

Thematic Article

Transformation of Slovakian Youth Religiosity

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Abstract

Some sociologists of religion think that countries in Central and Eastern Europe are expected quick and rapid secularization. Therefore it is interesting to continuously search out, how the religiosity of Slovakian youth is transformed against the background of continual social and culture changes. The main goal of the presented paper, based especially on its own empirical researches of 2006 and 2016, is a description related to the transformation of youth's religiosity in Slovakia (an example of Spiš Diocese). The presented work is situated in the area of religion sociology and shows also the typology transformation of the sought out youth's religiosity that is very useful. Empirical analyses are based on, linked to or compared with main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world.

Keywords: religiosity; Slovakian youth; metamorphoses; transformation; models of changes in religiosity.

Introduction

Religion is a subject of interest for many scientific disciplines among which sociology of religion also finds its stable position. This scientific discipline consists of a platform of all the requirements of the social empirical sciences and it does not represent prescriptive knowledge in any of its components (as opposed to the theology). Faith, which, according to theologians, is the work of grace, constantly needs to be rooted in the experience of everyday life. It changes as a result of socio-cultural changes to the extent it is dependent on the socio-cultural conditions. Religion or religiosity existing in reality always has its historical and social dimensions. And indeed, this “religion existing in reality” in social life is a subject of interest for sociology of religion as well (Marianiński, 2004).

Some sociologists of religion think that countries in Central and Eastern Europe are expected quick and rapid secularization. Therefore it is interesting to continuously search out, how the religiosity of Slovakian youth is transformed against the background of continual social and culture changes. The main goal of the presented paper, based especially on its own empirical researches in 2006² and 2016³, is a description related to the transformation of youth's religiosity in Slovakia (an example of Spiš Diocese). The presented work is situated in the area of religion sociology and shows also the typology transformation of the sought out youth's religiosity that is very useful. Empirical analyses are based on, linked to or compared with main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world.

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² It is a quantitative research by means of a survey. Terrain data collection took place in November 2006. The target group (a basic set) was the 17-18 year-old youth in Spiš Diocese. From the basic set a sample (random set) was deliberately created, which consisted of 663 young people (24 grades of 8 public schools and one church school). The implemented set consists of 629 respondents, which constitutes 94.9% of the random set.

³ It is a quantitative research by means of a survey. Terrain data collection took place in November 2016. The target group (a basic set) was the School-leaving youth in Spiš Diocese. From the basic set a sample (random set) was deliberately created, which consisted of 708 young people (30 grades of 7 public schools and two church schools). The implemented set consists of 677 respondents, which constitutes 95.6% of the random set.

Main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world

Before presenting the transformation of the religiosity of the examined youth on the basis of its own empirical researches, it would be appropriate to briefly recall the main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world. It is necessary to remember the fact that sociologists observe and interpret these changes, not to mention religious progress or decline. Depending on the author, we can distinguish at least a few main scenarios of transformation. According to the well-known Polish sociologist of religion and morality, J. Mariański, we can distinguish five partially complementary and partially competing models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world.

Model of advancing secularization

The thesis about the necessity of the erosion of religion, as a result of modernization processes *ex definitione*, applies mainly to the young generation which is significantly affected by social modernization. The weakening of religion has often been interpreted as a reverse side of social progress. The model of Western European secularization was considered by many sociologists as very probable in post-communist countries too. According to the model of advancing secularization, the departure of contemporary people from religion is already a fact and it can be expected that this “emigration” will continue. Supporters of the described scenario of transformation believe that all societies are or will be affected by the process of secularization (Mariański, 2008).

Model of stabilization or even revitalization of religiosity

The second model of changes presupposes the cessation of secularization processes or even the gradual restoration of the religious order in society. The ridiculed religion, removed from social life, returns to it through all possible “doors”. Even if the scenario of revitalization of religion does not currently seem very probable, it cannot be *ex definitione* excluded. J. Casanova in connection with the described topic writes: “Western modernism is at a crossroads [...] It would be deeply ironic if religion, after all the blows it received from modernism, could in some unforeseen ways help to save it” (2005). The revitalization of religiosity is associated with the dynamic action of religious organizations – especially in youth environments, seeking values that give real meaning to human life (Mariański, 2008).

