

Youth and Religion in Hungary*

ADRIENN MOLNÁR and MIKLÓS TOMKA

The notion that young people have become more interested in religious faith and in religious matters in general has gained ground amongst public and scholars alike.¹ Their opinions bolstered by sociological indicators, church policy-makers² and leaders of youth organisations³ agree that this is the case. Hard empirical facts, however, are rather scanty. Social scientists have not yet investigated several aspects of attitudes towards religion. Whatever data we have, may, therefore, serve only as a starting point far from giving satisfactory answers to the question. The lack of proven facts coupled with the importance of this issue has induced the Public Opinion Research Group attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League to set up an independent investigation into the phenomenon.

The basic questions of this inquiry are:

1. What aspects or elements of religion play any part in the life of young people, and what are the manifestations of these?
2. What differences can be discovered among young people of various social groupings in their attitudes to religious matters?

Religious feelings, and attitudes towards religion, are very complex indeed. Our inquiry — over and above factors of background and environment — concentrated attention on the following: interest in religion; knowledge of religious matters; beliefs; religious practices; religion and ideology; religious stereotypes. An investigation of relationships between various dimensions of religious feeling and the

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¹Györfy Miklós, 'Terjed-e a vallásosság és a hit a fiatalok körében?' Magyar Radio broadcast, 24 April 1987. István Kamarás, 'Bensőséges bázisok', *Ifjúsági Szemle*, 1986 No. 6, pp. 70-76. P. István Kerékgyártó, 'Keresztény közösségek Constantinus előtt és a II. Vatikáni zsinat után', *Tájékoztató* (MM. Marxizmus-Leninizmus Okataási Főosztály), 1984 No. 5, pp. 109-19.

²Imre Miklós, 'Bővülő lehetőségek az együttműködésre', *Magyar Hírlap*, 14 January 1984, p. 5.

³János Gönczi, interviewed in the radio broadcast mentioned above.

interrelationship of religion, morality and value systems will form the next stage of our analysis.

During the last 20 years there have been only two major investigations into religion — or the lack of it — amongst young people, although neither of them was based on a nationwide representative sample. The first of these, which has been only partially published, looked at pupils of comprehensive schools in the capital;⁴ the second was carried out among students and young workers in two counties.⁵ These surveys included the collection of some data on questions not directly relevant to religious or ideological matters, nor dealing explicitly with the sociology of young people. Nevertheless a number of facts emerged about beliefs, religious morality, religious practices and so on. These data, however, have not been analysed and summarised in any methodological manner.

The inquiry that follows represents the country's population between 14-29 years of age (excluding pupils and students resident in institutions or young people in prisons). We conducted 995 valid interviews. The social and demographic structure of those interviewed closely matched that of the 14 to 29-year-old cohort of the total population.

As this near 1,000 strong sample is statistically significant, it ensures that the results faithfully reflect the attitudes and views of all Hungarian young people. In order to reinforce the trustworthiness of our findings we have taken into consideration data obtained by other authors in their inquiries. We do recognise the limitations of our research, in that it was of a 'one-off' nature; therefore, we can refer only exceptionally to changes in religious behaviour — its growth or decline — in such instances where we can rely on a comparison between our findings and the data of earlier investigations. We feel that it is right and proper to restrict ourselves to the illustration of the state of affairs as it exists today, and to leave the large questions of changes in ideology to further and different inquiries.

Finally, it must be emphasised that, in the following, we are dealing with nationwide averages. Most investigations prove that averages may hide quite considerable deviations. For instance, the western, Cis-Danubian region of the country can be said to be 'more religious' than the rest of Hungary. Traditional religious belief is much stronger in the provinces than in the towns, particularly in villages of less than 1,500 inhabitants. The more recent — and more self-conscious — interest in religion appears to a greater extent in the capital, Budapest,

⁴Iván Varga, 'Hungary', in *Western Religion: A Country by Country Sociological Inquiry*, edited by Hans Mol (Mouton, the Hague, 1972), pp. 277-84.

⁵Miklós Tomka, 'Mai fiatalok és a vallás vidéken', *Közlemények*, 1976 No. 1, p. 51 and Tomka, 'A vallási kultúra maradványai a vidéki fiatalok körében', *Pedagógiai Szemle*, 1977 No. 1, pp. 10-11.

than elsewhere. A detailed investigation of these aspects will be the subject of a later inquiry. At this stage we must ascertain that, if our averages show a higher level of religious interest than would appear to be the case from general observations in the capital and in other cities, this is due to the differentiation in society and not to errors in our inquiry.

The Religious or Ideological Background of Young People

The family is the major institution of what we may call 'religious socialisation'. 23.3 per cent of young people said that their father was a religious person; 8.9 per cent thought their father was more or less religious. 36 per cent said that their mother was religious; 12.5 per cent that she was more or less religious. (We should point out here that, in 1985, 30.4 per cent of men aged between 30-49 and 28.7 per cent of women of the same age range declared themselves to be religious believers.⁶ This 30 to 49-year-old age group is, of course, largely the parental group of today's 14 to 29-year-olds. There is, therefore, some congruence in the two sets of data, although, interestingly, men in the 30-49 group show a divergence.) The numbers of non-believers are greater: 65.4 per cent of young people said that their father was non-religious; 50.1 per cent that their mother was not religious. Even if we discount the uncertainties involved in statements of this kind, it is clear that more than half of our young people did not receive any kind of religious upbringing from their parents.

