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## **Believing without Belonging? Detraditionalization of the Religious Identity of Youth in Slovakia**

### *Verovati, ne pripadati? Detradicionalizacija verske identitete mladih na Slovaškem*

*Abstract:* The purpose of my paper<sup>1</sup> is to present selected contemporary theories of religion in relation to modernity and late modernity. As well as their application in the Slovak social space. For this purpose, we will use the analysis of contemporary dates.

Davie's concept of "believing without belonging" has led to a number of interesting debates and discussions among scholars of religion and sociology. Some argue that this trend represents a decline in religious participation and an erosion of traditional religious values, while others see it as a positive development that allows for greater diversity and individual expression within religious and spiritual traditions.

The aim of this article is to analyze the basic assumptions of Grace Davie's concept and its application as a conceptual key to explain the transformation of religiosity in contemporary Slovakia, especially youth religiosity. The concept of "religion without obligation" is particularly applicable to the analysis of the dynamics and evolution of religiosity in contemporary Slovakia, especially among youth. The aim here will not be to discuss her works in detail, but only to present a few selected theses that seem relevant to the thought of the scholar in question. This article uses the method of content analysis and desk research.

*Keywords:* Religious identity, Religiosity, Religious participation, Religiosity of Slovak youth, Detraditionalization, Secularisation

*Povzetek:* Namen prispevka je predstaviti izbrane sodobne teorije religije v razmerju do modernosti in pozne modernosti ter njihovo uporabo v slovaškem družbenem prostoru. V ta namen je bila izvedena analiza sodobnih podatkov.

Koncept Grace Davie 'verovanje brez pripadnosti' je med raziskovalci religije in sociologije spodbudil številne pomenljive razprave. Nekateri menijo, da gre za

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trend upada verske udeležbe in razkroj tradicionalnih verskih vrednot, medtem ko drugi v njem vidijo pozitiven razvoj, ki omogoča večjo raznolikost in individualni izraz znotraj verskih in duhovnih tradicij.

Cilj prispevka je analizirati osnovne predpostavke koncepta Grace Davie in kako ga je mogoče uporabiti kot konceptualni ključ za razlago preobrazbe religioznosti na sodobnem Slovaškem, zlasti med mladimi. Tovrstni koncept ‚religije brez obveznosti‘ je posebej uporaben za analizo dinamike in razvoja religioznosti na Slovaškem, predvsem med mladino. Namen ni podrobna obravnava del Grace Davie, temveč predstavitev nekaj izbranih tez, ki se zdijo za razumevanje mišljenja omenjene raziskovalke pomembne. Pri tem uporabljamo metodo analize podatkovnih baz.

*Ključne besede:* verska identiteta, religioznost, verska udeležba, religioznost slovaške mladine, detradicionalizacija, sekularizacija

## 1. Introduction

Modernity, therefore, has not removed religion, but has caused its decomposition, the pluralization of its forms and often its transfer from the institutional framework of identity to the subjective world of religious experiences and sensations. Religiosity represents a basic cognitive and axiological component of social reality (Voegelin, Berger, Luckmann). The term “religiosity” is used in this paper as a general umbrella term for various types of religious and spiritual identities.

The relationship and connection between religion and post-modern civilization is an interest to many researchers, especially sociologists of religion. Religion, due to its dynamics, place and role in people’s lives, culture and civilization, has been a focal point of interest and a broad field of research for many different scientific disciplines since the beginning of time. In modern societies, often referred to as post-modern, institutionalised religion is losing its direct influence on social and especially political life. Many decisions of individuals do not fall within the sphere reserved for the sacred. In explaining and interpreting social life, religion has many competitors in modern societies, and for this reason it is losing its former credibility as the only source of meaning in life. It does not disappear in society but only changes its social forms. Visions of a humanism without religion, with some undefined spirituality, are unrealistic. Today, besides the secularisation theory, other theories are gaining importance - the theory of the religious market, the theory of individualisation, the theory of pluralization, the theory of dispersion, the theory of deprivatization and others (Mariański 2010, 12–14). The changes that are taking place in contemporary religiosity cannot be understood solely in terms of secularisation, but more broadly as transformations. Based on this, it can be argued that religiosity is still present in some form in all areas of human life (150–152).