Model of religious syncretism

Next model is ideologically connected with the theory of individualization. As F. X. Kaufmann notes, there is no longer one common “whole” to which an individual belongs. People compose their individual worldviews from elements that come from their own tradition as well as from others (2003). The scenario of religious syncretism points to the processes of formation of new forms of syncretic religiosity, even syncretic churches, in which diverse elements from different religious or quasi-religious traditions are mixed. It seems that in some youth environments traditional churches lose their significance and raise those ideological directions in which the individual can selectively choose religious contents and acts, unite them in various ways and reinterpret them in a new way (Mariański, 2008).

Model of religious fundamentalism

The fourth model of changes finds its expression in the idea of a “return to the roots” – either in the effort of religious orthodoxy, in the effort of fidelity to traditional religious acts, or in the effort of fidelity to traditional moral values. As demonstration of the revival of religious fundamentalism within Christianity is considered for example also a birth of new religious movements. E. Barker emphasizes that religious fundamentalism is associated with strict adherence to traditional principles of faith and is not necessarily associated with religious fanaticism. In addition, many empirical studies show that this connection is often not the case (2007). Many supporters of the described scenario of transformation simply find the diversity and relativization of religious truths as worrying. They do not accept the thesis that, ultimately, all religions are equally true (Mariański, 2008).

Model of pluralization of religiosity

The fifth and at the same time the last model of changes is ideologically connected with the theory of pluralization. According to P. L. Berger, modern globalization is above all a great engine of pluralism. As such, it questions the integrity of the system of beliefs and values – through migration and urbanization, through universal education and most of all probably through mass communication. All of this relates to the young generation in particular (1999). The scenario of pluralization of religiosity expects that religiosity will become more and more diverse, but there will be no radical increase of atheism or agnosticism. The described model emphasizes that, in fact, we are not observing so much the decline of religiosity as the transformation of its forms and images. Religiosity becomes a private matter, it does not function as much as a comprehensive system of beliefs and values, but rather as a system of diverse offers on the “religious market” from which the individual can freely choose in the processes of social communication (Mariański, 2008).

Changes in Slovakian youth’s religiosity

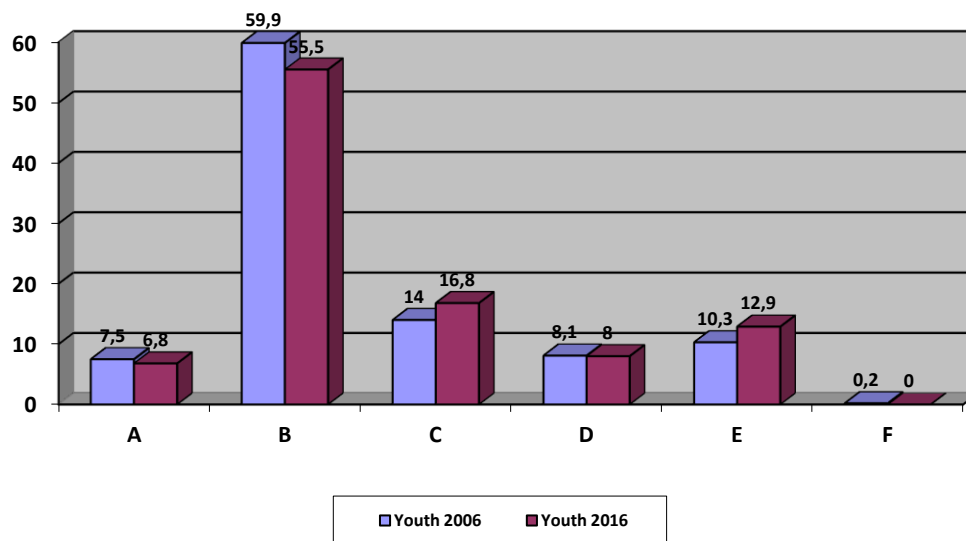
After a brief description of the main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world, I would like to introduce to the reader some summary results of the empirical researches of religiosity of Slovakian youth (on an example of Spiš Diocese). The main focus of the sociological researches was a description of transformation of religiosity of the searched young people in Slovakia. In view of the main issue (goal) of the presented research paper, the following basic scientific and research hypothesis was formulated: It is expected that our respondents represent a relatively high level of religious life in all its basic dimensions, although it is gradually slowly declining. In the following lines, I will shortly introduce the transformation of the aforementioned dimensions of religiosity in the sought after population of young people.

