

Biuletyn socjologii religii (81)

Grace Davie's Concept of Believing Without Belonging and Its Verification in Slovakia¹

Introduction

Various trends in religiousness and spirituality do not reveal only gradual secularization but at the same time also pluralisation, individualisation or desecularization. There are ongoing discussions between those still referring to the theory of secularization and those who are searching for new explanations of religious changes in the world today. Various theories that have been created within the sociology of religion are sometimes presented as competitors, but in fact they do not exclude one another and they are mutually complementary. For a deeper understanding of numerous changes in the context of religion of our contemporary world it is necessary to find connections between different paradigms. The modern societies have a tendency to give way to multiple types of religious transformation that have many forms and directions. There is not one universal scenario, nor there is one universal theory existing in the sociology of religion (Máriański 2010, 9–13; Casanova 2005).

In modern sociology of religion there are several theories resp. models of changes in religiosity that rely on empirical research. According to the well-known Polish sociologist of religion and morality Janusz Máriański (2008, 13–35) we can distinguish five partially complementary models of changes:

1. *Model of advancing secularization*: The weakening of religion has often been interpreted as a reverse side of social progress.

¹ This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-22-0204.

According to this model, the departure of contemporary people from religion is already a fact and it can be expected that this “emigration” will continue.

2. *Model of religious pluralization*: This scenario expects that religiosity will become more and more diverse, but there will be no radical increase of atheism or agnosticism. It emphasizes that religiosity does not function as much as a comprehensive system of beliefs and values, but rather as a system of diverse offers on the “market” from which the individual can freely choose.
3. *Model of religious syncretism*: The third model points to the processes of formation of new forms of syncretic religiosity, even syncretic churches, in which diverse elements from different religious or non-religious traditions are mixed.
4. *Model of religious fundamentalism*: This scenario finds its expression in the idea of a “return to the roots” – either in the effort of religious orthodoxy, fidelity to traditional religious acts or fidelity to traditional moral values. Religious fundamentalism is associated with strict adherence to traditional principles of faith and is not necessarily associated with religious fanaticism.
5. *Model of religious stabilization or even revitalization*: Even if the fifth model does not currently seem very probable, it cannot be *ex definitione* excluded. Revitalization of religiosity is associated with the dynamic action of religious organizations – especially in social environments, seeking values that give real meaning to human life.

Each of the socio-religious theories enriches our knowledge of religiousness and its transformation. Apart from these there are several concepts coming from the socio-religious circles that say much about changes on the background of religious scene in the world today. For example, the concept “belonging without believing” used by Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1999, 219–220) to name those people who formally belong to a certain religious organization, they even declare this allegiance, however in reality they don’t agree with all its teaching. Alternatively, the concept of Grace Davie (1994, 14–30) “believing without belonging” to identify those who in reality accept certain truths of faith of a specific religious organization though they formally do not belong to it or they do not identify with it. It is the latter concept which is the object of interest for this article – specifically its verification in the context of Slovak population. The whole text consists of two parts: 1. Theoretical and methodological assumptions; 2. Believing without belonging in Slovakia.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions

The main focus or goal of presented study is an analysis of the phenomenon of believing without belonging among Slovak population. In other words – it looks for an answer to a question: To what extent and what do Slovaks who do not associate with any religion, church or denomination believe in? According to numerous sociologists of religion we face more and more the so-called “diffused religion.” By using this term, they try to underline the fact that religion or religious values and ideas do not perish but change their position in the society. Specifically, they claim that these values are less and less “concentrated” in religious organizations, denominations, churches, shrines or church buildings and more and more they are widely “diffused” all around so therefore it is possible to find them in various spheres of life where we would hardly expect to see them (Cipriani 2017; Mąkosa, Słotwińska, Mariański, Buk-Cegiełka, and Rybarski 2024, 113–38).

Mentioned thesis, as well as other theses, concepts, theories, paradigms, scenarios or models in the sociology of religion, needs to be constantly verified through empirical research in different populations and at different times. What is observed in France or Italy may not be observed in Czech Republic or Slovakia. Similarly, what was observed in the second half of the last century may not be observed in the first half of this century. In the outlined context of this article, I would like to introduce several interesting sociological analyses from which we can step by step disclose a real picture of religious values, attitudes and behaviour of Slovaks who do not identify themselves with any religion, church or religious organization.