It is important to note that the term secularization refers to a relationship between modernity and religion. However, its multidimensionality leads to academic

controversy about its true meaning. In recent decades, academic discussions on religion have been characterized by a theoretical confrontation between two narratives. On the one hand, European scholars adhere to secularization theories, which argue that the social significance of religion is declining. On the other hand, American experts defend the idea of a return to the social significance of religions (desecularization). (Dobbelaere 2002, 64). According to Casanova (2007, 3) and Moniz (2023, 2), this debate has reached a “dead end.” The traditional theory of secularization fits well in Europe, but not in America. For this reason, scholars are calling for a change in the direction of current research, as it has reached a “dead end in the social science study of religion” (Burchardt 2017, 144). To avoid misunderstandings, a methodological approach is proposed: the systematization of secularization theories through the analysis of their internal layers at the macro level.

## 2. Grace Davie – A New Concept of Modern Religiosity

Grace Davie since the mid-1980s. She has been exploring the connections between religion and modernity in Britain and Europe. She then began to explore the forms of European religiosity in a global context. She is the author of a number of works from which substantial theses will be presented. Davie’s scholarly thought goes beyond both theory and research findings in order to create new methodological tools for the study of religion. Davie is aware that the social phenomena she studies are not static, and that methodological tools quickly become obsolete or simply useless amidst constant social change (Trzebiatowska 2010, 11–12).

On the basis of her research, Davie concludes that pluralisation and individualisation significantly articulate the processes of transformation of religiosity; they represent new and important, to some extent alternative and competing models of religious and spiritual life. According to her, the new religiosity and the new spirituality do not have to be alternatives to each other, much less in conflict with each other; they can complement each other and reinforce each other to a certain extent. And it is precisely this phenomenon of modern religiosity that the British sociologist of religion points out on the basis of her research. She also points out that the assumption that modernisation inevitably leads to secularisation is erroneous and outdated, especially in view of the fact that religion still retains an important role in late modern societies. The theory of secularisation, which has its roots in Europe’s specific nineteenth-century socio-economic context, has gradually taken on the form of theoretical dogma. And as Western Europe became the dominant model to which the rest of the world was compared, modernity and secularisation came to be treated as synonymous terms. Davie puts it briefly: theory dominated or became more important than empirical data (Davie 2010, 13; 2009, 26–34). In her view, the decline of religion in social life is not a necessary consequence of modernisation and economic development (Davie 2000c, 26). It is uncertain whether the secularisation trend will continue in Europe and the future of religion is difficult to predict (Davie 2006).

On the basis of research conducted in Britain, Scandinavia and the United States, Davie concludes that there is no decline of the spiritual element in contemporary Western society. According to her, there is invariably an element of spirituality in society, although the way it manifests itself – religiosity – is changing. Davie (2006, 27–29) notes that there is a profound change in the nature and understanding of religion in modern European societies. We have moved from a culture of religious obligation or commitment to one of consumption and individual choice. What was handed down or inherited has become a matter of personal preference, what we call the atomisation of faith and the privatisation of religion. According to Davie (2013, 61), the atomization of belief reflects the lack of a process of transmission and the breaking of the chain of collective memory. He argues that churches have ceased to be able to guarantee the collective religious memory that is essential to community dynamics. She follows Hervieu-Léger who argues that modern societies are less religious because of their inability to maintain the collective memory that is fundamental to their religious existence. As a result, individual societies are unable to maintain their identity. He coins his own term “amnesic societies” to designate them (Hervieu-Léger 2000). As a consequence, it can no longer be assumed that religion is transmitted among the members of a community through a series of relational chains. The church begins to be understood *de facto* as an institution of voluntary membership, situated in the sphere of individual choice. Against this background, it is relevant to note that if, on the one hand, the level of authority, influence and religious loyalty among individual church members decreases, the tendency towards belief without affiliation and vicarious religion increases. However, Davie points out that, on the other hand, this downplays religious organizations and their services of mediating the sacrum (Davie 2002, 30–32; Botelho Moniz 2017, 398–399). These are used according to the pragmatic, utilitarian and not necessarily religious desires of individuals.