The above presented models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world represent a theoretical framework for empirical researches and analyzes. Mentioned scenarios can be considered as scientific hypotheses that do not exclude each other. Moving to the empirical part of this study and coming closer to the core of the issue, I would like to briefly recall data from the last three censuses in Slovakia, which communicate the changes in religious affiliation. In 1991: 63.8% of Slovaks identified with the Catholic Church, 0.7% with the Orthodox Church, 6.2% with the Evangelical Church and 2.1% – other, 9.8% – did not identify with any religion or denomination, 17.4% – did not provide an answer (likewise: 2001: 73.0%, 0.9%, 6.9%, 3.2%, 13.0%, 3.0%; 2011: 65.8 %, 0.9%, 5.9%, 3.4%, 13.4%, 10.6%) (Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic, 2012). If we recalculated the obtained data “in the manner of elections” – in 1991 there were in Slovakia: 88.1% of believers (77.2% of Catholics) and 11.9% of non-believers; in 2001: 86.6% of believers (75.3% of Catholics) and 13.4% of non-believers; in 2011: 85.0% of believers (73.6% of Catholics) and 15.0% of non-believers.

Based on the above presented and recalculated data, it can be argued that religiosity in the dimension of religious affiliation is quite a permanent element of Slovak culture, although it has been gradually slowly declining over the last few decades. The question is, is it similar also to the environment of Slovak youth? In order to answer this question, in the following sections of this study we will present a comparison of the religiosity of the searched young people within its seven basic dimensions: global relationship to faith, religious practice, religious knowledge, religious beliefs, religious experience, religious community and ethical dimension of religiosity (Piwowarski, 2000).

Global relationship to faith

“Looking at the Slovak society, in which strong religious pluralism is perhaps only in statu nascendi, we can accept the view that it is rather a religious monopoly society” (Štefáňak, 2019a). In this society, as well as among our respondents, approximately 80% of people professed religious faith: youth 2006 – 81.4%; youth 2016 – 79.1% (Figure 1). Although there was a few percent of difference, it should be noted that in the described comparison statistically significant differences were not recorded ($p = 0.319$).

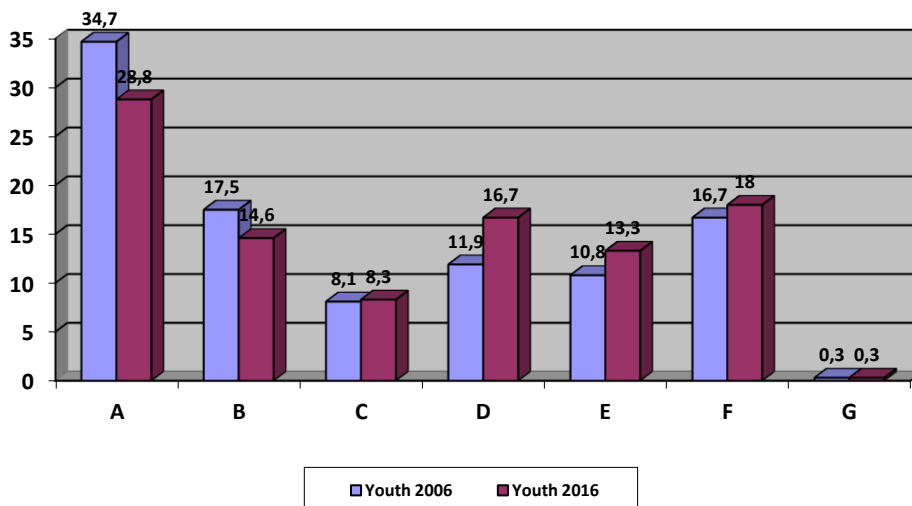
Figure 1. Transformation of global relationship to faith (in %)

A – Profound believers; B – Believers; C – Connected with a religious tradition; D – Indifferent; E – Unbelievers; F – No answer.

The most commonly given source of the religious faith in the searched for population is education and tradition in the family, and also personal discretion. Similarly, approximately four fifths of the surveyed young people spoke about at least rare implementation of some vague religious acts. In assessing their own religiosity, the youth (4 times) more frequently confessed its decline rather than deepening – it was even considered left without unchanged. “If we compare religiosity of youth with the religiosity of their parents, we can see the phenomenon of ‘inheritance of faith’, as well as its weakening in the younger generation” (Štefaňak, 2019a).

Religious practice

In relation to religious practice, it is necessary to confirm a relatively high level of practicing of religious acts among our respondents. Among the searched out young people there were 60.3% (2006) or 51.7% (2016) of so called Sunday believers – i.e. those who attend religious services at least once a month (Piwowarski, 2002). As we can see there was noted a slight percentage decrease (Figure 2). Observed percentage differences do mean that in this comparison statistically significant differences were recorded ($p = 0.045$; $V = 0.105$).

