw how dirty the people were and how they did not smell good. So I understood a little, but why would the non-Roma feel the same way about me and my family because we were not like that? I guess it was just the color of our skin. I did not understand.¹⁸⁵

Holubová states that the prejudice she observed and experienced while growing up is found in the church today. She relates how the church prepares Romani children for their first communion. "The Romani children must attend church every Sunday prior to this for several months and the non-Roma in the church do not like it. They complain about them being there."¹⁸⁶ She explains further that one thing that contributes to this problem is that the Romani children do not know how to behave while in church.

¹⁸⁴ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (1999), s.v. "prejudice." Additional comments from Webster's: "injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights ...an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge."

¹⁸⁵ Holubová, interview, 21 October 2004.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Jolana and Štefan Nátherovi started a ministry for Romani children in 1994 called *Nádej Deťom* (Hope for Children). This ministry is located in the city of Banská Bystrica where the Nátherovis attend the local BJB church. Jolana explains that their ministry is rejected by the local church:

We feel that there is prejudice from the church towards our ministry... When the people at the church did not know I was a Rom, they openly accepted me. But when they found out that I was a Rom, some began to put distance between themselves and me. When the Roma come to church, [the] non-Roma complain that they smell bad and are dirty. The non-Roma have complained that the Roma dirtied the restrooms and that some of the Romani kids kicked the walls. Whenever something is missing, the non-Roma immediately assumes (*sic*) that a Rom took it. But that is not the case. Those who steal are sinners, not Roma or non-Roma.¹⁸⁷

A group from America offered a set of children's materials to be used for ministry to the children in a local Romani settlement in eastern Slovakia, but the congregation leaders took the gifts to use them for the sake of non-Romani children instead. If asked, the leaders would most likely say that this was not a pejorative act, but simply using materials where they are most needed. The Roma felt it was done simply because they were Roma.

Bohuslav and Emília Baláž mention that when their children were young, they sent them to the RCC, but "the non-Roma threatened to stop coming if the Romani children kept coming."¹⁸⁸ The priest could have addressed this situation, but instead discouraged the Roma from attending church. In addition, "There are social groups in the RCC who don't...want ethnic groups coming to church."¹⁸⁹

Laco Duna, ACS Romani pastor, has recounted how the non-Roma "see the way that Roma live and cannot accept or understand it... [They see] a different language and a different color of skin. The non-Roma look down on us [the Roma] like a dictator."¹⁹⁰ This in turn adds to the non-Romani justification of their pejorative attitudes

¹⁸⁷ Jolana Nátherová, interview by author, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 14 October 2004, written notes.

¹⁸⁸ Bohuslav and Emília Baláž, interview by author, Brodské, Slovakia 25 April 2005, written notes.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Duna, interview, 15 July 2003.

There are non-Romani people who attest to the mistreatment of the Roma by the churches. Iveta Radičová is not a Rom, but as a sociologist and romologist, she understands the Romani situation in Slovakia and how the church has contributed to it. She writes, "In most cases priests and social workers do not visit the settlements....Our church [RCC] does mission work in the countries of South Africa, however...it does not do mission work [among the Roma] in Slovakia."¹⁹¹ She further stated that those who do work with the Roma are often frustrated by the lack of impetus placed upon Romani ministry by church leaders.

Daniel Mišina, a non-Roma, speaks first hand of the Roma who live in the village of Rankovce. "The Roma [of Rankovce] were not allowed to go to church in Herľany"¹⁹² where the closest RCC is located.

Another non-Romani minister, Milan Juriček, observes that "the Roma community feels from birth that they are not wanted among the non-Roma. When Roma become Christians, they hope that the prejudice will stop, but in context, no non-Romani Christian has been taught that they should not be prejudiced."¹⁹³

Františka Ondrášiková observes, "There is also prejudice from the Roma towards the non-Roma. They think that the non-Roma only want to use the Roma for [their own] benefit."¹⁹⁴ In fact there is a prejudice that the Roma have towards all people whom they consider to be outsiders, or *Gadje*. While these attitudes are easily found outside the church, they can also be found among the Romani Christians. Many Roma will associate only with "those people who understand the Roma."¹⁹⁵

5.6.2 Prejudices from the Selected Churches Perspective

Pierre VanVuuren is a South African missionary who works with the Roma. When questioned regarding discrimination against the Roma in the church, he stated, "The prejudice is not always out in the open, visible, but it is there."¹⁹⁶ There are others, however, who believe that prejudicial attitudes are not really hidden; they are demonstrated every Sunday. One person observed that "often the church has

¹⁹¹ Radičová, *Hic Sunt Romales*, 256.

¹⁹² Mišina, interview, 29 October 2004.

¹⁹³ Milan Juriček, interview by author, Modra, Slovakia, 1 March 2004, written notes.

¹⁹⁴ Františka Ondrášiková, interview by author, Rankovce, Slovakia 19 April 2005, written notes.

¹⁹⁵ Nátherová, interview, 14 October 2004.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre VanVuuren, interview by the author, Vranov, Slovakia, 29 October 2005, written notes.

become a church of segregation, especially on Sundays."¹⁹⁷ Another non-Romani layperson in the ECAV church stated, "We have a mixed church, but...the non-Roma do not want to sit next to the Roma."¹⁹⁸ In one church, the pejorative feelings are so strong that when they have a special activity at the church which includes a meal, the non-Roma "make the Roma go home without any food."¹⁹⁹

Prejudicial attitudes toward the Roma are not reserved for the adults alone in the church. Children can reflect the attitudes of their peers and the adult role models that influence them. "The non-Romani children often indicate that they don't want to sit next to the Roma [in church] because they are dirty and stink."²⁰⁰

Teodor Gavenda, a RCC priest, states, "There is some prejudice (in the church) but it is based on reality. There are some non-Roma who say, 'The Roma will never change.'"²⁰¹ Another RCC priest, Marián Ondriaš, adds:

When the Roma come to your house and ask for something, if you give it to them, they will keep coming back for more and more, and they have often stolen as they are asking for things. They do not have any borders when it comes to others' property. This seems to be the foundation of the prejudice here in Slovakia. There is some justification for the non-Roma to feel this way.²⁰²

Similarly, Ján Liba, whose ACS church in Košice is actively involved in ministering to the Roma, states that some Roma "think...[the church]...is reaching out to them because they have to, not because they want to."²⁰³ Ondriaš agrees with Liba, and adds that "the Roma do not trust the non-Roma...[because]...they feel rejected by them in all sectors."²⁰⁴ In addition, Pavel Šinko, a non-Romani pastor in the BJB church, explains another reason the Roma are rejected:

The church elders ask different questions when they are considering a Roma for church membership. They are more careful. The church has had things stolen, and it seems obvious to us that it was [the] Roma who did the stealing. There is an automatic feeling of distrust

¹⁹⁷ Mišina, interview, 29 October 2004.

¹⁹⁸ Ondrášiková, interview, 4 November 2004.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Mišina, interview, 29 October 2004.

²⁰¹ Gavenda, interview, 21 October 2004.