12.8 per cent of 14 to 29-year-olds cannot remember any mention whatsoever of God or religion by their parents or relatives. This might be taken as proof that in a very large part of society previously held religious traditions have completely disappeared. The reappearance of religion cannot, therefore, be attributed to surviving social models or customs. However, next to the role played by the family, the socialising role of peer groups and schoolfriends has a growing importance. 41.2 per cent of our sample said that there were believers among their best friends. On the other hand, 28.3 per cent said that there were convinced atheists in their peer group. This contrast may be taken as proof that the influence of the social environment tends more towards religious belief than towards atheism.

Apart from personal influences, however, religious culture cannot lean on any material support. Artefacts of religious symbolism are to be found in fewer and fewer family homes; religious books are present in only a small number of families. 48.8 per cent of the sample said that there was a Bible in their homes (or in that of close relatives).

⁶Data from the Tömegkommunikációs Kutatózpont.

19.3 per cent of these young people had a Bible of their own. The first figure is considerably greater than that stated in 1983, when the Association of Hungarian Publishers and Booksellers claimed that only 19 per cent of families owned a Bible.⁷ According to the findings of the Centre for Librarianship, published this year, a Bible can be found in two households out of every five.

If we accept that in four years Bible-ownership has doubled, let us look at what this can be attributed to. Firstly, several reissues of the Bible have been made in recent years; secondly, the Bible is now included in school curricula; finally, this formerly well hidden (or well forgotten) book has again pride of place in many households.

If we may summarise our findings so far, we can state that whilst family background and scarcity of religious material may give rise to indifference towards religion among young people (which, of course, is not identical with explicit atheism), the consensus among friends and in peer groups may be more favourable to religion than to its opposite.

Childhood Memories of Religion

40.3 per cent of our sample said that they had taken part in first communion; 30.8 per cent of them were confirmed in a Catholic church, 8.6 per cent in a Protestant church. Therefore more than half of young people had taken no part whatsoever in these rituals.

We must be careful not to relate the numbers of 'participants' to young people as a whole, as the ceremony of confirmation is observed only in the Catholic and Protestant churches. According to their statements, 59.5 per cent of baptised Catholics took part in first communion and 45.4 per cent were confirmed. 40.8 per cent of Calvinist and Lutheran young people were also confirmed. (These figures seem fairly high. According to data collected by the Catholic Church, in recent years 45 per cent of Catholic young people have taken first communion and 35 per cent have been confirmed. It is interesting to note that before 1965, or indeed before 1960, these ratios were 70 per cent and 55 per cent respectively.)

52.2 per cent of our sample remembered receiving 'religious education' either at school or in church. According to official figures and church assessments the numbers of those taking part in religious education — either at school or in church — has not exceeded 30 per cent since the early sixties. The figure of 52.2 per cent should, therefore, be interpreted as meaning that these young people remember some sort of organised involvement in religious education

⁷Júlia V. Kulcsár and Péter Mándi, 'Könyvek otthon', MKKE, (Budapest, 1983).

— such as Bible classes and preparation for confirmation or first communion. The other half of young people had received no kind of religious education at all; or this education (or participation in it) was so short, superficial or occasional that no memories of it were preserved.

Two thirds of our sample had memories of going to church in their early childhood: one third of them had never set foot in a church; 38.7 per cent went to church every Sunday or more frequently; 7.6 per cent did this once a month or once every two months; 19.7 per cent visited a church only on feast days. We do not know the precise meaning of 'early childhood' — what age or length of time this denoted. At first sight, the figures seem to be rather high. It should be noted that preparations for confirmation or first communion may have meant going to church at least once a week, over a period of 6-12 months. We interpret these figures in the sense that more than one third of young people remember going to church with some regularity, that is, at least once every week. Another third remembered less frequent, more occasional attendance (those having been prepared for confirmation were likely to go to church at least once a week). The last third never went to church, not even in their early childhood.

Earlier inquiries indicated that the numbers of those praying on occasion was greater than that of churchgoers.⁸ 59.3 per cent of our sample had memories of having prayed in their early childhood. This figure is higher than the ratio of religious fathers or mothers, and also exceeds the number of those who had received religious education. Could it be that at least one parent still had some religious inclination earlier in life? Or does this mean that religious conviction is not absolutely necessary for someone to pray? Maybe we shall learn more about this when we look at the numbers of those who pray more or less regularly today.

To sum up this line of inquiry, we find that about one half of young people did get some sort of religious education and that they had taken part in 'introductory sessions' (confirmation, first communion) or entered into some sort of religious practice (churchgoing, prayer). The intensity of these activities manifested itself at several levels.

