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SELECTED ASPECTS OF RELIGIOSITY AMONG YOUTH IN SLOVAKIA AND THE NETHERLANDS

Abstract. It is crucial to understand the religious ideas among youth, to set up the adequate pastoral practice. The study presents current trends in the measurement of religiosity and the perception of religion among public. At the same time, it deals with the research focused on the religiosity among youth in Slovakia and the Netherlands. The research is based on quantitative data and in the same time on result of focus groups in both countries. In addition to evaluation of selected indicators of the research sample, the study presents some differences in religiosity among youth.

Key words: Youth; Religiosity; Pastoral; Religious Values; Religion.

INTRODUCTION

In the development of religiosity among children and youth, multiple developmental stages can generally be identified by simple observation. The initial stage is characterized by the unilateral dependence of a young person on God. God makes decisions about the life of every person, he judges, rewards, and punishes him. The basic relationship is the absolute obedience. At a later stage, he realizes the relationship between the cause and consequence in the communication with God. He can enter and influence the relationship through prayers, faith and fulfilment of duties. In the next stage, many adolescent people ‘emancipate’ themselves from dependence on God’s power. They recognize his existence, but it is them who is primarily responsible for their life and actions.

Individual developmental stages of religiosity or religious experience can not be classified according to their duration. Many people have their relationship with

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God based on absolute obedience, or a constant change in their personal relationship to the transcendence, based on their current needs and circumstances.

By observing the current development of life trends, it is possible to say that the number of young people moving very quickly into a period of complete “emancipation” from the relationship with God is increasing.

The aim of the study is to describe the current aspects of the religiosity among youth by quantitative measurement of selected indicators and subsequent presentation of qualitative responses to results from two countries. These are interpreted in the text without assessment of their positive or negative impact on young people.

FAITH AND RELIGIOSITY

The concepts of religion and religiosity are related, but they do not have the same content. The first term, the religion, is a cultural phenomenon that describes the relationship of man and God or divinity. The sociological dictionary defines religion as a set of beliefs of faith, symbols, and acts that are based on the holiness and associate the faithful in the social-religious community.¹ On the other hand, religiosity expresses the “importance of religion in the life of a man.”² Some authors define religiosity as “devotion, faith in the authenticity and truth of religion, religious belief, its extent and reflection in the behaviour and everyday practice of a man.”³ Such a definition can be found in the literature as a personal and positive relationship of a man to religion, to God, including complex of phenomena, various forms of thinking, perception, and action. It also includes an attitude towards religious contents. Religiosity, unlike religion, does not have to be formalized and institutionalized. Internal perception of an individual does not necessarily have to be related to a declaration of faith or membership in a particular religious group. Religiosity is therefore a measurable, observable manifestation of religion. It is the characteristic of particular persons in a particular time and space. It describes the way in which religion is embodied in certain actions and attitudes as a set of characteristics and expressions related to the religious belief of an individual.

¹ G. MARSHALL, *Oxford dictionary of sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press 2005, p. 560.

² J.J. MACIONIS, *Sociology*, Upper Sadle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007, p. 512.

³ POROV. P. HARTL, H. HARTLOVÁ, *Psychologický slovník [Dictionary of Psychology]*, Praha: Portál 2000, p. 505.

Another author speaks about the formal or external religiosity and the informal or inner one. Formal, the so-called external religiosity relies on facts and statistics of ecclesial communities. It follows quantitative data, for example the religious services attendance or number of marriages. Informal or inner religiosity is based on the ability to perceive spiritual facts and to adjust our attitudes to them.

In the study of religious perception, measurable parameters have been gradually identified. In addition to religious services attendance, the frequency of prayer, or denomination, the multidimensional concept is promoted in the research; thus multiple criteria are being considered. Recognition of dimensions of religiosity is useful for understanding how and where to measure it.

The faithful do not form a homogeneous group. In researches dealing with religiosity, several criteria have been developed to describe them. According to their method of perception of the religious faith and the degree of identification of people with their Church, it is possible to create several religious-sociological typologies. One of them defines four types of religiosity of the faithful, namely: core, formal, marginal, and inactive.⁴ Other researchers have created five following types: adherent to religion – they are engaged in religious practice and believe in a personal God; atheists – do not believe in God, complying with religion – they tend to believe in a personal God but do not attribute great importance to religion, and their religious practice is occasional; modifying religion – they have faith in a personal God and modify forms of religiosity in order to create the religious practice that is appropriate for them; leaving religion – they have a some faith in impersonal God.⁵

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research on religiosity and its subsequent evaluation into one of the above mentioned typologies requires a large group of respondents involved. The size of the group depends on the level of behaviour of specific types that the researchers plan to interpret.