²⁰² Marián Ondriaš, interview by author, Michalovce, Slovakia, 22 October 2004, written notes.

²⁰³ Liba, Farkaš, and Láslofi, interviews, 15 July 2003.

²⁰⁴ Ondriaš, interview, 21 October 2004.

when we see a Roma. Roma are good actors, so you cannot know if they are telling the truth or lying.²⁰⁵

Another sector of Christian society within Slovakia that has helped to reinforce pejorative attitudes is found within institutions of higher education, and particularly institutions where theological issues are taught. At a conference of Protestant seminary educators, a paper was presented about the Roma that drew the following conclusions:

Roma are people created by God, just like every other person who lives or has lived on this earth. God loves them just as much as he loves anyone else. And they were born in sin just like all of us. When the Holy Spirit directed the apostle Paul to write, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," the Roma were included. When Paul continued in his letter to Timothy by stating, "God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,"²⁰⁶ he was speaking of the Roma as well.²⁰⁷

During the question and answer time that followed, people raised the question of whether the Roma can be truly saved. The opinion of several university educators present at the conference was that it is not possible for a Rom to change his or her spiritual condition. This assumption was based upon their experience in the churches they attended. For example, in one educator's home church (BJB), several Romani families began attending, but after several years, one of the families stopped attending and went back to their former life of drinking and family abuse. Because of this, the educator assumed that the Roma are not capable of spiritually changing.

If this were the only instance of this type of thinking, it could be overlooked as being inconsequential. Unfortunately, there have been other encounters that have exposed the same faulty reasoning. At a conference in Budapest, Hungary, the same question was asked following the presentation of a paper titled, "Reconciling Differences Between the Slovak Churches and the Roma." Some attendees (educators and pastors) of the conference commented on their doubts regarding the possibility of the Roma to be saved or changed. Their

²⁰⁵ Šinko, interview, 28 October 2004.

²⁰⁶ 1 Timothy 2:3-4, NIV.

²⁰⁷ Glen Randolph Robertson, "The Influence of the Gospel on Roma Society," *Katedra evanjelíkálnej teológie a misie, Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Mateja Bela Theological Journal*, no. 2 (2005).

assumption was that the Roma exist on a syncretistic multi-faith level that is unchangeable.

The concept that the Roma are only capable of a multi-faith level is a supposition espoused by many. However, when the author challenged educators and pastors about their conclusion that the Roma must then be reprobates,²⁰⁸ none would admit to such a position. It is not believed that these educators and church leaders are intentional in their pejorative attitudes, but rather they are a product of their theological culture and as such find it difficult to contradict what generations of prejudice have taught them. Their presumption seems superficially logical because it is based upon their past experiences with the Roma, both personal and historical. This study, however, has shown that the Roma are not limited to a multi-faith level.

While most of the church leaders interviewed agree that racism is wrong, some conclude that one of the solutions to overcome pejorative attitudes is that priests and pastors stand up and speak against it. One thing is certain: the differences between the Romani culture and the non-Romani culture contribute to the non-Romani misunderstanding and consequent prejudice toward the Roma. The Roma normally demonstrate a very emotional and aggressive lifestyle, whereas the non-Romani Slovaks are non-aggressive and rather passive in almost all situations. This vast cultural difference contributes greatly to prejudicial attitudes and a lack of understanding and trust between the non-Roma and Roma. One can only conclude that there is a need for the churches to initiate dialog between the Roma and the non-Roma regarding prejudicial attitudes. Hiebert's four-step critical contextualization process could be helpful in resolving pejorative conflict in the church.²⁰⁹ Another area where the churches could negate prejudice is in the theological training of their priests/pastors.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have answered the question regarding the participation of the Roma within the selected churches of Slovakia. The hypothesis of this study is that Christianity can be a positive influence on the Roma by encouraging them to live on a non-syncretistic, single-faith level, which will reduce the prejudicial

²⁰⁸ Reprobate is defined as “to foreordain to damnation.” *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition (1999), s.v. “reprobate.” Some relevant Biblical passages are Romans 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:8; and Titus 1:16 (KJV).

²⁰⁹ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 186-7.

marginalization of the Roma. This is demonstrated by the Roma's increased ability to participate within the church.

One of the mitigating reasons for churches to reject ministry to the Roma stems from the years they were under the influence of communism. The repression of the churches of Slovakia by Marxism resulted in the churches entering the post-communist era with ambivalence as well as guilt for being so poorly equipped to practice religion. This caused the members to be introspective, which resulted in little effective evangelism to those outside the church. They were so consumed with fixing their own wounds that they were blind to the plight of the Roma. Fortunately, the further the churches are removed from communist influences, the more they are able to understand their biblical obligation to minister to disadvantaged people groups such as the Roma.

The attitude of the RCC to the Roma differs from that of the other churches examined, primarily because this church considers the Roma to be Roman Catholic. The idea of evangelizing a people group that is already a part of the church is therefore a non-issue. They appear to equate evangelism of the Roma with their church attendance. Those RCC's that are successful in getting the Roma to attend church services regularly do so by showing interest and concern for the Roma. This increases the church attendance of the Roma, but it seems not to move them beyond the multi-faith level. Of all the churches examined, the RCC had little success in seeing Roma leaving a syncretistic multi-faith level and adopt a non-syncretistic single-faith level. In some situations, when Romani people with a RCC background changed from a syncretistic faith to a non-syncretistic faith, they did so by leaving the RCC and becoming members of other churches. Exceptions to this were seen in Bardejov and Lunik Devät'.

The attitude of other denominations (ECAV, RKC, ECM, BJB, and ACS) examined are similar in their evangelistic approach to the Roma. First, not all congregations within these denominations are involved in ministry to the Roma. Second, those congregations that are engaged in Romani ministry are showing some success in helping the Roma move from a syncretistic multi-faith level toward a non-syncretistic single-faith level. Thirdly, each of these churches places great emphasis upon similar elements: demonstration of love and concern for the Roma, consistent contact, teaching the Bible as the word of God, salvation through a personal relationship with Christ, and the desire to lay aside prejudicial feelings.

All denominations discussed in this study state their openness to ministering to the Roma, but only the RCC has drafted a serious plan. At a General Presbytery meeting of the ACS in 1994, ministry to the Roma was discussed, but it seemed not sufficiently important for them to formulate a written policy.