The other half of our cohort did not have any religious education and never went to church. So, on the basis of childhood memories, one may say that the attitude and behaviour of young people towards religion shows a cleavage into two largely equal groups following mutually exclusive traditions.

⁸See Footnote 5 and István Kiss, 'A vallásos gondolkodás és magatartás néhány szerkezeti sajátossága a tsz-tagság körében', *Tájékoztató* 1977 No. 3, pp. 91-103.

Religious Knowledge

Sociologists of religion consider the level of knowledge about religious matters as an independent dimension. There is a level of religious faith which requires a fair amount of knowledge and some religious 'acculturation'; there is also an intellectually less demanding form which relies mostly on rituals and emotions. For instance, within Hungarian Christian traditions there are considerable differences between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic (Uniate) churches, both of which put great emphasis on rituals, and the Reformed one that professes the principle of *sola fide* ('he that believeth shall be saved'). On the whole, all denominations demand a knowledge of Christian culture. In essence, we are talking about a body of knowledge that can be taken as a universal cultural norm. The various investigations pursued in the last few decades have proved that in reality this body of knowledge is rather incomplete amongst young people. Correct answers to the eight questions listed in Table One below vary between nine and 77 per cent.

Table One

Percentage of correct answers to eight questions on religious knowledge (in decreasing order):

| <i>Questions (correct answers in brackets)</i> | <i>Percentage of correct answers</i> |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Who was the mother of Jesus? (Mary, Virgin Mary) | 77.2 |
| Into which nation was Jesus born? (Jewish, Israelite) | 46.5 |
| The followers of Jesus are called disciples. How many disciples were there? (12) | 43.3 |
| Who condemned Jesus to death? (Pilate, Pontius Pilatus) | 20.8 |
| The story of Jesus was written by the Evangelists. How many Evangelists were there? (4) | 8.9 |
| Can you remember the names of the Evangelists or mention at least one? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) | 18.1 |
| According to the Bible in which town was Jesus born? (Bethlehem) | 12.4 |
| How old was Jesus when he died? (33) | 11.4 |

An opinion about the importance of the Bible is part of religious culture. Fewer than one half — 41.6 per cent — of our sample said that the Bible was an essential part of our culture. 38.8 per cent of them agreed that the Bible was the first printed book; 43.2 per cent disagreed. Only about one quarter (28.7 per cent) knew that the Bible was written by Jewish authors; one seventh (14.5 per cent) were doubtful, and more than two fifths (40.3 per cent) denied this!

Bearing in mind the likelihood that poorly informed people may try to 'guess' replies, the proportion of correct and incorrect answers might to some extent be due to chance. Nevertheless, the wrong answers to both questions were in the majority regardless of whether they were based on firm knowledge or on guesswork.

Finally, there is a key matter of substance which has been treated in a rather controversial manner in the last three to four decades. It could be a question of knowledge or opinion and it may also touch upon belief. We posed the following question, 'According to some people, Jesus did not exist — he is pure invention.⁹ According to others, however, he was a genuine historical figure.¹⁰ What is your opinion?' 31.9 per cent surmised that he was invented; 11.2 per cent thought that he may have lived but were not sure; 56.9 per cent, however, were of the firm belief that he did live. Historical consensus holds nowadays that he certainly did exist. Those who deny this are, in all probability, simply ignorant. But one cannot avoid the conclusion that all those who did not accept the existence of Christ, or were doubtful about it, could not be considered 'religious' in terms of Christian traditions. Reversing the argument, however, the acceptance of Christ's historical existence in itself may not indicate religious belief. Conviction based on misinformation is rather unstable; once a person realises that his or her opinion is faulty, the foundations of their encompassing materialist ideology or, indeed, any critical stance in respect of religion may be weakened.

The results of this part of our inquiry show the level of religious knowledge to be rather low. This may be a factor that diminishes the attractions of religion; it can be also a source of irrational, superstitious beliefs (in contrast to church traditions based on a philosophical system). The low level of religious knowledge no doubt impedes the transmission of religious beliefs — it also obstructs any ideological dispute at a higher level and, within this, a measured critique of religion. Last but not least, this low level of knowledge is a serious cultural shortcoming, making the appreciation of European history, literature and art that much more difficult.

⁹I. Kriveljov, *Könyv a Bibliáról* (Budapest, 1960), pp. 121-49 and 227-28. Gusztáv Gece, *Vallástörténete* (Budapest, 1971), pp. 168-70.

¹⁰Jenő Gergely, *A pápaság története* (Budapest, 1982), p. 12.

Religious Belief — and its Denial

The system of structured religious belief is a complex, multifarious body of knowledge. It is formed of a hierarchy of tenets of greater and lesser importance with its constituent elements linked in a cogwheel-like fashion. This organic structure is, of course, more in evidence in the official teaching of the churches. Popular religious-faith — and individual faith — generally show a somewhat more disorganised (or individually assembled) body of beliefs. This state of affairs poses a methodological problem for researchers: one may delineate, and inquire about, an official belief-system, its familiarity and acceptance, but the result may simply show conformity with, or denial of, hallowed traditions. It is advisable, therefore, to take a somewhat more 'reductionist' attitude and, instead of looking at tenets or dogmas, to find out something about a number of fundamental key questions. Some of these are:

1. The question of immanence or transcendence, that is, the acceptance of an exclusively empirical reality, or the belief in transcendence beyond empirical reality.
2. Belief in God (i.e. the belief that transcendence means a personal entity), or its denial.
3. Belief in, or denial of, the divine nature of Jesus Christ.
4. Belief in, or denial of, the reality of an afterlife for the individual human being.