Reported results of this study stand for the presentation of a survey realized in January and February 2017. It is inspired by the already mentioned approaches to

⁴ Porov. J.H. FICHTER, *Sociological Measurement of Religiosity*, "Review of Religious Research" 10(1969), no 3, p. 169-176.

⁵ Porov. D.L PEARCE, M.L. DENTON, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of American Adolescents*, New York: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 38-55.

religiosity measurement, although it does not have the ambition to sort the results into selected typology.

The questionnaire was prepared at the Dutch University of Tilburg and subsequently adjusted to Slovak conditions by the Theological Faculty of the Trnava University. Data collection was carried out in both countries by partner faculties. Questionnaires were filled out in Slovakia at six secondary schools in western and central Slovakia, in the Netherlands at five secondary schools. In both cases, the research had been introduced personally to students during the class; and after that, the secondary school students completed it electronically. 26 questions asked were divided in the questionnaire into several following areas: identification questions concerning the respondent, exploration of life goals, perception of inspirations and problems, pleasant and unpleasant experiences, faith and institution, the vision of God, and finally questions including religious experience.

The total number of completed questionnaires was 167 in Slovakia and 160 in the Netherlands. The survey is not based on a representative sample of the young generation, but rather it is a pilot exploration of the society in both countries. It aims to be a contribution to a better understanding of the impact of social changes on the religiosity among youth. The inclusion of results into typologies is not used, as the number of evaluated questionnaires is insufficient for creation of individual types. After the realization of quantitative online research and its processing into comparative charts, focus groups with students of theology were established at both universities, in both countries.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Participating Slovak and Dutch respondents were 16 years old in average. Answers to the question “Based on my worldview, I would call myself” show the most striking difference (Fig. 1).

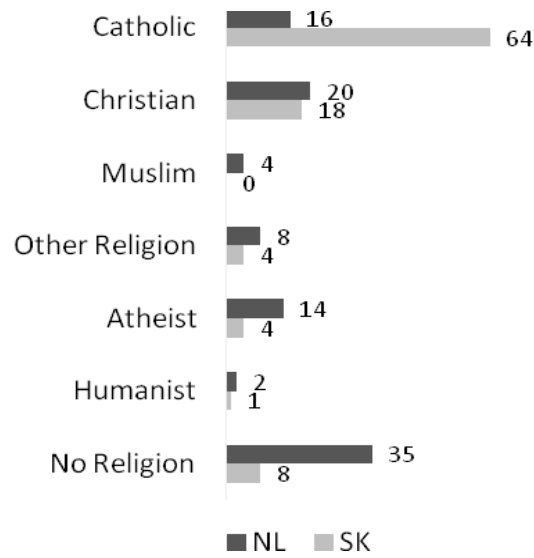


Fig. 1: Worldview classification (in %)

We have also chosen the respondents’ opinions about the identity of the believer from the individual areas surveyed. The question “Who is the believer” could be answered by choosing from several variants. A significant difference can be observed when it comes to the faithful who are part of the community and attend the worship (Fig. 2).

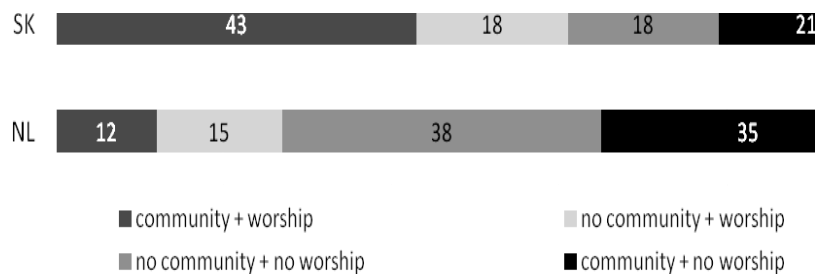


Fig. 2: Identity of the believer

We have also compared data concerning respondents' life goals. Figure 3 shows the answers to the question "People follow the goals rising from their meaning of life. What life goals do you consider important in your life? Evaluate each of the following goals."