Figure 2. Transformation of attendance at religious services (in %)

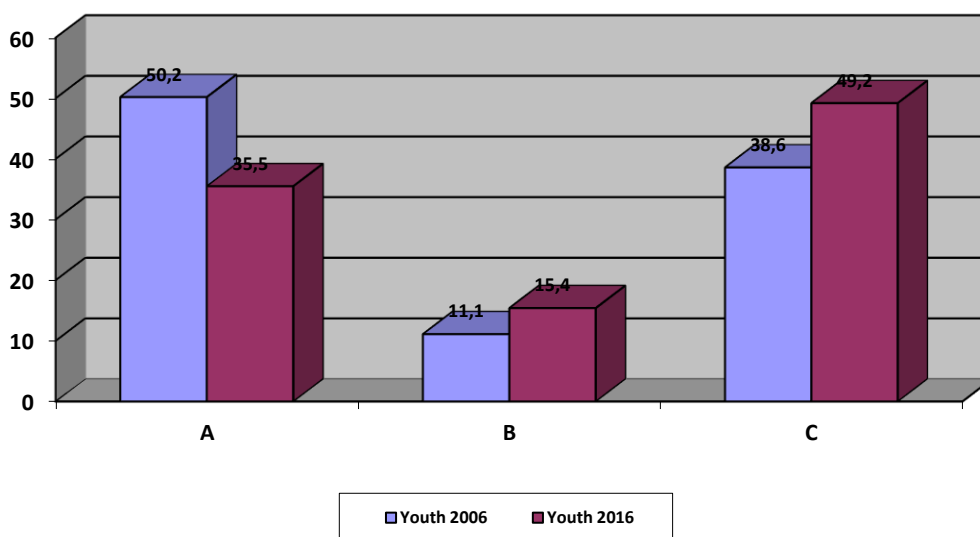
A – Every Sunday; B – Almost every Sunday; C – 1-2 times a month; D – Only on bigger feasts; E – Only occasionally (marriage, funeral ...); F – Never; G – No answer.

Approximately two thirds of the searched young people received the sacrament of reconciliation at least once a year. As to an individual who prays, we noted slightly lower indicators, whereas approximately one third of the surveyed youth did not pray at all, or only very rarely. In connection with the customary religious acts it can be said that some of the family customary acts (common Christmas Eve and Christmas Day meals and a visit to the cemetery on All Saints' Day) were practiced widely in the families of Slovakia. Instead, the local customary religious acts were situated at different levels – depending on the size of residence, declared relation to the religious faith and systematic participation in religious services (see also Štefaňák, 2019a).

Religious knowledge

Another dimension of religiosity is religious knowledge. Although the variable of knowledge of the Holy Trinity persons was relatively high: 2006 – 81.4%; 2016 – 75.3%, knowledge of knowing the names of evangelists was already weaker: 2006 – 50.2%; 2016 – 35.5% (Figure 3). It can be added that in this case statistically significant differences were recorded as well ($p < 0.0005$; $V = 0.150$).

Figure 3. Transformation of knowing the names of evangelists (in %)

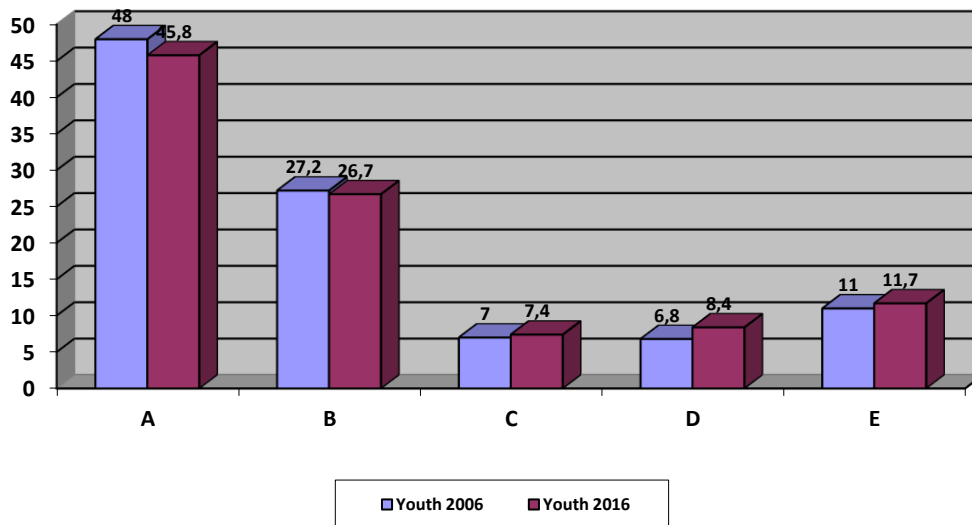


A – Fully right answer; B – Partially right answer; C – Wrong or no answer.