There are Romani people involved at all levels of participation within the selected churches. Only the RCC and ACS have Roma in ministerial positions: as priests/pastors and nuns. All other churches expressed the possibility for Romani people to receive theological training and become priests and pastors. One reason why the RCC and ACS have Romani ministers and the others do not could be a statistical phenomenon. The larger the number of the Roma exposed to a church, the greater the possibility of their people being called to the priesthood or the ministry.²¹⁰ Still another reason could be the genuine interest shown to individual Roma by some of the church leaders. This was certainly the case with Viktor Tomčany²¹¹ and Laco Duna.²¹²

There are two participation models which the selected churches use in seeking to include the Roma: multiethnic congregations and/or indigenous churches. The multiethnic congregation model is preferred by the leaders of the majority of the selected churches, and in reality it is how they accomplish the integration of Roma into their existing congregations. The RCC is the only church that has a written policy regarding the Roma and the preferred structural method of multiethnic parishes. In contrast to this policy, the RCC in Poštárka began as an indigenous Romani congregation that was located next to an indigenous non-Romani congregation. The Poštárka church eventually evolved into a multiethnic congregation but the RCC located in Bardejov continues to be predominantly an indigenous non-Romani congregation. Only the ACS allows the local congregations to determine how they will be structured regarding the Roma. As a result, the ACS has established some multiethnic congregations while others are indigenous congregations. The indigenous congregation avoids many of the

²¹⁰ No statistical data was found that specified the number of Roma who attend the various churches, but it is assumed that because the RCC is the dominant church that they have more exposure to the Roma than any other church. Whether the ACS has the second largest number of Roma in attendance is not known, but one third of their churches have some type of ministry to the Roma.

²¹¹ Tomčany, interview, 17 March 2004.

²¹² Duna, interview, 15 July 2003.

prejudicial problems that the multiethnic congregation must deal with on a regular basis.

At the present time the possibility for the Roma to participate in the development of theology is very limited. However, the development of a contextual theology is happening within the Romani Christian community. For the most part, it is syncretistic in nature. It functions verbally, not written, and it is socially demonstrated. But a new contextual theology is evolving in those cases where the Roma are changing from a syncretistic multi-faith level to a non-syncretistic single-faith level. In order for the Roma to become a true part of the selected churches, they must be taught how to participate in the development of contextual Romani theology.

The most serious problem which the Roma and the selected churches face is the prejudicial attitudes that continue to exist between the Roma and the non-Roma. These discriminatory attitudes marginalize the Roma and limit the possibility for them to participate in the life of the church. While the pejorative attitudes exist on both sides of this spectrum—non-Roma to Roma and Roma to non-Roma—it can be observed that in the churches that show acceptance toward the Roma, marginalization is becoming less of a problem. The church must be more proactive in welcoming the Roma into the church and breaking the cycle of prejudice. In doing so, not only will the Romani people benefit, but so will the churches and eventually society as a whole.

6 IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, AND PARTICIPATION

The hypothesis of this study is that the influence of Christianity reduces the prejudicial marginalization of the Roma, providing them with a non-syncretistic faith that enables them to participate more readily within the selected churches of Slovakia. Two preliminary questions were asked prior to two main research questions.

The first preliminary question asked what place the Roma occupy in Slovakia—politically, socio-economically and culturally. The answers to this question reveal that the Roma are marginalized in every aspect of life in Slovakia. Since this study began, two specific aspects of Romani life have become better. One is the positive steps made by the Slovak government toward the Roma, which were precipitated by Slovakia's entrance into the EU. The second is the increase in NGOs that act as advocates for the Roma. But there is still much to be done to overcome the centuries of prejudice.

A second preliminary question queries the religiosity of the Roma. Traditional Romani religiosity is syncretistic in nature. The first main research question regarding the impact of Christianity upon Romani spirituality is answered in conjunction to the question of Romani religiosity. This research project reveals that there is a new effort on the part of some individual churches, across denominational lines, which are seeking to help the Roma develop a single-faith religiosity. It is possible to identify three distinct faith levels on which the Roma practice their spirituality. The multi-faith level is where the largest majority of the Roma exist spiritually. But growing numbers are shifting to a transitional-faith level as they seek to find a more meaningful relationship with God. The central reason for such a transition is the acceptance that is shown to them by individuals—priests, pastors, lay people—and the willingness of their family to accept such a change. This helps transition them to a single-faith level on which they become active in the local church.

The final research question focuses on the possibilities for the Roma to participate in the selected churches. A key element of this question is whether the Christian message, demonstrated in the lives of non-Roma and Roma alike, reduces the prejudicial marginalization of the Roma within the church so that

doors are open for their involvement. In those situations where the Roma are allowed to function in a multiethnic congregation, there seems to be an atmosphere of acceptance that develops between the Roma and non-Roma (e.g., RCC in Poštárka). A possible explanation of this is that since neither the Roma nor the non-Roma can hide from the reality of racial tensions, they are forced to work through their prejudices. By doing so, the participants can come to an understanding of the other's ethnicity and in the process find common ground upon which to build a relationship.

Other situations exist, however, where indigenous congregations have evolved intentionally in an effort to keep the Roma and non-Roma segregated (e.g., RKC in Tušice and ECAV in Rankovce). The goal in these instances has been to avoid outward conflict. But there seems to be a deeper issue that is at the heart of segregation: the desire to avoid facing the reality of personal prejudices and having those prejudices labeled as inappropriate. In such instances, the reduction in marginalization is limited, but the participation level is high.

The contrast between the multiethnic church and the indigenous church forces a further question. What is more important: Romani participation within a church or the reduction of marginalization of the Roma within the church? From a biblical perspective, it would seem that both are equally important. What is not acceptable is that one be sacrificed in order to accomplish the other. The intentional segregating of the Roma from the non-Roma is counterproductive and actually has the potential to increase marginalization. It is the conclusion of this study that a multiethnic church is most helpful in overcome the pejorative attitudes that exist and that such a church will increase the potential for Romani participation in the church. It is within a multiethnic church setting that the two key ingredients to reducing the marginalization of the Roma are found: first, the willingness of the non-Roma to accept the Roma as part of the church, and second, the willingness of the Roma to leave their syncretistic multi-faith for a single-faith life.

Two leading social scientists who function within the Slovak context were asked to evaluate the conclusions of this study: Arne B. Mann and Michal Vašečka. Each were frank in their reactions and each suggested further questions that should be explored. Vašečka states that the conclusions of this study make sense. He adds that "religiosity is one of the most important parts of the Romani

personal and social life."¹ He poses the question of whether the conclusions of this study have been applied to social issues. The answer is no. But this presents a specific question that should be examined in a future study.

Mann agrees that when the Roma transition from a syncretistic multi-faith level to a non-syncretistic single-faith level, the degree of prejudicial marginalization within the church and Slovak society is reduced.² He suggests two further areas that need to be analyzed. First, Mann notes an interesting parallel between the traditional Romani faith and the traditional folk faith of the non-Roma. He explains that there are non-Roma who are syncretistic in their belief system. This is a phenomenon that this study did not consider. A comparison of traditional Slovak folk faith and Romani traditional faith should at some point be examined.

Second, Mann suggests that, on the one hand, the Roma who live in settlements find it difficult to leave their traditional syncretistic faith and transition to a single faith. On the other hand, those Roma who live among the non-Roma find it easier to transition from a multi-faith level to a single-faith level.³ This is the same idea that Ondrej Vaško, ACS pastor in Rožňava, made. Such a comparison between Roma who live in settlements and those who live integrated in Slovak housing would be helpful. Assumptions from this present study suggest that pressures against change are stronger within a settlement than within a family integrated in Slovak housing, but the need for further research is indicated.

Another question that comes to mind, which this study did not answer, is whether the church is better equipped to communicate with the Roma than other groups or organizations. It would seem that along with the church those organizations that would be best equipped for such a task would be the educational system and various Roma-conscious NGOs. This research does not have an answer to this question, but suggests that the answer should be pursued.