According to her, the weakening of institutional religiosity does not mean that most people are abandoning religious beliefs or adopting an ambivalent attitude. She argues that the decline in membership of churches and faith groups is evidence of a decline in the willingness to participate in formalised religious institutions, not a decline in faith. Moreover, Davie emphasises that the phenomenon mentioned is only one of many ways in which the tendency to avoid association that is common today manifests itself. Thus, we are dealing with the occurrence of a broad trend which, at the level of religion, manifests itself in a decline in membership of churches and other religious institutions (Davie 2002). Building on this insight, Davie developed the notion of believing without belonging, according to which people continue to believe but do not inscribe their faith in any institutional framework – “believing but not belonging.” For Davie, religion is not strictly linked to the institutional aspect, hence it is possible to talk about religiosity without belonging to a religious institution. Taking this perspective, it is possible to speak of a situation in which participation in religious practice decreases significantly and faith moves further and further away from Christian orthodoxy but does not disappear (2000, 116).

She emphasizes that religious practice encourages the believer to resist elements contrary to Christian teaching. In the face of a marked decline in practice, such resistance is diminishing. However, faith persists, increasingly contaminated by elements that are inconsistent with, even contradictory to, Christian teaching. This disconnection of faith from ordinary practice, together with its sociological implications is, according to Davie, a far greater challenge to the churches of Western Europe than the supposedly secular society in which we live. At the very least, it requires the sustained attention of sociologists. Related to this is another aspect of research, which is religious transmission. According to her, it is the demographic differences that are most relevant, as they show the fundamental importance of generational change in the process of religious transmission and the contrasting roles of men and women in this process (1994, 24–26).

The author herself indicates that the terms “believing” and “belonging” should not be considered too rigidly. The distinction between the two is intended to capture a mood, to suggest an area of enquiry, a way of looking at the problem, not to describe a detailed set of characteristics. Operationalizing either or both of the variables too severely is bound to distort the picture (Davie 1997, 18). By “faith without belonging,” Davie means a situation in which Europeans profess to believe in God, but only close to 10 % of them regularly attend church. Davie partly justifies this state of affairs by a general decline in involvement in all voluntary, including non-religious, activities (e.g. membership of political parties and trade unions), and thus shows an analogy between the changes that are taking place in religious and secular forms of involvement.

An important phenomenon that can be observed in contemporary Western societies is the weakening influence of religious institutions (manifested in the loss of these institutions’ ability to exercise social control over the faithful). In the light of Davie’s conception, we are dealing with the phenomenon of the emergence of alternative forms of religiosity, which, in the light of Davie’s conception, can be regarded as evidence of the continued existence of the need for the sacred (e.g. New Age). The presence of alternative forms of religious life creates a kind of market for religious traditions. In postmodernity, religion is no longer imposed on anyone or inherited, like other ideas, religion becomes an object of consumption. Everyone can choose the religious tradition that suits him or her, as well as the degree of involvement is determined by each individual. (Davie 2004, 78–80). On this assumption, it can be concluded that those institutions will survive whose religious offerings are willingly chosen by their adherents - the consumers - and this will determine the continuity of the church or faith group.

For this reason, he suggests that if the definition of religion is broadened to include issues related to individual and social health, the meaning of existence, the future of the planet, and humanity’s responsibility to people, we may find a quite different pattern of religious behaviour among young people (Kardis 2020, 53–56). It seems at least plausible that younger ages may respond to these profound ecological, moral, ethical, and religious issues much more constructively than to traditional religious beliefs. Moreover, their response may be considerably

more positive than that of older people (Davie 1994, 26; Voas and Crockett 2005, 12). The broadening of the definition of religion makes it all the more possible to accept the concept of believing without belonging.

### 3. Context of Slovakia and the Religiosity of Slovak Youth

Grace Davie's scholarly thought provides a springboard of sorts, raising questions that often make us think and even question tried and tested methods of analysis. In other words, whether one agrees or disagrees with her point of view, Davie's scholarly thought sustains further discussion about the study of religiosity. Based on Grace Davie's concept of *believing without belonging* transformations of religiosity, I will briefly present a study of the religious life and religious beliefs of the Slovak population. Despite the fact that the territory of Slovakia, with its size and population, is a small country, its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is not insignificant. According to information provided by the last population census (2021), there are 14 ethnic groups living in Slovakia.

Slovakia is characterised for various reasons by a specific religious environment - the Cyril and Methodius tradition, various forms of popular piety, and the experience of totalitarian rule. Since the political transformation in Slovakia, several studies have been carried out to diagnose the religiosity of Slovaks, some of them targeted exclusively at young people.