Knowledge of knowing of individual sacraments was relatively low: 2006 – 22.6%; 2016 – 13.7%. The most known were the sacraments of confirmation and baptism and the least known were the sacraments of penance and priesthood. Overall, almost half of our respondents in 2006 and approximately one third of our respondents in 2016 were able to name at least five out of the seven sacraments. Finally, religious knowledge “about actual issues” – names of the current religious representatives – was situated at different levels. Most often, the searched young people knew the name of the Pope (2006 – 86.2%; 2016 – 65.7%), the least often it was the name of the bishop of their own diocese (2006 – 39.0%; 2016 – 34.4%) (see also Štefaňák, 2019a).

Religious beliefs

Taking into consideration the collected indicators of the ideological dimension of religiosity, we should agree with W. Piwowarski who stresses that from the confessed truths of faith, respondents accept most frequently those that are abstract to them – which they count on less in their lives. On the contrary, least often they accept those religious dogmas which they “must count on” in everyday life (2005). Based on the obtained empirical results, in 2006 approximately three quarters of the surveyed youth were convinced of the existence of God as a Transcendent Being (75.2%). A similar indicator in 2016 was slightly lower (72.5%) (Figure 4). However, in this comparison statistically significant differences were not recorded ($p = 0.801$).

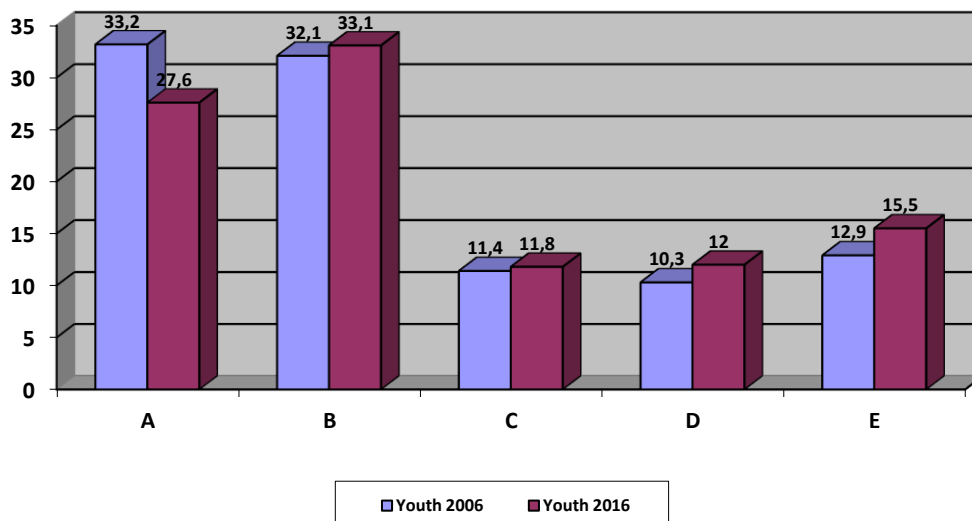
Figure 4. Transformation of belief in a personal God (in %)

A – I definitely believe; B – I rather believe; C – I rather do not believe; D – I definitely do not believe; E – No answer.

In the context of above mentioned thesis of W. Piwowarski we can observe that the indicators of those believing in the existence of hell were in the surveyed youth somewhat lower (2006 – 53.4%; 2016 – 53.0%) compared to those believing in personal God (2006 – 63.9%; 2016 – 58.9%), Holy Trinity (2006 – 61.5%; 2016 – 57.4%), the deity of Jesus Christ (2006 – 72.4%; 2016 – 69.1%), his redeeming work (2006 – 73.8%; 2016 – 69.4%) or the after-life (2006 – 74.7%; 2016 – 67.7%). Overall, more than a half of the young people in 2006 and almost a half of the young people in 2016 accepted at least six out of the seven selected religious dogmas (see also Štefaňak, 2019a).

Religious experience

In the area of religious experience the searched young people were characterized by medium religiosity variables. This is confirmed by the percentages obtained such as: linking a sense of life (often primarily) with faith (2006 – 58.6%; 2016 – 51.7%) and belief in God's assistance in difficult life situations (2006 – 65.3%; 2016 – 60.7%) (Figure 5). It can be added that in this case statistically significant differences were not recorded as well ($p = 0.209$).