From those two above mentioned concepts (“belonging without believing” and “believing without belonging”) it is clearly easier to analyse the first one. Affiliation without faith can be simply described for example when we measure what percentage of Christians don’t accept the truths of faith for Christianity, don’t take part in Christian religious acts, don’t adopt Christian moral norms, etc.² Faith without affiliation is harder to analyse. It touches people who do not identify themselves with any denominational institution. According to the last census in 2011 there are approximately 15% of them in Slovakia. Paul M. Zulehner takes notice of the fact that there are ongoing efforts to present this type of people as “unbelievers,” however very few sociologists can say what this “unbelief”

² I dealt with this topic in detail within the context of youth in Slovakia in an article “Katólicka mládež = katolícka viera?” (= “Catholic youth = Catholic faith?”) (Štefaňák 2013, 165–96).

in fact means, as it is defined only in the categories of rejection of official religious structures. The type of “unbelievers” deals with the people who don’t accept official models of religiousness and create their own – new interpretations of life and the world (2003, 383–408).

All accepted conclusions will be based especially upon own empirical research of religiousness among the Slovak population that took place in 2020 on the sample of 1000 respondents.³ As such they are trying not to be ideologically burdened but sociologically balanced. In the scope of this sociological research 18.1% of questioning people did not identify themselves with any church or denominational institution – 181 of respondents. The focus of presented study will be the views in this category of people on certain religious, philosophical, respectively ethical questions. It centres especially on less official or less formal expressions of religiousness – for example religious experience, acceptance of religious doctrine, acceptance of religious morality, etc. It partially refers to the data from the last three population censuses in Slovakia, thanks to which it is able to give an answer to a following question: to what extent can the size of the category of people without religious affiliation increase or decrease.

2. Believing Without Belonging in Slovakia

The second part of this article introduces various elements of religiousness (religious values, attitudes and types of behaviour) among surveyed Slovak population that does not identify with any religion, church or denominational institution. Thus, it will proceed on the background of seven basic parameters of religiousness: general religiousness, practicing of religious acts, acceptance of religious doctrine, religious knowledge, religious experience, religious community and acceptance of religious morality (Stark and Glock 2003, 182–87; Piwowarski 2000, 58–66). A special attention will be given to less official resp. less formal expressions of religiousness – namely to acceptance of religious doctrine, religious experience and to acceptance of religious morality. In order to introduce various elements of religiousness among Slovaks without religious affiliation in a complete and logical way I will choose two or three most basic indicators of religious

³ It was a questionnaire survey on religiousness of Slovaks that was carried out within the project APVV-17-0158 by the research agency Data Collect s.r.o. The core was the Slovak population as a whole. A sample from the basic set was selected by the using quota sampling. The sample consisted of 1000 respondents of various sex, ages, residences and education from all Slovak regions.

participation from each of the stated parameters of religiousness as required for this analysis.

Before the introduction of individual indicators, we can briefly say that when we speak about possible changes concerning the size of the group of people without religious affiliation in Slovakia, their indicator is quite slowly increasing. According to the latest census (2011) there were 76.0% of the Slovak people that claimed their affiliation to various religious organizations (13.4% were without any denomination and 10.6% did not give any answer). The fact is that 65.8% of the Slovak citizens claimed their affiliation to the Catholic Church, 5.9% to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 0.9% to the Orthodox Church and 3.4% to other Churches or denominational organizations. If we do not take into consideration the votes that were not submitted, there were 85.0% of believers and 15.0% of non-believers in Slovakia in 2011 (in 2001: it was 86.6% of believers and 13.4% of non-believers; in 1991: 88.1% of believers and 11.9% of non-believers) (Štefaňák 2021, 103–7). Eventhough religious affiliation is only one of many other indicators of religiousness that the sociologists of religion take into consideration in their research, in outlined view we can say that Slovakia is quite slowly becoming more secular.

2.1. General Religiousness

Among Slovaks without religious affiliation was reported higher than zero degree of positive attitude to religious faith. Around one fifth of these people (22.7%) considered themselves to have a deep faith, a faith or at least some kind of connection with religious tradition: with a deep faith – 3.9%; with a faith – 8.8%; undecided but in connection with religious tradition – 9.9% (indifferent – 8.3%; unbelievers – 69.1%). Somewhat higher indicators of religiousness were reported in the case of relationship of respondents without religious affiliation to God. Approximately one quarter to one third of them declared more or less positive relationship to some supernatural reality (36.5%): I know that God really exists and I have no doubts about it – 7.7%; though I have some doubts I feel that I believe in God – 3.9%; sometimes I feel I believe in God and sometimes I feel I don't – 1.1%; I don't believe in personal God but in some superior being – 23.8%. Other respondents presented agnostic (I don't know if God exists and I don't think we can find it out – 7.2%) or atheistic attitude (I don't believe in God – 48.1%), or they were not able to provide a definite answer (8.3%).