In concluding this study, some observations on the identity of the Christian Church and the Romani people of Slovakia are presented. This is followed by reflections on communication at the faith level and at the organizational level. Finally, attention is made to how Romani Christians fit into Slovak society at large.

¹ Vašečka, interview, 21 June 2008.

² Mann, interview, 20 May 2008.

³ Ibid.

6.1 The Identity of the Christian Church and the Romani People

The identity of an organization or people group is found within the individuals who are bonded together by a common cause or purpose. This community of influence helps in determining the choices, right or wrong, that those individuals make. The Christian church of Slovakia is one of those communities of influence that went underground for a period of more than 40 years following World War II. The Marxist regime effectively convinced society that the church had little or no influence. In the process, the church became paralyzed, hibernating from its biblical responsibilities. By the time communism fell, the Christian Church had lost its relevance and identity—having forgotten why it existed

The church had to rediscover its own identity in a very culturally confusing time. As the communist wall came down, Western culture came flooding in. The ideology of the West, both good and bad, confronted the church with many decisions that it was not prepared to make. Under a communist government, all decisions were made for it, but under a post-communist government, the church was forced to make its own decisions and to find its purpose for existing. This was not accomplished without some confusion regarding the real mission of the church.

As time passes, however, the Slovak Church has begun to rediscover its identity. Though its first reaction after the fall of communism was to view everything from a centristic perspective concentrating on healing its own wounds, today the church is rediscovering *missio Dei*, God's mission for the church. David Bosch defines *missio Dei* as "God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God which embraces both the church and the world, in which the church is privileged to participate."⁴ Van Sanders is more specific in his definition: "*missio Dei* correctly emphasizes that God is the initiator of His mission to redeem through the Church a special people for Himself from all of the peoples...of the world. He sent His Son for this purpose, and He sends the Church into the world with the message of the gospel for the same purpose."⁵ This study has examined selected

⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10.

⁵ Van Sanders, "The Mission of God and the Local Church," in *Pursuing the Mission of God in Church Planting*, ed. John M. Bailey, (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2006), 24.

churches and discovered that only a few churches are fulfilling God's mission by ministering to the Roma. Ideally, all churches of Slovakia would have come to the conclusion that they have a responsibility to deal with the Roma from a salvific perspective. In most cases the church calls for *missio Dei*, but in practice ignores God's intended mission and as a consequence treats the Roma no differently than society.

The identity of the Romani people is found within the context of community. Their culture places little importance on individualism looking to collectivism as their means for decision making. This identity of the Romani people is steeped in their cultural norms which often are the cause of their marginalization. The culture of the Roma prior to encountering Christianity was influenced by a syncretistic worldview that they learned from Hinduism. In their peregrination to Europe they encountered and embraced dualism and animism. Many of these traditional beliefs are still a part of the Romani religiosity; e.g., their multi-faith level lifestyle, their concept of good versus evil and spiritual forces inhabiting nature as well as inanimate objects.

One of the most troubling aspects of Romani spirituality is the apparent fact that the churches (both East and West), which the Roma have identified with in the past, have never challenged the Romani syncretistic lifestyle. It is possible that the church was so consumed with other issues at the time just as in the communist era—e.g., schisms and invading Turks—that dealing with the multi-faith level of the Roma paled in comparison. Whatever the reasons, no responsibility was assumed by the church to cause the Roma to adopt a non-syncretistic faith. Instead, they were allowed to become part of the church, though their participation in the church was limited, while they still continued to participate in non-Christian practices, many of which are either taboo or go against Christian tradition. These non-Christian practices reinforced the perception that the Roma were strange, lazy, superstitious and mystical.

To define Romani Christianity today, generalizations must initially be used. Multi-faith level is the best way to describe traditional Romani spirituality. Certain rites within the church have taken on magical qualities in the Romani culture. Child baptism has become a very important part of the identity of most Romani families. They view baptism mystically, thinking that through this ritual, the parents have provided protection from evil spirits for their children. The First Communion has also become an important ritual for them. They view this ritual

as a form of protection for their growing children rather than as a sign of their spiritual maturation. The Roma's perception of these rites reveals syncretistic influences.

These Romani views have contributed to the churches' questioning whether the Romani people can ever become true Christians. This attitude, however, is changing, particularly in the churches who view the Roma as redeemable. These churches are addressing the issue of syncretism, pointing out its adversity to biblical Christianity. At the same time, these churches accept the Roma in a loving and redemptive way. As a result, a growing number of Roma are discarding syncretism as a viable path to salvation and are identifying with a single-faith level that is based on biblical principles alone. This transformative process leads to a rethinking of both the identity of the Christian Church and the identity of the Roma.

6.2 Communication at the Faith Level

At the heart of this transformation is the communication of the gospel. While the proclamation of the message of Christ might seem a normative thing when the hearers are from the same culture, challenges arise when a message must be communicated cross-culturally. The Christian Churches of Slovakia are beginning to send missionaries to the Roma in order to fulfill *missio Dei*. Within this positive step is the prevailing problem that these missionaries are inclined to present spiritual truths most often within the framework of their non-Romani culture rather than from a Romani cultural perspective. This study has shown that the churches that are most successful in affecting Romani people and their faith are those who either have a Rom leading the ministry or are concerned with gaining an unbiased understanding of the Romani culture. Thus, they are effective communicators with the Roma because they understand or are attempting to understand the Romani culture.

Gaining understanding of a different culture in order to communicate the gospel is not easy. David Hesselgrave suggests that there are seven dimensions to communicating cross-culturally: worldviews (ways of perceiving the world), cognitive processes (ways of thinking), linguistic forms (ways of expressing ideas), behavioral patterns (ways of acting), social structures (ways of interacting), media influence (ways of channeling the message), and motivational resources

(ways of deciding).⁶ Missionary communication of the gospel must include all of these elements. Hesselgrave adds an important truth regarding missionary communication: "Since missionaries have undertaken the responsibility of delivering the Christian message across cultural boundaries, the responsibility for achieving cultural understanding and initiating the process of contextualization rests upon them."⁷ In other words, the missionary must gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of the people to whom he desires to communicate the gospel.

This study has found that the churches that are working with the Roma place the proclamation of the gospel or church tenets as their main goal. There is no intentional goal of gaining an understanding of the Romani culture, rather, it is a by-product of the proclamation. In other words, it is proclamation by trial and error. While some of the churches are finding success with such a pattern others are struggling. The reasons for those who are successful seems to lie in the fact that they either have a Rom leading the ministry, such as Duna with the ACS in Lunik Devät', or they have a Rom who is involved in the daily function of the ministry, such as Holubová with the RCC in Bardejov. In both of these cases, Duna and Holubová are able to give insights from a Romani cultural perspective.

In situations such as Tušice and Rankovce, while the intentions have been honorable, the ministry to the Roma has faltered. In each of these cases there have been mitigating circumstances that have contributed to the struggle. While these circumstances could not have been avoided, perhaps a better understanding of the Romani culture could have limited the difficulties. At the least, a better cultural understanding would have helped explain what happened.