Figure 5. Transformation of belief in God's help in difficult situations (in %)

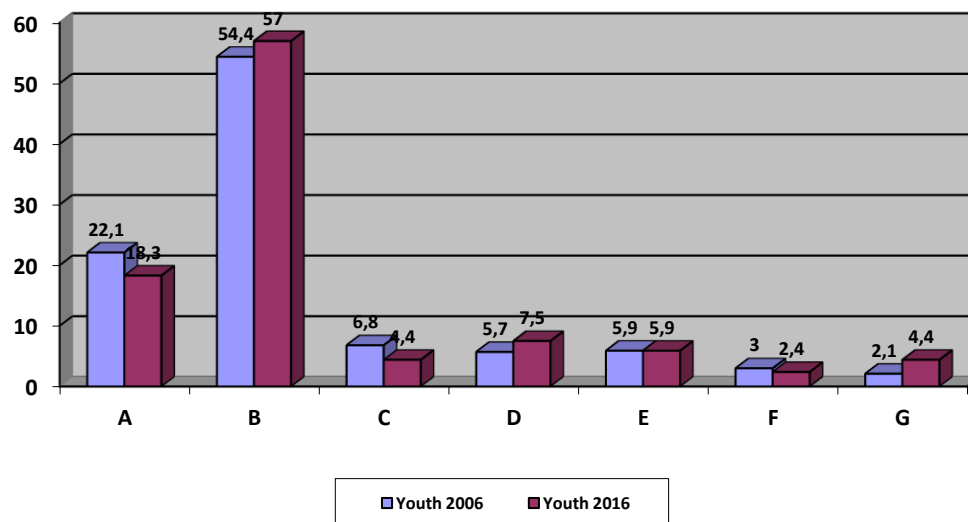
A – Definitely yes; B – Rather yes; C – Rather no; D – Definitely no; E – No answer.

In the case of experiencing the feeling of God's closeness in the lives of the searched youth, a relatively low variable of positive responses (2006 – 28.3; 2016 – 25.1%) was shown. “However, we must think about the difficulties in understanding and describing religious experience as well as the ‘threat’ of further specific answer, which could have encouraged the respondents to choose the corrective response ‘hard to say’” (Štefaňak, 2019a).

Religious community

Secularization most affects the community character of religiosity. Even among our respondents we noticed strong individualisation processes. Although they saw the Catholic Church as a community of believers in particular (2006 – 53.9%; 2016 – 47.0%), only 22.1% on 2006 and 18.3% in 2016 consciously presented so called church religiosity (guided by the doctrine of the Church). A significant percentage of the studied youth define their own religiosity with the statement: “I am a believer in my own way” (2006 – 54.4%; 2016 – 57.0%) (Figure 6). Observed percentage differences do mean that in this comparison statistically significant differences were recorded ($p = 0.032$; $V = 0.110$).

Figure 6. Transformation of religiosity and connection with the church in the minds of youth (in %)



A – I am religious and adapt to the demands of the church; B – I am religious in my own way; C – I cannot say whether I am religious or not; D – I am not religious and do not care about these things; E – I am not religious, because the Church's teaching is wrong; F – Other answer; G – No answer.

However, it must be said that the obtained empirical results – In a socio-cultural context of the Slovak society – speak about the selective religiosity (“I am a Catholic, but...”), rather than strictly religious individualisation, because 58.7% in 2006 and 51.9% in 2016 of the surveyed young people identified emotionally with the Church at various levels. The religious individualisation of the surveyed young people was indirectly referred to by a low level of involvement in religious associations and movements, as well as the observed gap between the views on the need for priests in the society and the desire to have a priest in their own families (see also Štefaňak, 2019a).