Admittedly these questions are not of equal importance for every denomination, but — as far as Hungarian Christian traditions are concerned — they can safely be used as a yardstick in our investigations.

It should be noted that belief is not closely related to categories of logic; it may not reach even the level of verbalisation. On the other hand, believers and non-believers might equally use the stereotypes derived from religious culture (and lately from critiques of religion) to justify their stance. Such stereotypical expressions mirror personal attitudes only vaguely, but an ensemble of statements may give a reasonably close indication of a person's belief-system. The relationship of the various indicators, their partial overlap, concordance or antithesis can give a useful overview. An assembly of such data might form an answer to the initial question. (This will be one of the tasks of the next stage in our inquiry.) It should be pointed out, that simply setting these indicators next to one another would give only a crude picture. It is of some interest to find out the order of magnitude in the contrast between firm convictions and equally firm denials concerning our four questions on religious beliefs.

Replies to questions about existence beyond this world, spirit being independent of matter, and supernatural powers, subjects or persons, show fairly high figures in each category. That is, there is little polarisation of opinions (see Table Two). This result is supported by the additional view of 30-50 per cent of our sample that one cannot give a really convincing answer to questions of this nature. (We found, for instance, that the term 'beyond this world' was rather confusing for most young people. The expression 'supernatural person or object' was more comprehensible to them.)

Table Two

The proportion in percentages of those accepting or denying supernatural subjects or phenomena (see questions being phrased differently).

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'No reply'</i> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| No answer is possible to the question 'Does anything exist beyond this world' | 37.7 | 27.0 | 35.3 |
| One cannot determine whether a supernatural person or subject exists or not | 57.2 | 21.3 | 21.5 |
| There is no reason to suppose that anything exists beyond our world | 33.7 | 36.5 | 29.8 |
| Supernatural powers do not exist | 48.0 | 29.8 | 22.2 |
| There can be no spirit independent of matter | 43.9 | 30.0 | 26.1 |
| A belief in a supernatural Being is unacceptable | 21.8 | 41.8 | 36.4 |
| An omnipotent Being does exist | 13.5 | 66.2 | 20.3 |

Perhaps this perplexity is the reason for our finding that nearly one half of our sample (48 per cent) rejected the idea of supernatural powers, including that of 'a spirit independent of matter'. Roughly the same proportion (41.8, per cent) rejected the statement 'It is impossible to believe in a supernatural Being'. At the same time, only 13.5 per cent of young people agreed with the statement 'Some kind of omnipotent Being does exist'. So we may conclude that 40-50 per cent of young people do not believe in supernatural phenomena, although, in the final analysis, they think these questions cannot be decided one way or the other. This is supported by the fact that, although the

number of firm believers in a supernatural Being was rather small, three times as many accepted that such a belief was tenable.

One consequence of this peculiar set of opinions was the view of at least some of those who do not believe in the supernatural that others — a minority — were entitled to believe in an existence beyond this world and, indeed, that there was no need to disapprove of this.

This view is also significant in so far as polarisation of opinions increased when more concrete questions were put to the sample (about God, Jesus, the hereafter): our young people came down much more decisively on the positive or negative side of the questions (see Table Two).

Many young people were uncertain about the existence or non-existence of God. About one-fifth of them were strongly exercised by this question; the majority were uninterested (see Table Three).

Table Three

The proportion in percentages of those who believe in the existence of God, against those who reject his existence.

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'No reply'</i> |
|--|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| I do not know whether God exists, but could not care less | 29.4 | 35.0 | 35.6 |
| I do not know whether God exists — the question does not interest me | 22.0 | 55.7 | 22.3 |
| I am concerned that there is no real proof of God's existence | 25.2 | 51.4 | 23.4 |
| Belief in God makes it more difficult to understand the world | 17.4 | 48.3 | 34.3 |
| I have no need for a God in order to lead a well-balanced life | 57.4 | 23.8 | 18.8 |
| It is a useless thing to be concerned with the existence or non-existence of God | 27.3 | 38.1 | 34.6 |
| Science has proved that God does not exist | 37.8 | 37.8 | 24.4 |
| I do not believe that God exists but I feel that he should | 15.4 | 57.4 | 27.2 |

We found two peculiarities in respect of belief in God. One of these was the view emphasised by more than half our sample (57.4 per cent) that they had no need for God in a well-balanced life, (although later analysis showed that some perhaps did believe in God). In contrast, quite a few (15.4 per cent) did not believe in God but felt some need for his existence. The other peculiarity was the finding that whilst a majority did not think that God was important in their lives many rejected such statements as 'Belief in God complicates and confuses our understanding of the world' (48.3 per cent) and 'It is useless to trouble ourselves with the existence or non-existence of God' (38.1 per cent.)