It is the opinion of this study that a clear comprehension of the Romani culture is a necessity in the proclamation of the gospel. A proactive way of acquiring such an understanding can be accomplished by churches engaging in dialogue with the Roma. Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of communication could be used as an outline to gain such a knowledge by creating specific questions to be discussed between the Roma and non-Roma.⁸

⁶ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 97.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸ Michal Vašečka directed a similar project from a social and economic perspective that resulted in the book *Čačipen pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*. There is a chapter in this book on the religious life of the Roma, but it does not deal with the premise of this study.

When a church or individual states that they want to gain a better understanding of the Romani culture, it immediately places value upon the Roma. This in and of itself helps to break down barriers that might exist and provides an open door for the proclamation of the gospel.

Communication at the faith level demands that the churches find ways to show acceptance toward the Roma. Open communication will lead to more Roma leaving a multi-faith level and adopting a single-faith level and thus, diminishing their marginalization. Communication of the gospel is important in turning the Roma from a multi-faith level to a single-faith level, thus removing them from pejorative attitudes.

6.3 Communication at the Organizational Level

The organizational makeup of the Christian Church has an enormous impact on how communication functions between the Roma and the churches. There are areas where the Christian Church of Slovakia has found opportunities to cooperate within itself and develop a more or less interdenominational ministry to the inhabitants of Slovakia. CampFest, for instance, is an outdoor concert that happens every year during the summer. Singing groups from all Protestant churches as well as the RCC perform during this festival. Concerts of Prayer and Praise are similar to CampFest, but they take place in the winter. People from across denominational lines have been attending. The Alliance for Saturation Church Planting is another non-denominational organization that works with all denominations to encourage and facilitate church planting across Slovakia.⁹ Združenie Evanjelikálnych Cirkví (the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches) is also a cooperative organization linking ACS, BJB, ECM, and CB that administrates KETM. While all of this is encouraging there is no direct link between these cooperative efforts and communication between the Roma and churches. It is true, however, that there are Roma who attend these cooperative events.

Although there is cooperation between the denominations, each has its own structural particularities. These structures determine how communication takes place between the church and the Roma. Each of the selected churches and their specific structure as it relates to the Roma is analyzed in the following paragraphs.

⁹ The Alliance is involved in a number of Eastern European countries.

Local RCC priests do not favor the syncretism of the Roma, but they experience difficulties in changing it. A possible explanation is that the majority of non-Romani Catholics hesitate to have Roma attend mass and participate in the activities of the local parishes. In the few cases where local priests are able to help the Roma transition from a syncretistic faith to a single-faith level, the priests have a ministry to the Roma separate from the ministry to the non-Roma. Problems occur with this strategy. First, it creates ethnic-specific churches which are not consistent with the New Testament definition of the church. Second, it justifies the prejudicial attitudes which already exist within the church. And third, the potential for solving pejorative attitudes are lessened in an ethnic-specific church as opposed to a multiethnic church.

The ECAV believes that the church should be multiethnic in concept. In practice, the churches in Rankovce and Slavošovce are multiethnic in nature though this has not terminated prejudicial problems from occurring. Generally speaking, the non-Roma have expressed their intention not to sit next to the Roma during church services and not to gather together with them when there is a special meal served at the church. The non-Romani youth of the church are demonstrating the same feelings as their parents toward the Roma. In Rankovce the situation has escalated to the point that the Roma have left the ECAV and started attending an all Romani Seventh-Day Adventist church. The ECAV leadership does not know exactly how it should overcome such problems. If the leaders do not develop a solution, the problem will persist.

Only one RKC of Slovakia was found to be working with the Roma. That church is located on the southern border of Slovakia where large numbers of Roma are located. That only one church is ministering to the Roma seems odd. However, a possible explanation is that the RKC stresses the importance of reaching those who have been born into Reformed Church families and objects to making proselytes of those belonging to other denominations. Since the majority of the Roma in Slovakia identify with the RCC, the RKC could view ministry to the Roma as inappropriate. The only RKC ministering to the Roma is located in Tušice. The local RKC pastor stresses the importance of reaching the Roma who already participate in the local church. The RKC of Slovakia has strong connections to the Hungarian Reformed Church because the Southern region of Slovakia was at one time, prior to the end of WW I, part of Hungary. When pieces of Hungary were given to various other nations, many Hungarians found

themselves in a different country even though they continued to live in the same house and village. This geographical issue gives many of the RKC a multiethnic mind set. Since many in the RKC deal regularly with prejudicial problems between the Slovak and Hungarian nationalities, they may understand the Romani issues more clearly than others do.

The ECM of Slovakia finds its identity in stressing openness to ethnic groups. Members of this church are involved in humanitarian work with the Roma, providing clothing and household items. They encourage the participation of the Roma at church conferences and synod meetings. By doing so, the non-Roma and the Roma are forced to communicate with one another regarding many topics including the prejudices that exist between the two groups. As a result, "the non-Roma have become more tolerant of the Roma."¹⁰

The BJB national leadership encourages all local churches to reach out to the Roma.¹¹ In reality, many of the Baptists have reservations regarding ministry to the Roma. Some leaders within the BJB question the validity of Romani conversions. These negative attitudes could stem from an incident in Lučenec where a number of Roma left the BJB in order to join The Disciples of Christ.¹² Another possibility is that the negative attitudes could have arisen from the failure of a church planting project in Velky Kurtiš that began in 1994. They tried to reach adult Roma through ministry to their children. But after ten years of work, there were only 15 people attending the church and only one or two of them were Roma. Thus, there is an atmosphere of discouragement in the BJB regarding effective ministry to the Roma. These experiences may make it difficult for the church to see value in manifesting acceptance toward the Roma.

By contrast, the ACS remains open to ministering to a variety of different ethnic groups. One church in Eastern Slovakia has a pastor on staff whose specific assignment is ministering to ethnic people groups. Many ACS churches minister in some capacity to the Roma. Whether this should be done within a multiethnic setting or in an ethnic specific setting has to be decided by the local church. There are two ethnic-specific churches in the ACS, one in Sabinov and the other in Lunik Devät'; however, the leaders of these churches have expressed a desire for having non-Roma in their services.

¹⁰ Procházka, interview, 29 September 2004.

¹¹ Kriška, telephone interview, 9 September 2005.

¹² Šinko, interview, 28 October 2004.

One glaring omission by the selected churches is their lack of an official policy of ministry to the Roma. Though the RCC produced such a policy in 2001 when it published the "Pastoral and Evangelization Plan, 2001—2006", in which an outline was given regarding ministry to the Roma, in its subsequent "Pastoral and Evangelization Plan, 2007—2013", the Roma were not even mentioned. It could be rationalized by all the churches that such a policy is not necessary because all people who are unreached by the gospel message are included in *missio Dei*.

A question to be asked is whether the Roma would even know if a church had a policy regarding ministry to the Roma. While there is no scientific data to answer such a question, it can be assumed that the answer most likely would be no. However, if there was a policy and the Roma were to find out about it, it would demonstrate that the church cares about the Roma.