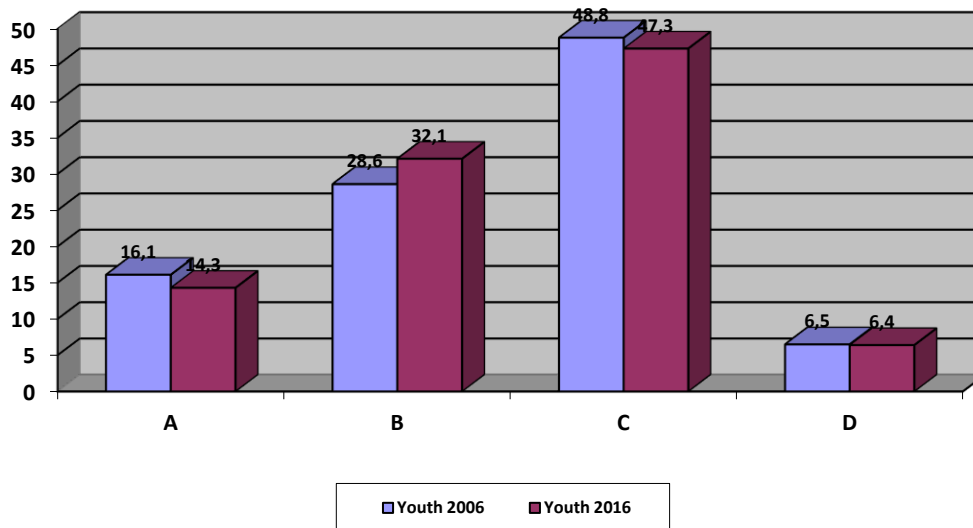
Ethical dimension of religiosity

Overall, the searched Slovakian youth was characterized by a relatively high indicator of verbal acceptance of each of the Ten Commandments. The average variable of resolute or moderate acceptance of these basic, but rather general moral standards, was 75.6% in 2006 and 75.1% in 2016. The most often accepted moral norms were the prohibition to kill and the command to honour one's own parents; the least often accepted were the prohibition to take God's name in vain, and to keep the feast days holy.

For much more specific standards of sexual, marital and family morality, a significant decline in their acceptance was seen. An average indicator of their unconditional acceptance was 42.2% in 2006 and 44.6% in

2016. They were notably increased by a denial of rape and marital infidelity, and reduced by low acceptance of the prohibition of premarital cohabitation and use of contraceptives. For example, unconditional acceptance of a denial of abortion was 48.8% in 2006 and 47.3% in 2016 (Figure 7). It can be added that in this case statistically significant differences were not recorded ($p = 0.555$).

Figure 7. Transformation of attitudes of youth towards abortion (in %)



A – It is allowed; B – It depends on the situation; C – It is not allowed; D – No answer.

As to the attitudes of the surveyed young people to various moral authorities, it can be said that in addition to unquestionable authority of one's own conscience, family and friends "well-disposed" advice was most popular. Moral authority of the Church or priests was not sought for according to the responses of the studied youth (2006: 10.0% – 15.1%; 2016: 9.9% – 14.8%) (see also Štefaňák, 2019a).⁴

The typology of Slovakian youth's religiosity and its transformation

In the last section I would like to briefly turn attention of readers to the main types of religiosity of the twice examined young people. Each group (religiosity type) was formed by a procedure of two-step grouping within the nominal range by the statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) (Marek, 1989). As a result of using of this procedure, four groups (types of religiosity) were distinguished. Their names seek to reflect the characteristics of the given type:

Church-oriented religiosity

"The first type of religiosity is characterized by high levels of indicators of religious involvement in all its fundamental dimensions. The most important fact here is the existence of willpower to identify with the Church" (Štefaňák, 2019a). SPSS statistical program placed 15.9% in 2006 and 14.9% in 2016 of the surveyed young people into this group.

Selective-oriented religiosity

The youth with selective-oriented religiosity "acknowledge readily their faith, they accept the dogmas of their religion; more or less they often practice religious acts; life is meaningful both in faith and other values in life and they are characterized by relatively high levels of religious knowledge. However, in relation to the acceptance of the Church teaching on some moral issues, 'a revived choice realization' can be seen" (Štefaňák, 2019a). SPSS statistical program placed 38.3% in 2006 and 29.5% in 2016 of the surveyed youth into this group.

⁴ Detailed results processing of the described empirical researches can be found in Štefaňák, 2019b.