We may conclude, therefore, that the majority of young people do not know what to do with the question of God, as far as their own way of life is concerned. At the same time, about half of our sample did not consider belief in God to be a confused, useless attitude. (There is an overlap between these two categories of opinion.) Finally, views were equally divided as to whether science had proved that God could not exist (37.8 per cent).

About one third of our sample did believe in God (Table Four). In the view of a smaller group (8.2 per cent), God was not interested in us; 11.4 per cent thought that God should not demand anything from us. More thought that 'God is walking beside us' (15.9 per cent), and that he 'loves us' (18.9 per cent). 10.2 per cent believed that 'the Kingdom of God is drawing near'; 18.4 per cent agreed with: 'God manifested himself in the person of Jesus Christ.' The group who did believe in God made up about 15 to 20 per cent of the total. Next to them came another sizable group — 22.3 per cent — that accepted the necessity of God, but did not believe in his tangible reality: 'God probably exists but we don't know anything about him.' Looking at this from the opposite point of view, more than one half of our sample could not accept any statement affirming the existence of God.

In previous inquiries, it was found that some young people rejected the existence of God (perhaps the concept was too abstract in their eyes) but accepted that Jesus was the Son of God, and of divine nature.¹¹ Our later investigations will try to assess such inconsistencies. It should be pointed out here and now, that about one quarter of young people (23.6 per cent) believed that Jesus was the Son of God and therefore was himself God-like. 4.8 per cent of those questioned were unable to give a firm answer to the questions whether Jesus was only an exceptional human being, Son of God or of a God-like nature. These proportions were higher than the percentages of those affirming a positive belief in God.

¹¹Miklós Tomka, 'A változó vallás mérésének problémái', *Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle*, 1977 No. 4, pp. 363-76.

Table Four

The proportion in percentages of believers to non-believers, in the light of varying versions of the questions.

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'No reply'</i> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>a) Statements about an intangible, unknowable, distant God</i> | | | |
| There must be something or someone that can be named 'God' | 21.4 | 58.6 | 20.0 |
| There must be a God but we know nothing about him | 22.3 | 53.1 | 24.6 |
| God exists but he is not interested in us | 8.2 | 74.1 | 17.7 |
| God exists but he cannot demand anything from us | 11.4 | 67.8 | 20.8 |
| <i>b) Statements about a factual, historically extant God</i> | | | |
| God exists and walks beside us | 15.9 | 59.5 | 24.6 |
| God exists and manifested himself in the person of Jesus Christ | 18.4 | 58.5 | 23.1 |
| God exists and his kingdom is drawing near | 10.2 | 71.9 | 17.9 |
| God exists and he loves us | 18.9 | 61.0 | 20.1 |

According to international surveys, the most vulnerable point of religious belief-systems is the belief in a hereafter. Loss of religious faith usually begins with the rejection of this belief — in other words, this is the tenet least acceptable to many people. In our sample of 14 to 29-year-olds, roughly one quarter accepted the idea that there may be life after death, but only, 15.6 per cent of them believed in the idea of resurrection. Three quarters of the sample rejected the concept of 'existence beyond the grave' or of resurrection; indeed, 83.6 per cent thought that 'Death means a final extinction'. It is interesting to note — although not relevant to our inquiry — that this was not linked to any kind of pessimism. It seems that belief in a hereafter is a rather restricted idea in Hungary (Table Five).

Table Five

The percentages of those who believe or disbelieve in a hereafter (the questions being phrased differently).

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'No reply'</i> |
|--|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Death means a final dissolution, but what we made of our life does not disappear without trace | 83.6 | 14.9 | 1.5 |
| Life is not meaningless, because there is something following it | 38.8 | 56.0 | 5.2 |
| Death is simply a transition into another kind of existence | 22.4 | 71.8 | 5.8 |
| Death will be followed by resurrection | 15.6 | 78.6 | 5.8 |

Summing it all up, we find that, in the area of religious belief or non-belief, certain attitudes appear at various levels. At one level, there is considerable vagueness, bordering on agnosticism. At another level, a somewhat tendentious divergence between personal standpoint and objective truth. Perhaps, this is because certain knowledge is missing, and as its lack is not made conscious personal attitudes are formed independently. The third level is the question of belief or its opposite. The proportion of non-believers is much greater than that of believers. Finally, belief has many different aspects, all differing in terms of subject and certitude — in some ways paralleling the proportions of the two main groups. It seems that whatever body of knowledge does exist, this is largely detached from the internal system of teaching as practised by the churches.

Religious Practice and its Role as a Normative Factor

Five separate areas can be defined when investigating the dimension of religious activity. These are:

1. Religious rites of passage (such as baptism or marriage);
2. Open participation in 'official' (denominational) religious practices, (the most obvious of which is church attendance);
3. Religious practices pursued in private (prayer);
4. Participation in religious communal life (Sunday school, prayer groups) etc.;
5. Religion as a system of ethics that gives meaning to behaviour.