In the scope of the outlined context the concept of believing without belonging could cover the range of one quarter to one third of the surveyed

Slovaks who do not identify themselves with any specific religion, church or denominational institution and at the same time consider themselves to have a faith or at least some connection with religious tradition, respectively more or less declare faith to some supernatural reality (God or Superior Being that we can call God). However, it is important to validate this claim more extensively and in depth on the basis of the following – more specific parameters and indicators of religious participation.

2.2. Practicing of Religious Acts

The important part of religious parameters is the practice of religious acts – for example participation in church services, an active use of prayer or following the act of fasting (Adamczewski 2024, 159–82). Among Slovaks without religious affiliation the indicator of those who attended the church services at least on special feasts was only 4.4% (every Sunday or more often – 1.1%; nearly every Sunday – 0.6%; only on special feasts – 2.8%). Although additional 28.7% of these people declared their participation in the church services on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc., we should rather understand this participation as an expression of family solidarity than as a sign of religious participation.

A more general indicator of practicing of religious acts is a prayer which does not concern only the members of various religious denominations but also the people without religious affiliation. It is therefore logical that in this case there were reported slightly higher indicators of religiousness. As much as one quarter of the Slovak population without religious affiliation used prayer at least very rarely (27.1%): every day – 8.3%; once in several days – 2.8%; from time to time – 2.2%; only in serious life situations – 2.8%; very rarely – 11.0%. In the case of this presented parameter of religiousness the concept of believing without belonging could cover the range of one quarter of respondents who do not identify themselves with any specific religion and at the same time use prayer at least very rarely.

2.3. Acceptance of Religious Doctrine

In the scope of acceptance of religious doctrine, which can be included among less official or less formal expressions of religiousness, we will present empirical data telling us about the faith in Jesus Christ, faith in afterlife and faith in reincarnation. Almost one fifth of Slovaks without religious affiliation declared the faith in deity of Jesus Christ (17.1%): exclusively God (Son of God) – 7.2%; God and man – 9.9%. In addition, it

is important to say that explicit disbelief (no faith) in deity of Jesus Christ was declared by two thirds of these people (67.4%): significant historical figure – 24.9%; legendary figure, myth – 42.5%. Quite a large percentage of them marked the answer “it’s difficult to say” (15.5%). More general indicator of acceptance of religious doctrine is the faith in afterlife. Approximately one quarter of surveyed people without religious affiliation presented their faith in a way where death does not mean the end of life for a person (25.4%): people will raise from death with body and soul – 3.3%; only souls will live after death – 22.1%. Also in this case, it is important to add that explicit disbelief (no faith) in afterlife was declared by less than a half of these people (45.3%). A great percentage of them were not able to state clearly their opinion on the analysed question (29.3%).

As far as the faith in reincarnation is concerned, which is relatively foreign to the Slovak environment, approximately one quarter of the Slovak population without religious affiliation declared its faith in reincarnation of souls (25.4%): definitely believe – 12.7%; rather believe – 12.7%. Also in this case, we can say that explicit disbelief (no faith) in reincarnation was declared by more than a half of respondents (56.4%): rather do not believe – 16.0%; definitely do not believe – 40.3%. Quite a large percentage of them marked the answer “it’s difficult to say” (18.2%). When we reflect on the presented empirical data it seems that the phenomenon of faith without religious affiliation within the Slovak religious environment can find – to a certain extent – some parallels with acceptance of the specific truths of faith among the non-Christian religions – for example the eastern ones. In the same way as in the case of practicing of religious acts, also in the case of acceptance of religious doctrine the concept of believing without belonging could refer to about one fifth to one quarter of the surveyed Slovak population that does not identify with any specific religious denomination and at the same time declares the faith in deity of Jesus Christ, afterlife or reincarnation.

2.4. Religious Knowledge

Among the basic parameters of religiousness, we can find also religious knowledge. Within this dimension of religious participation, I asked respondents for example about reading of religious press, watching religious programs or visiting religious websites. It was shown that only a minimal percentage of Slovaks without religious affiliation read religious newspapers or magazines at least very rarely (7.2%). Similarly, only a minimal percentage of surveyed people without religious affiliation listen to religious

radios at least several times a year – e.g., Radio Lumen (5.0%) or watch religious televisions at least several times a year – e.g., TV Lux (9.9%).