This study has shown that acceptance is very important to the Roma. It is at the center of Roma changing from a multi-faith level to a single-faith level, which leads to the diminishing of their marginalization. If the Churches of Slovakia, on an organizational level, demonstrate acceptance to the Romani people, it will help to heal the prejudicial wounds between Roma and non-Roma not only in the church but in society as well.

6.4 Participation of Romani Christians in Society at Large

Romani Christians can be identified from a "faith level" point of view: first, they can adhere to a multi-faith level; secondly, they can transition away from a syncretistic worldview; and finally, they can be non-syncretistic, adopting a specific denominational faith. With these definitions in mind, several observations should be made.

Education and employment are important aspects of the Slovak society, and for someone to reject the need for either, places him at odds with the majority. The attitude of the Roma toward education and employment is different for each level. The multi-faith level Roma care little about education or finding continuous employment. Those who are in the transitional phase can still have the same attitude towards education and employment as those at the multi-faith level. However, as they progress through the transitional-faith level, positive spiritual experiences bring change to their lives. This change finds fruition in the single-faith level. Those on this level tend to place value on the educational experience

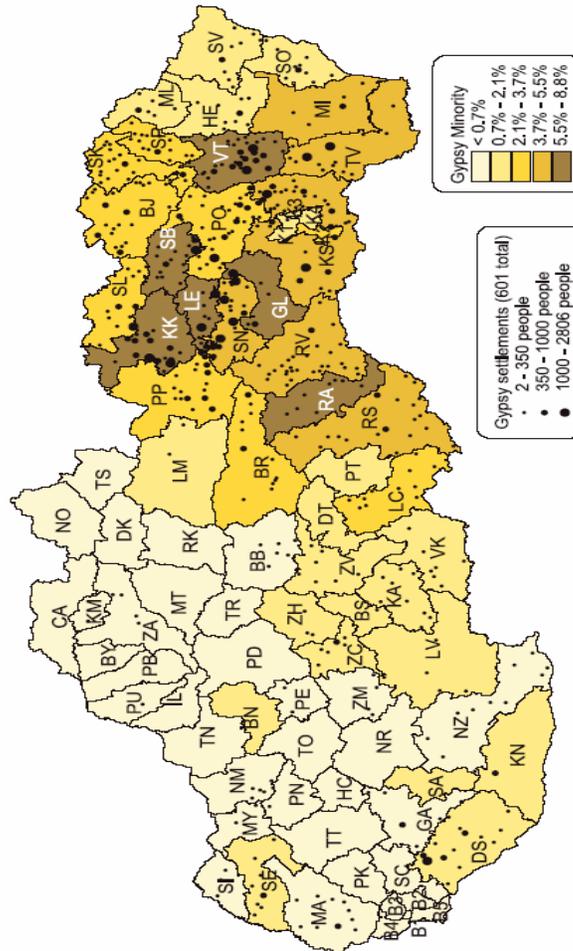
and the importance of having a steady job, thus facilitating a desire to participate more fully in Slovak society.

The churches that try to help the Roma are doing so not only in the field of spirituality but also in the areas of education and gainful employment. Several of the churches investigated in this study have developed preschool programs designed to prepare Romani children for Slovak schools. Others help the Romani children with their school work in after-school tutorial classes. Regarding employment, several churches have begun training programs to teach skills or specific trades to the Roma, which helps them find work. All of these programs are facilitating the Roma to become more active in Slovak society.

The premise of this study suggests that the church should be a leading force in mitigating the marginalization of the Roma. It is clear from a historical perspective that in the past the church did little to alleviate the pejorative attitudes between the non-Roma and Roma. In spite of the past, the church must realize its unique position of influence within Slovak society and address such prejudicial issues. At the heart of the gospel message is a call to put aside discriminatory attitudes and to embrace each other in love. Jesus did instruct us to 'love one another' (John 13:34). This type of Christ-centered *koinonia* should be demonstrated and taught by the church, first to its constituency and then to the greater Slovak society. Such a *koinonia* must embrace all of the ethnic groups that reside in Slovak, including the Roma. Where the single-faith level is accepted, a new way of living together emerges: a community of Roma and non-Roma existing as brothers and sisters in Christ.

APPENDICES

I. Location Map of Roma in Slovakia¹



¹ Research project on the state of the Slovak churches 2003, ed. Doug Stoner CD-ROM. (Košice, Slovakia: ETC Grafo/The Alliance for Saturation Church Planting, 2003).

II. Cina's Classification of Dialects²

1.
 - a) The dialect of the Roma from the northern part of the former Soviet Union (ruska Romani, cheladitka Romani);
 - b) The dialect of the Roma from the western part of Latvia and Estonia (lotfitka Romani);
 - c) The dialect of the Roma from central Poland (felditka Romani).

2. The sinti dialect in Germany, France, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Yugoslavia, Northern Italy, and Austria (the dialect prevails in German-speaking environments).

3.
 - a) The dialect of the Roma from northern and eastern Slovakia (servika Romani);
 - b) The dialect of the Roma living in southern Slovakia and northern Hungary (ungrika Romani);

4.
 - a) The erlides dialect (western Bulgaria, Macedonia, southern Serbia);
 - b) The ursari (bear-leaders) dialect (Rumania, Moldavia);
 - c) The krymtika dialect (Crimean Roma) Surrounding the towns of Kotel, Slivan and Plaven (central Bulgaria—the Drindars).

5.
 - a) The dialect of the vlachika Romani (Rumania, Moldavia—Lingurari, Eletari, Kekaviari);
 - b) The dialect of the kalderasha (kettlesmiths) Roma, concentrated in the mid-19th century on the Rumanian-Hungarian border in Austria-Hungary. They now live in the former Soviet Union, in Poland, the Czech Republic,

² Stanislav Cina, "The Roma Language and its Standardization," in *Čačipen Pal o Roma: A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson, eds. (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2003), pp 93-4.

Slovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, France, England, and Belgium.

6. a) The dialect of the vlachika Roma in Yugoslavia, above all in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
b) the servi dialect of the left-bank Ukraine and neighboring areas (Plashtshunaja, Volochuja).
7. The dialect of the Finnish Roma (fintika Romani).
8. Volshenenge Kale—the Roma in Great Britain, above all in Wales.

III. Slovak Romani Comparison with Fraser's Chart³

English	Sanskrit	Hindi	Greek Romani	Welsh Romani	Coppersmith Romani	Slovak Romani
Big	Vadra	barā	baró	bārō	Baró	baro
Brother	bhrātr	bhāī	pral, plal	phal	Pral	phral
(to) drink	pībati (drinks)	pī-	Pī-	pī-	pē-	pijel
Father	Tāta	tāt	Dat, dad	Dad	Dad	dad
Hair	Vāla	bāl	Bal	bal	Bal	bal
Head	Śiras	sir	śeró, seró	śērō	Śeró	šero
hot, warm	Tapta	tattā	tattó	tatō	Tató	tato
I	máyā (instr.)	main	Mē	mē	Mē	me
Man	mānusa	mānusa	manús	manús	Manús	manuš
Nose	Nakka	nāk	Nak	nakh	Nakh	nakh
Our	asmāka (ours)	hamārā	amaró	amārō	Amaró	amaro
(to) see	drksati (sees)	dēkh-	Dik-	dikh-	dikh-	dikhel
Sister	bhaginī	bahn	Pen, ben	phen	Phei	phen
(to) sleep	svāpati (sleeps)	sōnā	Sov-	sov-	sov-	sovel
Sun	gharmā (heat)	ghām (heat)	kam	kham	Kham	kham
Water	panīyā	pānī	paní	pānī	Pai	pañi
You (sing.)	Tuvām	tū	Tu	tū	Tu	tu

³ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, p. 16.