One of the most important manifestations of religion, which safeguards and consolidates its role in society, is the series of rituals marking the turning-points of life. 36.9 per cent of young married couples had a church wedding. The children of 63 per cent of parents in our group were baptised (both figures correspond quite clearly with figures derived from state and church sources).

These figures require certain qualifications. It should be pointed out that more than half of young people (55.3 per cent) eschewed church wedding ceremonies. In the case of second marriages, the figure is even higher (62.1 per cent), but of course, the Catholic Church refuses to bless such weddings. The overall proportion of church weddings has slowly and gradually declined year by year in the last few decades. This again has been linked to the increase in divorce and re-marriage. (The proportion of church weddings among newly-weds is much more stable.) The proportion of baptisms has considerably declined in the course of one generation: whilst 88.6 per cent of 14-29-year-old people had been baptised, only 63 per cent of their own children were. (This may be counterbalanced somewhat by adult christenings, but the proportion of these is negligible.) Finally, whilst the rituals mentioned above may indeed safeguard and reinforce religious culture, in many instances this does not represent personal religious belief, only a conformity with local customs or the wishes of relatives.¹²

5.4 per cent of our sample said that they went to church every Sunday (or even more frequently); 3.1 per cent once a month (or even less frequently); 37.1 per cent said that they went to church only on feast days or similar occasions. 54.4 per cent of young people did not go to church at all. Churchgoing, and its frequency, was lower than in early childhood (then 38.7 per cent on Sundays). This agreed almost exactly with a 1972 datum registering 5.1 per cent of churchgoers among 18 to 29-year-old-people.¹³ It is possible (indeed probable) that on any given Sunday, the actual number of those present in church from our sample is somewhat lower. The same applies to churchgoing on feast days. Our figure is rather higher than that of a 1980 inquiry which found that 27 per cent of 18-24-year-old people went to church at Christmas and 16.4 per cent at Easter.¹⁴

In our analysis of the frequency and importance of churchgoing we had to resort to combining the data about young people of different denominations. As the norms of the churches are not at all the same, we are conscious that this is less than satisfactory treatment.

¹² See Footnote 5.

¹³ Miklós Tomka, 'Vasárnapok, ünnepek, vallásgyakorlat. Megjegyzések a templomba járás szociológiájához', *Világosság*, 1982 No. 5, pp. 300-306.

¹⁴ Márta Hoffmann and Erzsébet Szilágyi, 'Ünnepek', 1980, with data issued by the Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpontban.

Unfortunately data from different denominations were not available; it is for this reason that we were constrained to apply a global analysis. We hope to progress later to a more sophisticated approach.

It is worthwhile to find out why those who went to church earlier in life do not do so now (29.9 per cent). The most frequent reason was lack of interest (60.1 per cent of the group). Presumably this means that young people changed their attitudes. Custom and tradition ceased to be reasons for churchgoing. A good number of young people gave up church attendance because religious services offered nothing relevant to their lives and were devoid of interest. 1.5 per cent said that churchgoing was 'not fashionable' — from this one can suspect that they had not gone to church earlier in life from conviction. The 'lack of interest' reason is, however, ambiguous: it may mean either that the young people were genuinely uninterested in religion (or just in its ceremonial), or that church services had become something alien to their lifestyles or expectations. It is an open question whether more of them would go to church if church services were targeted more towards the spiritual requirements of young people. Modern forms of mass with music — even jazz — or similar 'attractions' tend to attract larger numbers of young people.

Twenty seven per cent of our sample said that they prayed on occasion: of these six per cent claimed that they were praying daily. This is a much lower figure than that for small children (58.3 per cent), but we still consider them to be important indicators of youthful religious practice conducted in private. This was reinforced by the admission of 51.4 per cent that sometime in their lives they had asked for help or for strength from God, from a saint or from some other supernatural being. More than half of these 'supplicants' also said that they did receive help (i.e. what they asked for resulted in success); one quarter said that the outcome had nothing to do with supernatural intervention, or, indeed, it was a failure. Of course, this also means that another half (48.2 per cent) did not ask for supernatural help, and nearly three quarters of them (73 per cent) never prayed. It is an interesting contrast that against this 73 per cent, we found 45.6 per cent who occasionally did go to church. It is a puzzle, what did those who made up the difference — 28.4 per cent — think about church service.

One important aspect of religion as a factor in regulating social behaviour is the system of human relationships. 45.9 per cent of our sample had an acquaintance who was a regular member of some sort of religious community. One quarter of them (28.7 per cent) had personally experienced a community of religious people. Some of them meant by this common worship in church (13.7 per cent). A small number did mention basis communities or some special, perhaps

charitable, groups (5.2 per cent). Against this stands the 70.8 per cent who said that they never took part in any religious community life — which may imply also that even if they did go to church on occasion, this was not a communal experience for them.