As far as religious websites are concerned, on the basis of acquired empirical results we can say that also only a minimal percentage of the Slovak population without religious affiliation visit them at least several times a year (3.9%). Other respondents do not visit them at all. It is obvious that religious knowledge does not necessarily have to be an expression of religious participation and therefore it is difficult to say what percentage of the surveyed Slovak population represent the concept of believing without belonging in the case of the intellectual scope of religiousness.

2.5. Religious Experience

Speaking about religious experience that can be categorized as a less official or a less formal expression of religious participation we will present empirical data communicating about the values which give a meaning to human life, and about a belief that God helps in times of difficulties. Approximately one tenth of Slovaks without religious affiliation finds the meaning of life (also) in religious faith (11.0%): only the faith – 3.9%, not only the faith but other values as well – 7.2%. In order to have a more complete understanding it is important to say that the explicit negation of the meaningful role of religious faith in their lives was declared by more than a half of respondents (54.7%) – a great percentage of them marked the answer “it’s difficult to say” (34.3%). To mention some other values in which these people find the meaning of life we can include mainly family and friends. In order to enrich our sociological knowledge I quote some specific statements: “Love, family”; “Children, family, filled life, work”; “Good, love, humility, decency”; “Humanism, human development, social progress and human well-being”; “My meaning of life is based on harmony with nature and life”; “Money”; “Reality”; “Unlike believers, I believe in love and good manners”; “Helping others, friendship”; “It is essential to live life properly and nicely.”

Other important indicator of religious experience is the belief that God helps in difficult life situations. Almost one fifth of the Slovak population without religious affiliation was convinced about the fact that we can count on God’s help in hard times (17.1%): definitely yes – 8.8%, rather yes – 8.3%. Similarly in this case we can say that the explicit negation of the belief that God helps in hardships was declared by two thirds of respondents (66.9%) – quite a large percentage of them marked the answer “it’s difficult to say” (16.0%). In the case of this presented parameter of religiousness

the concept of believing without belonging could represent about one tenth to one fifth of surveyed Slovak population that does not identify with any specific religion and at the same time links the meaning of life (also) with faith respectively is convinced about the help of God in hard life situations.

2.6. Religious Community

Community parameter is an integral part of the basic parameters of religiousness. We can suppose that people without religious affiliation will show (in the scope of this parameter) zero or only a minimal indicator of religiousness. And this was in fact the case, because when being asked a question about the character of their relationship to faith, these people answered as follows: I believe and I adjust to the demands of the Church – 0.0%; I believe in my own way – 23.8%; I cannot say if I am a believer or not – 4.4%; I am not a believer and I am not interested in these matters – 27.6%; I am not a believer because the teachings of the Church are wrong – 33.1%; something else – 3.3%; it's difficult to say – 7.7%. We are not sure what exactly is the focus of the answer “I believe in my own way” but in this case we can conclude that it points in particular to syncretic or private religiousness. Overall, we can say that approximately one quarter to one third of the group of people being described declared more or less positive relationship to faith – private or syncretic (not ecclesiastical). In order to enrich our sociological knowledge, I quote some specific statements from the category of “something else”: “It's my personal matter”; “I am not a believer, but I am interested in theology from a scientific point of view”; “I am a believer based on my intuition, which has helped me in finding the truth”; “I believe in what I see and feel”; “I believe in a higher principle, a higher being or consciousness. I believe that souls return to earth to evolve and learn from their mistakes, to learn to live in peace and love, to have no prejudice and hatred coming from ignorance and fear.”

The next indicator speaks about the attitude of the Slovak population without religious affiliation to priests resp. leaders of religious communities. Specifically, we were interested to find out how much these people understands their need for the society. Almost one fifth of these respondents understand the presence of priests within the society to be useful – 18.8%. In addition, it is important to point out that the explicit negation of their need for the society was declared by less than a half of surveyed people (48.1%) – a great percentage of them marked the answer “it's difficult to say” (33.1%). On the basis of the acquired empirical data we can claim that eventhough the people without religious affiliation do not need

the priests for themselves still they greatly respect the fact that for many others they are needed. Though the indicator of ecclesiastical religiousness among Slovaks without religious affiliation, as far as the community parameter is concerned, was more or less zero, the indicator of private or syncretic religiousness represented approximately one quarter to one third of this group of people.

