

## Foreword

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013, the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture, attached to the Szeged Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, began its activity. It came into being as a result of the cooperation between the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who financially supports the Research Group, and the Faculty of Arts at Szeged University. This Research Group has deep roots in Szeged University, reaching back to the work and scientific legacy of Sándor Bálint (1904-1980), Professor of the Department (1947-1966), who remains the foremost scholar of ethnology of religion in Hungary. Building on his academic achievements, research on religious culture has strengthened in recent decades at the Department of Ethnology in Szeged. This department has become one of the outstanding European research centres of ethnology of religion. The activity of the MTA-SZTE continues this thorough tradition of many decades.

The MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture is multidisciplinary; it acknowledges the complexity of religions in our present times, whether they are examined as systems of beliefs, organisations or actions. Accordingly, its research methods and ramifications involve various disciplines, including ethnography, anthropology, sociology, history and Islamic studies. All research projects of the MTA-SZTE Research Group aim to study the transformations of religious cultures in light of their historical, cultural and social settings. A special focus is laid on social transformations of religions in the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. For this reason, the research group launches its yearbook under the title of *Religion, Culture, Society*.

The research group reaches other sectors of the society. Although it operates in a historically Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant) social and cultural environment, it shows genuine interest in the Jewish and Muslim religious cultures and an outlook towards other religions and/or religious movements, including the so-called neopagan movements that have strengthened in recent decades in both Hungary and other European countries. The inter-religious and the ecumenical perspectives provide a stimulating environment for the research, making a distinctive contribution to both the local and the international academic community. In cooperation with theological and religious studies, it strives to carry out its work with a sound historical basis in which theory and practice, empirical facts and their interpretation, historicity and normativity are closely intertwined.

The associates of the research group are experienced in the exploration of historical sources, in fieldwork and in international scholarly life. They benefit from the strong and motivating research culture of the Szeged school of ethnology.

The academic research group presents its findings at conferences in Hungary and abroad, in its own publications (Books on Research of Religious Culture series), and in its English-language yearbook *Religion, Culture, Society* launched with this edition. The first volume of the yearbook contains case studies from recent research.

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