IV. Religious Affiliation of Slovak Citizens⁴

Church	1991 Number of adherents	1991 Percent of population	2001 Number of adherents	2001 Percent of population
Roman Catholic	3,187,383	60.43%	3,708,120	68.93%
Lutheran Church	326,397	6.19%	372,858	6.93%
Greek Orthodox	178,733	3.39%	219,831	4.09%
Reformed Christian	82,545	1.57%	109,735	2.04%
Orthodox	34,376	0.65%	50,363	0.94%
Jehovah Witnesses	10,501	0.20%	20,630	0.38%
Methodist	4,359	0.08%	7,347	0.14%
Christian Assemblies	700	0.01%	6,519	0.12%
Apostolic	1,116	0.02%	3,905	0.03%
Baptist Union	2,465	0.05%	3,562	0.07%
Seventh Day Adventist	1,721	0.03%	3,429	0.06%
Brethren	1,861	0.04%	3,217	0.06%
Jewish	912	0.02%	2,310	0.04%
Ancient Catholic	882	0.02%	1,733	0.03%
Czech Hussite	625	0.01%	1,696	0.03%
Other	6,373	0.12%	6,294	0.12%
Total affiliated	3,840,949	72.80%	4,521,549	84.10%
Unknown	917,835	17.40%	160,598	3.00%
No Affiliation	515,551	9.80%	697,308	13.00%
Total	5,274,335	100.00%	5,379,455	100.00%

⁴ Research project on the state of the Slovak churches 2003, ed. Doug Stoner CD-ROM. (Košice, Slovakia: ETC Grafo/The Alliance for Saturation Church Planting, 2003).

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SAMENVATTING

Het volk van de Roma in Slowakije wordt gemarginaliseerd op alle terreinen van de samenleving, evenzo ook in de kerk. De hypothese van deze studie is dat de invloed van het Christendom de marginalisatie op grond van vooroordelen over de Roma vermindert, omdat de Roma in het Christendom een niet-syncretistisch geloof hebben, dat hen in staat stelt om beter deel te nemen in de Slowaakse kerken waar dit onderzoek op focust. Voorafgaand aan de twee hoofdvragen werden twee voorbereidende vragen gesteld.

De eerste voorbereidende vraag ging om de plaats die de Roma in Slowakije innemen, politiek, sociaal-economisch en cultureel. De antwoorden op deze vraag laten zien dat de Roma in Slowakije op alle terreinen van het leven gemarginaliseerd zijn. Sinds het begin van het onderzoek voor deze studie zijn twee specifieke aspecten van het leven van de Roma verbeterd. Als eerste: de positieve stappen die de Slowaakse regering in de richting van de Roma heeft gezet, gestimuleerd door de toetreding van Slowakije tot de EU. De tweede is de toename van NGO's die optreden om de belangen van de Roma te behartigen. Er is echter nog steeds veel te doen om de eeuwenoude vooroordelen te overwinnen.

Een tweede voorbereidende vraag gaat in op de religiositeit van de Roma. De traditionele religiositeit van de Roma is syncretistisch van aard. In samenhang met de vraag naar de religiositeit van de Roma wordt de eerste hoofdvraag van het onderzoek, de vraag naar de impact van het Christendom op de spiritualiteit van de Roma, beantwoord. Dit onderzoek laat een nieuw initiatief zien waarin enkele afzonderlijke kerken, vanuit verschillende denominaties, proberen om de Roma te helpen bij het ontwikkelen van een spiritualiteit op basis van één geloof. Het is mogelijk om drie niveaus te onderscheiden, waarop de Roma hun spiritualiteit praktiseren. Het 'veelsoortig geloof' niveau (multi-faith level) is waar de meerderheid van de Roma zich spiritueel bevindt. Een toenemend aantal ontwikkelt zich in de richting van een 'overgangsgeloof' niveau (transitional-faith level), omdat ze op zoek zijn naar een zinvoller relatie met God. De belangrijkste reden voor een dergelijke beweging is de acceptatie die zij ervaren van individuen – priesters, voorgangers en leken – en de bereidheid van hun families om zo'n verandering te aanvaarden. Dit draagt eraan bij dat ze overgaan naar een 'enkelvoudig geloof' niveau (single-faith level) waarop ze actief worden in de lokale kerk.

De slotvraag van dit onderzoek richt zich op de mogelijkheden voor de Roma om te participeren in de kerken waarop dit onderzoek focust. Een sleutelonderdeel van dit vraagstuk is of de christelijke boodschap, gemanifesteerd in het leven van zowel niet-Roma als Roma, de marginalisatie op grond van vooroordelen over de Roma binnen de kerk terugdringt, zodat deuren opengaan voor hun betrokkenheid. In die situaties waarin het de Roma is toegestaan om te functioneren in een multi-etnische gemeente, lijkt een sfeer van wederzijdse aanvaarding van Roma en niet-Roma te ontstaan. Een mogelijke verklaring hiervoor is dat, omdat noch Roma noch niet-Roma de werkelijkheid van raciale spanningen kunnen ontkennen, beide groepen worden gedwongen om hun vooroordelen te verwerken. Zodoende kunnen de betrokkenen inzicht krijgen in de etniciteit van de ander en tijdens dit proces kunnen ze een gemeenschappelijke basis vinden om een relatie op te bouwen.

Er zijn echter ook andere situaties, namelijk die waarin Slowaakse gemeenten zich bewust hebben ingespannen om de scheiding tussen Roma en niet-Roma in stand te houden. In deze gevallen was het doel het voorkomen van externe conflicten. Er lijkt echter een diepere oorzaak te zijn voor deze scheiding: de tegenzin om persoonlijke vooroordelen onder ogen te zien en deze vooroordelen als ongepast te moeten benoemen. In deze gevallen is de vermindering van marginalisatie weliswaar beperkt, maar het niveau van deelname blijft hoog.