Religion can serve also as a framework for behaviour in the sense that it can provide life with order and meaning. It was interesting to note that two thirds (65 per cent) of our sample was of the opinion that, for a believer, death was not meaningless. Only 23.3 per cent agreed that the meaning of life originates with God. The majority thus accepted the explanatory function of religion — but not from their own point of view. Other data also indicate this 'distant' recognition of the potentially stabilising role of religion. 46.6 per cent agreed that religion can lead to inner peace; 49.1 per cent admitted that religion was a consolation in misery. In contrast, almost the same number denied any such function. It is significant how many of our sample denied that religion might be a disadvantage to personal behaviour or way of life. Seventy one per cent disagreed with the statement 'Religion keeps people in ignorance'. 24.6 per cent, however, agreed with this. 78.7 per cent disagreed and only 14.8 per cent agreed with 'Religion ruins the joy of life'.

In the light of these replies we find that, in regard to religious practices and the regulatory functions of religion, there are several grades of awareness among different groups in our sample of 14 to 29-year-olds. About one twentieth of them did pray every day, did go to church at least once a week and did have some links with a religious community. That is, they practised their religion regularly, privately as well as communally, in the framework of one of the churches. About one third were occasional participants: they did go through a religious marriage ceremony, went to church on feast days, prayed occasionally and in a somewhat loose manner took part in a community of religious people. Another third were what we may call 'sympathisers': they had their children baptised, said the occasional prayer, and — most significantly — rejected statements critical of religion. Somewhat fewer of them approved of the positive role of religion. In these attitudes there is a good measure of 'keeping their distance'; this group had no use for religious practices, they did not gain anything from current church activities. For one third of young people religion played no part whatsoever in their lives. In most cases, these young people were critical of religion, not accepting that it may play any kind of positive role in life. About one tenth of the sample grew up in complete isolation from religious culture, having no recollection of religion in early childhood or in their social environment. It would be very difficult to separate in this group the conditioning of the environment from conscious, individual decision.

Self Perceptions

It is worth repeating that religion is a complex phenomenon; no single figure or indicator can express every aspect of it. We get a different result when we inquire about religious knowledge, about actual beliefs, religious feelings or religious activities. Everyday thinking, however, usually disregards such methodological problems and uses the terms 'religious' and 'non-religious' as generic definitions. Most people tend to rank themselves and others along an imagined scale of 'religious feeling'.

By assessing this general view one cannot, of course, derive exact percentages in respect of the state of religious feeling. What one can deduce is the state of religion as seen by public opinion. Comparing this with estimates derived from all mankind, from the whole Hungarian population, and from the young people of the country, one can gain some information about the extent of religious feeling.

On the subject of mankind as a whole, 53.2 per cent thought that people were generally religious. Their view of the Hungarian people differed somewhat: they thought on average 43.1 per cent of our people to be religious. The majority was of the opinion that only one tenth of their own age group was religious. Averaging out the replies, 21.5 per cent of young people of 15-25 years of age were thought to be religious. This means then, that our sample thought that young people were only half as religious as the total population. Generally, they assumed a greater difference between the younger and older generation in Hungary than between Hungary and the whole world. Within these broad lines we should point out that 11.4 per cent of our sample thought a good half of young people to be religious, whilst 28.6 per cent thought one quarter of them to be religious (see Table Six).

One check on such general estimates is the assessment of how people rank or qualify their own attitudes. In a 1985 poll 35.9 per cent of 18 to 25-year-olds said that they were religious, 56.1 per cent stated that they were non-religious and eight per cent 'undecided'. More exactly, 'I am religious and am following the teachings of the church': 4.8 per cent; 'I am religious in my own way': 31.1 per cent; 'I cannot decide whether I am religious or not': eight per cent; 'I am not religious, it does not interest me': 20.8 per cent; 'I am not religious and think that religion is wrong': 15.2 per cent; 'I am non-religious but am interested in religion': 20.1 per cent.¹⁵

¹⁵Data from a so-called 'Panel Investigation' conducted by the Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont.

Table Six

Views on the percentage of religious people amongst: the whole of humanity; the Hungarian population; Hungarian youth (15-25 yrs.)

| | <i>The whole of humanity</i> | <i>The Hungarian population</i> | <i>Hungarian young people (15-25 yrs)</i> |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Only one tenth is religious | 4.2 | 9.1 | 55.4 |
| Approximately one quarter is religious | 18.2 | 35.0 | 28.6 |
| Approximately one half is religious | 45.2 | 36.4 | 11.4 |
| Approximately three quarters are religious | 25.6 | 15.4 | 2.8 |
| Almost everyone is religious | 6.8 | 3.3 | 0.8 |
| Don't know | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.0 |

These figures agree with the results of a separate survey of religious attitudes conducted in 1985 by our research group. A representative sample of all Hungarian young people divided as follows: 32.9 per cent were religious, 57.4 per cent non-religious and 9.7 per cent uncertain. The current inquiry, limited as it is to the 14 to 29-year-old cohort, shows the following: 33.3 per cent said they were religious, 48.6 per cent non-religious and 18 per cent uncertain. Of those who said they were religious, one quarter was 'religious in his own way' and only 8.3 per cent followed the teaching of a church. 34.6 per cent of the non-religious did not qualify their statements at all; only 14.3 per cent were convinced non-believers.