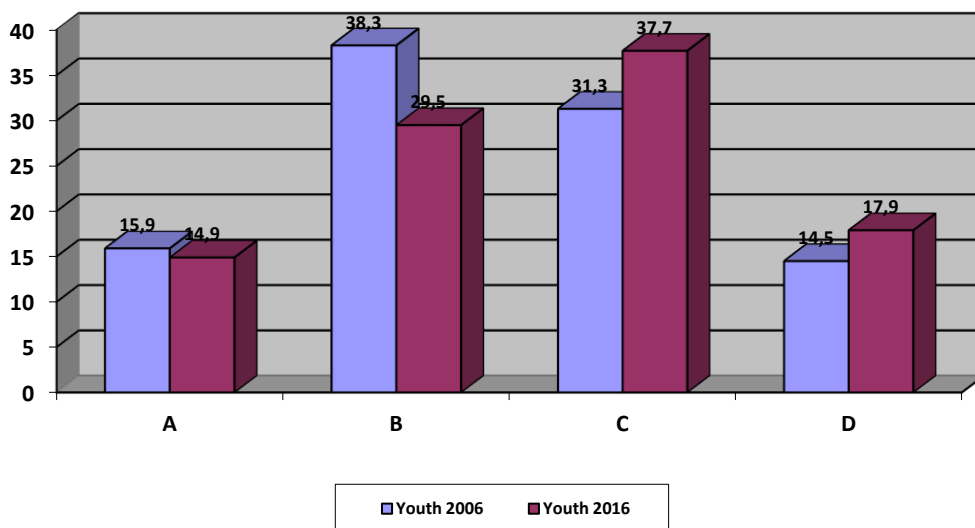
Hesitant and dubious religiosity

“The surveyed with such attitudes do not completely ignore religious issues, but they also do not automatically accept an institutionalized religion. They formulate many questions about it and present a number of doubts. It is undecided youth, asking, doubting, but also seeking answers to religious questions” (Štefaňak, 2019a). SPSS statistical program placed as many as 31.3% in 2006 and 37.7% in 2016 of the studied young people into this group.

Indifference to the faith and unbelief

“There are such people who openly declare indifference in relation to the religious belief or unbelief, and in connection with that they do not practice any religious acts; do not accept religious dogmas, or at least they find it difficult to express their opinion on similar topics; they look for and find a sense of life in different values of life outside of religious faith” (Štefaňak, 2019a). SPSS statistical program placed 14.5% in 2006 and 17.9% in 2016 of the surveyed youth into this group (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Transformation of the typology of Slovakian youth’s religiosity (in %)



A – Church-oriented religiosity; B – Selective-oriented religiosity; C – Hesitant and dubious religiosity; D – Indifference to the faith and unbelief.

Observed percentage differences do mean that in this last and perhaps most important comparison statistically significant differences were recorded ($p = 0.003$; $V = 0.103$). It can therefore be concluded that the religiosity of the majority of our respondents was selectively (selection) and indecisively (indecision) oriented (2006: 69.6%; 2016 – 67.2%). On one side, this majority borders with a part of the Church-oriented young people, on the other side it is a part of the indifferent young people in relation to faith or unbelievers.

Conclusion

Finally, it might be asked: “What was the transformation of religiosity of the questioned youth between the first and second decades of the 21st century?” After presenting many specific correlations, we can claim that stereotypical social views on the topic of changes in religiosity of young people are not very far from the real situation. It is true that in the period from 2006 to 2016, the religiosity of the surveyed youth slightly weakened – especially in relation to religious knowledge, but also in the case of global relationship to faith, religious practice, religious beliefs, religious experience and religious community. It is interesting that in relation to religious morality various tendencies were recorded – while the acceptance of some moral norms was characterized by a decrease, the acceptance of others was characterized by an increase.⁵

⁵ See also Pusztai, Demeter-Karászi, 2019; Schreiner, 2013; Hanesová, 2013; Hámori, Rosta, 2013; Pusztai, 2013.

If we link the presented empirical data with the main models of changes in religiosity in the contemporary world, we can say that the results of the presented researches confirm not only the model of advancing secularization, but partly also the model of stabilization or even revitalization of religiosity (for example increase of identification with one's own parish or belief in resurrection of human body), model of pluralization of religiosity or worldview (for example increase of the indicator of the search for meaningful values outside religious faith) and model of religious fundamentalism (for example increase of the indicators of acceptance of some traditional moral norms).

In addition, in relation to relatively stable indicator of religious affiliation (2006 – 89.9%; 2016 – 91.2%) associated with the decline of religiosity in cases of its basic dimensions, we can recall the phenomenon, which is in the sociology of religion called “belonging without believing” (belonging without religious practice, religious knowledge, religious beliefs, religious experience, religious community or ethical dimension of religiosity) (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). If the different concrete indicators of religiosity are declining and the indicator of religious affiliation is not, then it is precisely the strengthening of the mentioned phenomenon.

Finally, I just want to underline that the carried out analysis and considerations are insufficient for religious leaders, teachers, educators or parents, given the fact that – as Polish classic of this discipline W. Piwowarski says – “sociology of religion is not the science which could ‘automatically’ influence the change of directions and methods of pastoral action. However, it allows to ‘understand’ the current situation, showing what, how and why happens” (2000).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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