De tegenstelling tussen multi-etnische kerk en homogeen Slowaakse kerk dwingt tot een verdere vraag. Wat is belangrijker: deelname van de Roma in een kerk of de vermindering van marginalisatie van de Roma binnen de kerk? Vanuit een bijbels perspectief zouden beide even belangrijk zijn. Wat niet acceptabel is, is dat het ene wordt opgeofferd om het andere te bereiken. De bewuste scheiding van Roma en niet-Roma is contraproductief en heeft eigenlijk de potentie om marginalisatie te versterken. Deze studie concludeert dat een multi-etnische kerk nodig is om de bestaande kleinerende houdingen te overwinnen en dat zo'n kerk het potentieel voor participatie van de Roma in de kerk doet toenemen. Binnen de context van een multi-etnische kerk worden de twee sleutelementen om marginalisatie van de Roma te verminderen gevonden: allereerst de bereidheid van

de niet-Roma om de Roma te accepteren als deel van de kerk en ten tweede de bereidheid van de Roma om hun syncretistische ‘veelsoortige geloof’ (multi-faith) vaarwel te zeggen ten gunste van een ‘enkelvoudig geloofsleven’ (single-faith life).

Translated by Dr. Dorottya Nagy

ZÁVER

Rómovia na Slovensku sú marginalizovanou skupinou v každej spoločenskej oblasti, cirkev nevynímajúc. Hypotézou, z ktorej vychádza táto dizertácia, je predpoklad, že vplyvom kresťanstva sa znižujú predsudky voči Rómom a ich marginalizácia, keďže kresťanstvo im dáva nesyntetickú vieru, vďaka ktorej participujú na živote vybraných cirkví na Slovensku. Pred tým, ako sme si položili dve hlavné výskumné otázky, sme si položili dve predbežné otázky.

Prvou predbežnou otázkou bolo, aké miesto majú Rómovia na Slovensku z politického, socioekonomického a kultúrneho hľadiska. Odpovede ukázali, že Rómovia sú marginalizovaní v každom aspekte života na Slovensku. Od času, keď sme sa začali venovať nášmu výskumu, sa zlepšili dve veci. Jednou z nich sú pozitívne opatrenia, ktoré podnikla slovenská vláda v rómskej otázke v rámci príprav na vstup Slovenska do Európskej únie. Ďalším zlepšením je nárast počtu mimovládnych organizácií, ktoré vystupujú ako obhajcovia rómskych práv. Aj napriek týmto úspechom sa ešte musí urobiť mnoho, aby boli prekonané predsudky, ktoré trvajú už celé storočia.

Druhou predbežnou otázkou v dotazníku bola religiozita Rómov. Tradičná rómska religiozita je vo svojej podstate synkretická. Prvá hlavná výskumná otázka, ktorá sa týka vplyvu rómskeho kresťanstva na rómsku spiritualitu je v dotazníku prepojená s otázkou rómskej religiozity. Výskumný projekt ukazuje, že niektoré cirkvi v rámci medzidenominačnej spolupráce vynakladajú nové úsilie, aby pomohli Rómom vybudovať si jednoúrovňovú religiozitu. V rámci rómskej spirituality môžeme identifikovať tri úrovne praktizovania viery. Majorita Rómov praktizuje viacúrovňovú vieru. Zväčšuje sa však počet Rómov, ktorí prechádzajú do novej úrovne viery tým, že hľadajú zmysluplný vzťah s Bohom. Ústredným dôvodom tohto pohybu je prijatie, ktoré zakúšajú od jednotlivcov – kňazov, pastorov, laikov, ako aj ochota ich vlastnej rodiny prijať zmenu. Vďaka týmto dôvodom sa presúvajú na jednoúrovňovú vieru a stávajú sa aktívnymi v miestnych zboroch.

Posledná výskumná otázka sa zameriava na to, aké majú Rómovia možnosti participovať na aktivitách vybraných cirkví. Kľúčovým prvkom tejto otázky bolo, či kresťanské posolstvo, ktoré sa prakticky prejavuje v živote Rómov, ale aj Nerómov, znižuje predsudky voči Rómom a ich marginalizáciu v cirkvách a či sú dvere cirkví pre Rómov otvorené. Zdá sa, že v cirkvách, kde je Rómom umožnené fungovať v multietnických spoločenstvách, sa medzi Rómami

a Nerómami buduje atmosféra prijatia. Dá sa to vysvetliť tým, že keď sa nemôžu ani Rómovia, ani Nerómovia skrývať pred realitou rasového napätia, musia pracovať na tom, aby prekonali vzájomné predsudky. Tým, že sa o to snažia, začínajú rozumieť špecifikám toho druhého etnika a nachádzajú spoločný priestor, v ktorom môžu budovať vzájomný vzťah.

Na druhej strane, existujú aj prípady, v ktorých cirkvi cielene založili oddelené spoločenstvá rómskych a nerómskych veriacich s cieľom vyhnúť sa vonkajším konfliktom. Zdá sa však, že ide o hlbší problém – neochotu čeliť realite osobných predsudkov a charakterizovanie týchto predsudkov ako neprípustných. V takýchto prípadoch je síce obmedzená marginalizácia, účasť Rómov v praktickom živote cirkvi sa však zvyšuje.

Rozdiel medzi multietnickou cirkvou a autochtónnou cirkvou vedie k ďalšej otázke. Čo je dôležitejšie? Participácia Rómov na živote cirkvi alebo redukcia ich marginalizácie v rámci cirkvi? Z biblickej perspektívy by sa mohlo zdať, že oba prístupy sú rovnako dôležité. Je však neakceptovateľné, ak má byť jeden cieľ obetovaný pre naplnenie druhého. Vedomá segregácia Rómov a Nerómov je kontraproduktívna a v skutočnosti môže viesť ešte k väčšej marginalizácii. Výsledkom nášho výskumu je názor, že na to, aby boli prekonané pejoratívne postoje voči Rómom, sú potrebné multietnické cirkvi, ktoré budú zvyšovať potenciál rómskej participácie na ich aktivitách. Práve v multietnickom prostredí dochádza k stretu dvoch kľúčových ingrediencií, ktoré môžu napomôcť k zníženiu marginalizácie Rómov v cirkvi – prvou je ochota Nerómov prijať Rómov ako súčasť cirkvi a druhou je ochota Rómov zanechať ich synkretickú vieru a prijať jednoúrovňovú vieru.

Translated by Ľubica Brenkusová

CURRICULUM VITAE

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PUBLICATIONS

Journals

- KETM Theological Journal, no. 1, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 2001.
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- Viki Šoltéssová and G. Randy Robertson. *Misiológia so zameraním na Rómske komunity (Introduction to Missiology: A Study Guide)*. Banská Bystrica, Slovakia: KETM Press, 2004.

RESEARCH

Major Research: The Roma/Gypsies of Slovakia

Papers Presented:

- "The Roma Problem of Slovakia." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, February 2000.
- "The Roma and the Churches of Slovakia, a Discussion of the Indigenous Church Principle as It Relates to the Roma of Slovakia." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, May 2000.
- "Reconciling Differences Between the Slovak Churches and the Roma." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, November 2000.
- "Historical Developments of the Roma People in the Slovak Region." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, November 2003.
- "The Influence of the Gospel on Roma Society." KETM Theological Conference, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, March 26, 2004.
- "A Missiological Approach to the Roma of Slovakia." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, June 4, 2004.
- "Major Influences On the Slovak Roma." PMTI Missiological Research Fellowship, Budapest, Hungary, June 2005.

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MEMBERSHIPS

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