Comparing the results of what they said about themselves personally and about young people generally, we find that our sample consistently underestimated the level of religious feeling. (The figures on self-assessment are more or less the same as those from other investigations and from data-collection by the churches.) Another interpretation might suggest that the religious attitudes of young people are less exposed to the limelight of public opinion than supposed. The question is then, where do religious sympathies exist: in private life or in the bosom of, to some extent closed, religious communities.

Public Opinion Concerning Religion

This divergence of views on religious attitudes shown by the sample points not only to a 'hidden quality' of religious feeling. It indicates also that public opinion is being influenced by several factors over and above the actual state of affairs. Conversely, public opinion does influence people's thinking and behaviour. This is certainly one justification for the attempt to trace the thoughts of young people on the subject in present-day Hungary. Some of the views on the regulatory nature of religion touched upon the impact of religion on personal, individual behaviour. Beyond this, our investigation allowed us to deal in some detail with four specific aspects of the problem:

1. What are the (assumed) characteristics of a religious person?
2. What kind of person needs religion?
3. What is the social role of religion?
4. What are the opinions about the social and institutional influence of religion and of its denial?

Replies to the first question stated that 'there are good ones and bad ones, regardless of whether they are religious or not' (91.4 per cent). 'What is important is how one conducts one's own life, not whether one is religious or not' (89 per cent). Almost without exception, our sample agreed with the statement, 'The front line of class struggle is not between believers and non-believers.' The majority rejected statements like, 'Only a religious person can be virtuous' (74.9 per cent), or 'Only those who believe in God are capable of great sacrifices' (75.6 per cent). Less definite statements — e.g. 'A religious person is well fitted for leadership' — were rejected by 71.8 per cent; similarly the one, 'A religious person is more likely to be a good teacher than a non-religious one' was rejected by 69 per cent. There was one significant exception where our sample in large part agreed with one particular characteristic of religious people: 50.1 per cent thought that 'The majority of religious people are happy and satisfied with their life.' 43.9 per cent were of the opposite opinion.

On the question 'Who needs religion?' our young people turned out to be against not only an over-estimation of religious people, but also against their under-estimation. A large majority (73.1 per cent) disagreed with 'Religion is for the weak and the dependent,' as well as with 'Religion is good for very simple people only' (74.4 per cent), or with 'Religion is good only for those who cannot cope alone with their difficulties' (rejected by 61.1 per cent). Our sample was split down the middle on the statement, 'A modern individual has no need for religion': 45.2 per cent agreed, whilst 50.1 per cent disagreed.

Regarding the social role of religion, the opinions in our sample showed a quite interesting and subtle differentiation. 62.5 per cent

rejected the statement 'Religion is just a remnant of the past and it will disappear in due course' with 76 per cent rejecting the statement 'Religion is an obstacle to social progress.' This did not represent great enthusiasm for religion: 74.9 per cent rejected the statement 'Without religion society would disintegrate.' On the other hand, 59 per cent agreed with 'Religion is a valuable element of our present-day society.' Against this positive estimation stood the opinion of 60.1 per cent that 'Science has disproved the validity of religion.' Thus, religion may be of value but is in contradiction with science.

When it came to the question of what should be the correct attitude towards organised, institutional moves in regard to religion or its denial, our young people showed a uniformly even-handed attitude. Neither the state nor the schools should adopt a position for or against religion. In their view, believers and non-believers can equally be good leaders, teachers etc. (see Table Seven).

Table Seven

Percentage of those who agree or disagree with questions on the social and institutional influence of religion

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'don't know'</i> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Open and free practice of religion is one of the fundamental human rights | 82.7 | 12.8 | 4.5 |
| It is no business of the state to take sides for or against religion | 61.0 | 30.8 | 8.2 |
| Schools should not take a stand for or against religion | 78.1 | 17.6 | 4.3 |
| It is nobody's business whether a person is religious or not | 87.5 | 10.7 | 1.8 |
| Even today religious people may suffer disadvantages | 53.6 | 42.0 | 4.4 |
| No one suffers disadvantages for being religious | 77.2 | 19.9 | 2.9 |
| No one should prevent a religious person from getting a responsible job | 70.5 | 25.0 | 4.5 |
| Religious people should not be allowed to have responsible positions | 13.7 | 81.5 | 4.8 |

(continued overleaf)

(continued from overleaf)

| | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Uncertain or 'don't know'</i> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Religious belief should not be a bar to the teaching profession | 72.7 | 23.4 | 3.9 |
| Religious people should not be allowed to teach | 13.1 | 82.2 | 4.7 |
| Religious education of children should be made obligatory | 26.1 | 69.2 | 4.7 |
| Religious teaching of children should be forbidden | 14.9 | 80.8 | 4.3 |

We can thus conclude that, in the general opinion of our young people, religious feeling or its opposite are not the most important characteristics of mankind. One can be a better (or worse) human being either way. Therefore, it is not right to prefer or to penalise someone on the basis of their religious belief. Religion is a private affair; state and school should remain neutral towards it. Only tiny minorities expressed different views.

Translated from Hungarian by Julian Schopflin