2.7. Acceptance of Religious Morality

The last of the basic parameters of religiousness is the moral parameter which we can include among less official or less formal expressions of religious participation. In its scope the sociologists of religion examine those moral values and norms that are more or less connected to religion – for example the attitudes to the commandments of the Decalogue, to some selected norms of marital and family morality or to moral authorities (Štefaňák 2019, 196–226). Concerning the attitudes of Slovaks without religious affiliation towards some selected norms of marital and family morality, which are more or less emphasized by different religious organizations, we noted a low degree of their acceptance. On the basis of acquired empirical results we are able to form a scale – from the most commonly to the least commonly unconditionally accepted moral norms: prohibition of homosexuality – 15.5% (in some circumstances it is allowed – 19.3%); prohibition of abortion – 5.5% (in some circumstances it is allowed – 33.7%); prohibition of sexual life prior to a wedding – 2.2% (in some circumstances it is allowed – 6.1%); prohibition of using contraception – 0.6% (in some circumstances it is allowed – 10.5%). We can say that the first two of the above analysed norms meant almost no problem and the other two norms meant practically no moral problem for these groups of people. Overall, the level of their acceptance by these people was significantly lower than in the case of examining the bulk of the Slovak population undergoing this research (Štefaňák 2021, 109–10).

Finally, we will introduce the attitudes of Slovaks without religious affiliation to moral authorities (based on a questionnaire question with the possibility of a maximum of three answers). It was shown that in addition to the almost absolute authority of one's own conscience (86.7%), "generally established principles of behaviour" (29.8%), "advice of family" (26.0%) and "advice of friends" (14.9%) were relatively often accepted as well. It is logical that the moral authority of the church (0.6%) or priests (0.0%) was sought almost not at all, according to the declarations of the people described. In order to enrich our sociological knowledge,

I quote some specific statements from the category of “something else”: “Through inner intuition”; “Based on the consideration for and against, on my feelings. I always consider whether someone can be hurt”; “Through my own discretion”; “According to the facts, my own morality (I look at it as if it was happening to me)”; “According to myself.” It is obvious that acceptance of the moral norms or moral authorities does not necessarily have to be an expression of religious participation and therefore it is hard to say what percentage of the Slovak population being researched refers to the concept of believing without belonging in the case of the moral parameter of religiousness. If we consider exclusively religious moral authorities respectively the norms which are quite significantly emphasized through various religious organizations (for example prohibition of abortion), then described concept could represent less than one tenth of these respondents.

Conclusion

Before presenting of main conclusions, we can briefly say that category of Slovaks without religious affiliation was most often represented by the inhabitants of the Bratislava Region (29.6%), Trnava Region (24.0%) and Banská Bystrica Region (23.9%). On the other hand, it was most rarely represented by the inhabitants of the Prešov Region (11.5%). Regarding the size of residence, the largest proportion of people without religious affiliation was in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (25.7%) and in cities with 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants (23.0%). Finally, as for the size of the household, this group of people most often included respondents living in a one-member (28.1%) or two-member household (25.4%). On the other hand, it most rarely included respondents living in a household with six or more members (7.1%). A typical representative of the Slovak without religious affiliation is therefore a resident of a larger city in the Bratislava Region, Trnava Region or Banská Bystrica Region, who lives in a smaller household.

Following the presentation of numerous empirical data, we have to say that the concept of believing without belonging represents approximately from one fifth to one third of Slovaks who do not identify with any religion, church or denominational organization – depending on specific parameters and indicators of religiousness. The highest indicators of religious participation of these people were reported in the case of general religiousness (for example relation to religious faith or supernatural reality), acceptance of religious doctrine (for example the faith in afterlife or reincarnation) and

in the case of practicing of religious acts (for example at least rarely practicing the prayer). Lower indicators were reported in the case of religious experience (for example the belief that God helps in the times of hardship) and religious knowledge (for example reading of religious press). Finally, minimal indicators were reported in the case of acceptance of religious morality (for example religious moral authorities) and of course in the case of religious community (for example the ecclesiastical orientation of religiousness).

Overall we can say (as far as the general religiousness, relationship to God and to the faith are mainly concerned) that the group of Slovaks without religious affiliation consists of atheists – approximately one half of those examined, agnostics – approximately one fifth of those examined, and believers with private or syncretic religiousness – approximately from one quarter to one third of those examined. In addition, it seems that the concept of believing without belonging is (in the Slovak religious context) connected – to a certain degree – with acceptance of spirituality, some truths of faith or religious practices of eastern religions (for example reincarnation). Anyway, it is necessary to agree with Paul M. Zulehner that it is not possible to automatically identify a group of “people without religious affiliation” with a group of “unbelievers” (2003, 383–408).

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