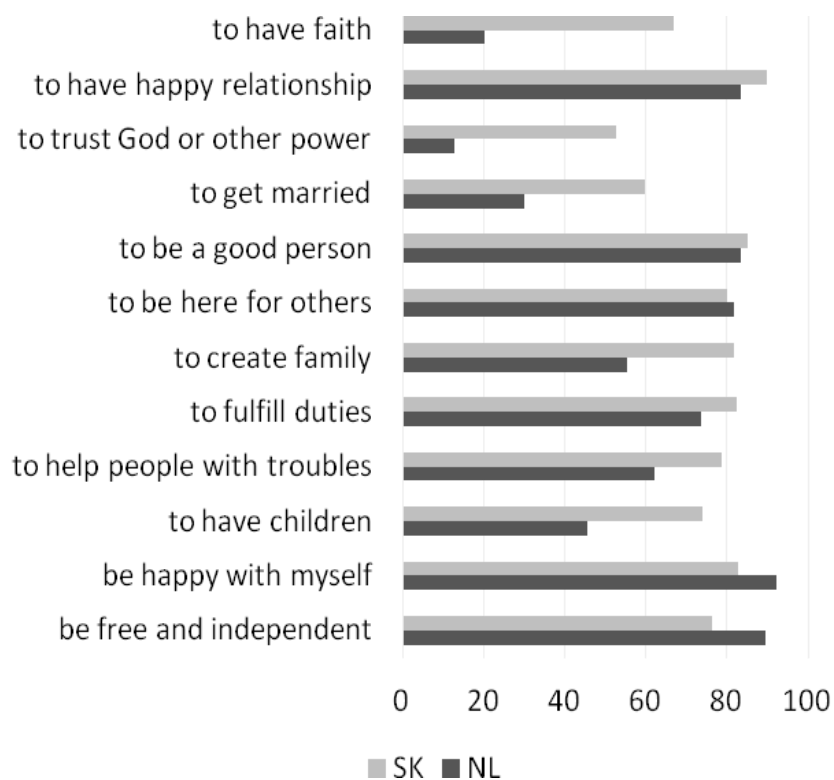


Fig. 3: Life goals

Differences in life goals are significant in five following indicators: for Dutch youth, compared to Slovak one, it is not that important to establish a family, have children, and marry. Also, "to have faith" and "trust in God" entries occupied significantly lower positions in life goals. On the other hand, young people in the Netherlands declare a stronger desire for happiness and independence in life.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

At the partner universities, the Trnava University in Slovakia and the Tilburg University in the Netherlands, through which data collections were carried out in their home countries, the participants discussed their opinions about results of questionnaires. In both cases, these groups consisted of eight participants. The groups were led by two pedagogues, representatives of both universities. A quantitative exploration was done in May 2017. One-hour interviews were recorded and subsequently interpreted. From the interpretation, we are choosing the main lines of discussions. Since they were conducted at Catholic theological faculties, the themes relate mainly to this denomination.

The question related to interpretation of differences in the religiosity among youth was answered by both groups mainly in terms of different historical development of both countries and its subsequent impact on the individual's religiosity. One Dutch student pointed out to the long-term weakening of religiosity: "Young people in the Netherlands do not have many models of Catholic values anymore. Here I see the challenge of creating such models." One student sees a time limit for the loss of Catholic perceptions especially in the change of approach of the Catholic Church: "After the Second Vatican Council in the Netherlands, the Church communities accepted the challenge "open the windows" more widely, and it harmed them." The council was the reasoning for one Slovak student as well: "It seems to me that before the Second Vatican Council, the Church was offering a stronger identity than it is offering today. People ask more questions nowadays, they need answers. Before, it was enough for them to have their clear identity which was offered to them by the Church institution." Another perception points out to the aspiration of Slovak participants to maintain the position of religion in the life of an individual: "I think that the difference arose due to the fact that the historical conditions that prevailed in our country during communism forced our population to seek faith in something else, and it was the faith which emerged in the religion that filled them with confidence. So, from my personal point of view, historical development has affected these results. When our culture opens more to other directions, it will be the same way as in other Western countries, not only in the Netherlands. It is up to us whether we start searching again for the confidence that religion proposes."

Students from both countries were surprised about the great diversity related to the declared trust in God. The Dutch participant of the discussion said the following: "I wonder where the strength of the Slovak youth rises from." Another

participant of discussion from the same country thought about the change of lifestyles: “Young people no longer believe in supernatural things like few generations ago. Therefore, I think they are not able to express trust in the supernatural. When you don’t know someone well enough, you can not like him and trust him.” In the second group, the reason for decline was found mainly in cultural differences: “People long for a nice time with someone. They want to talk and laugh together. It is like some kind of bridge between the Church and the ordinary life. To meet, talk about things, and also have opposing views. To discuss different topics, receive opinions in other places, not only in the church, for example. Trust has to exist probably outside the church as well. When a person has such an experience, he trusts God more. I don’t think, however, that the Church abroad doesn’t realize such a bridging. Perhaps it is more likely that the society in Western countries is more individualistic than in our country. People rely more on themselves and therefore the intensity of trust in God is lower in the Netherlands.”

In the final part of the interviews, students were asked in which area they see the possibility to work with the religious dimension of young people: “When young people seek answers about God or faith on the Internet, they find many negative information. That’s also why they are not able to believe in God. As future catechists, we should focus mainly on positive information and the benefits of religion.” Another Dutch student highlighted the main focus of work of pastoral workers: “Even in the period of secularization, there is plenty of space for positive experiences with the Churches. Churches are not only about the response to secularization.” One of the Slovak students described the focus on positive practice with religious experience: “We held ‘the day of open monasteries’; we opened our monastery as well. We made all the spaces to which people could come accessible, even those they usually do not visit. Most of the people who came were atheists; and they were fascinated when they saw that we were normal people – that’s one thing. And then they spoke to each other about having prejudices towards votarists. When they saw our way of life and how we work, they said that their opinions have changed. It is also our fault that we don’t talk about ourselves too much. In some way, we create the taboos in the public. Our task is to destroy the walls and talk more about ourselves; to show that we are not isolated from the society, but we are part of it, and that we want to help society to grow.”

One of the challenges for Dutch students is to confront young people directly with their spiritual dimension: “For teachers, it is necessary to learn how to lead a lesson. They need to provoke the youth to get out of the shell. They should surprise them and touch their personal life. They need to help students to discover

things they have not previously experienced. So they are able to show personal interest in the subject of spirituality and its manifestations.” The focus on personal experience can be described by one Slovak reaction: “Our faculty organizes praxes with participation of our students and people with special needs, often atheists. These people experienced our lay student or votarist who had fun with them, and was cheerful, and just the touch of such normality is for them, in my opinion, a big and positive step forward in terms of better understanding of the Church. These are the ways how the meetings should be carried on.”

Also one statement from the Dutch group is worth the attention. It focuses on the need for interreligious dialogue that can contribute to the development of religiosity among youth: “There are many Muslims in Dutch schools. It is not easy to begin a religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims at school. But if it is managed well at school, it can enrich young people a lot. It will teach them to speak about their identity.”

CONCLUSION

During the focus discussion, students from both countries were interested by the fact that for Slovak youth, more than for the Dutch, it still has a high value to establish a family and have children. Despite the fact that the importance of these values is intergenerationally lower when speaking about the youth, even in Slovakia.

During the qualitative interviews, two camps were set up in both countries to clarify whether the change stands for a positive or a negative development. One student said an interesting idea: “It disturbs me the most that our parents and people of their age often tell us about the reason why is today’s youth worse than they were in their young age. They say that we already are a spoiled generation. Nevertheless, we will live our life at least as well and as our parents did. What we need in particular is that the older generation believes in us and not only reminds us of why their perception was better.”

Youth, its value perception of the world and social events are topics of many disciplines. Not only marketing specialists try to understand the thinking of the new generation, but political parties or media channels also try to address the youth. For religions, working with the youth is one of their key activities. Professional reflection leading to a better understanding of the youth’s world is therefore the area pastoral theology is interested in as well. It is not true anymore that more than three-fifths of the Slovak population declare and live the values that are part of the teaching of the Catholic Church. The situation of young people in the Netherlands

is also changing. The tasks of pastoral theology are to approach and to interpret over again the basic Gospel themes in a language that is understandable to young people whose religious values evolve and, in many cases, do not reflect the world of older generations.

The aim of the study was to execute the pilot elaboration of the image of the Slovak and Dutch youth's religiosity through a number of indicators concerning perception of religion. The introduction of multiple typologies of religiosity and the processing of survey results provide space for further pastoral-theological interpretation. The survey and its processing intended to point out to the fact that for the adequate pastoral work with young people it is insufficient to perceive only the denomination they belong to, what they believe in or how often they visit the church. Their religious perceptions and expressions are a much more complex area that needs to be constantly analysed, understood and brought to theological consideration. And most importantly, it is essential to have faith in today's young people, to believe they are not a lost generation, but that they are trying to live a vibrant life as well as the previous generations.

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WYBRANE ASPEKTY RELIGIJNOŚCI MŁODZIEŻY NA SŁOWACJI I W HOLANDII

Streszczenie

Konieczne jest poznanie poglądów młodzieży na sprawy dotyczące religii, żeby opracować adekwatne duszpasterstwo. W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono aktualne trendy w pomiarach religijności i postrzegania religii w społeczeństwie. Jednocześnie przedstawiono wyniki badań religijności przeprowadzone wśród młodzieży na Słowacji i w Holandii. Zaprezentowane analizy opierają się na danych ilościowych oraz na wynikach badań grup fokusowych w obu krajach. Oprócz oceny wybranych wskaźników, uzyskanych w badaniach, przedstawiono także pewne różnice w religijności młodzieży.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież; religijność; duszpasterstwo; wartości religijne; religia.