Tížik argues that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can consider Slovakia as one of the moderately religious countries in the European space, i.e. a country with a high level of declarative religiosity and an average level of church attendance. At the same time, it delineates 5 phases of the period of transformation of the relationship between religion and state in Slovakia since 1989 (Zachar Podolinská et al. 2019, 12–13).

Sociological research clearly points to a change in the cultural mentality of Slovaks, which also affects Christians. Today, it is a mistake to assume that a well-formed Christian is a person in whom passions are internally subordinated to reason, who lives in a society that facilitates or at least does not hinder the perception of the correct order of values and moral goods. Today we have before us a hurting humanity to which the Gospel needs to be proclaimed anew. Often these are baptized people who are passive Christians, and their own cultures and different understandings of values have to be reckoned with (Csontos, 2019, 194–150). The change in cultural mentality has not bypassed the traditionally religious Slovakia. This is shown by the results of sociological research on the religiosity of Slovaks. In the following section, I will present in a very general way the individual dimensions of religiosity in the studied population of Slovak youth on the basis of the results of the sociological research carried out (Kardis 2021, 153–154).

The positive connections between religiosity and people's attitudes and behaviour are also indicated by data from nationally representative sociological research on religiosity, which has been carried out by Jozef Matulník and his team for a long time. The first sociological research was carried out on a representative sample of the Slovak population aged 18 to 60. Primary data collection was carried out using standardized interview techniques in 2007. The sample consisted of 2020 respondents, 1298 of whom were Catholics (Matulník et al. 2008).

The second empirical research focused on youth religiosity. It analysed the associations between religiosity and young people's attitudes towards studies, leisure activities and substance use, family environment and attitudes towards cohabitation (2014). Data collection was conducted in the 2012/2013 school year using a questionnaire technique and the sample consisted of 1968 third-year students from all types of secondary schools. The basis was the research on the indicator of the religious practice of young people (frequency of attending religious services, frequency of praying and accessing the sacraments) and its relation to the above-mentioned aspects of life. In the analysis of religious practice, four empirical types of religious practice of young Catholics were developed: practising, individualistic, neglecting, passive. The practitioners are characterized by high levels of religious practice across all items; the individualistic are characterized by high values on the prayer indicators, but below-average values on the items related to church attendance and participation in religious services; the neglectful are characterized by low, below-average values on the prayer indicators, but above-average values on the indicators related to church attendance and access to the sacraments; the passive show overall very low values of religious practice. (2014, 38–43)

Of the 1,968 respondents contacted, the majority – 1,242 respondents – said that religion was important to their lives, while 762 respondents said that they did not subscribe to any of the existing churches. Respondents who subscribed to an existing church were then asked to indicate how important religion was to them in their own lives. This research, which was subsequently published in *Analysis of the Religiosity of Young Catholics in Slovakia*, confirmed that religion still plays an important role in today's society in Slovakia, as it still influences, albeit to a lesser extent, the thinking and living of today's people.

The research also aimed at gaining insights into the links between religiosity and family behaviour. Focusing on the analysis of the connection between religiosity and young people's family environment and between religiosity and their attitudes towards extramarital sexual relations and cohabitation (Kratochvíla 2014, 119–155). The impetus for such a research focus was the significant changes in demographic and family behaviour, as well as the significant weakening of the institution of marriage in the last decades in Slovak society.

Matulník argues that the findings regarding the interrelationships between religiosity and family environment and attitudes related to family and demographic behaviour bring with them the question of the direction of causal interaction be-



tween these variables in Slovak conditions. It should be pointed out that the results of this research on youth religiosity point to the possibility of reverse causality (data on differences in indicators of religiosity between young people who live with their own father and young people who do not live with their father). In this case, the family environment also acts as an independent variable in relation to religiosity. Thus, religiosity can act in the position of a dependent variable and the characteristics of the family and the family environment in the position of independent variable variables (Matulník 2019, 40–41).

The data provided by the 2001, 2011, and 2021 censuses of population, houses and flats in Slovakia reflect a rather alarming situation, i.e. that religion in society is gradually declining. While in the 2001 census, 84% of the total population of Slovakia subscribed to religion, in 2011 it was 75.97% and in 2021 it was down to 69.72%. But what does this mean? It indicates the fact that the number of people with no religion or no religion identified is increasing – in 2001 – 12.96 % / 2.99%; in 2011 – 13.44 % / 10.5 9%; in 2021 23.79 % / 6.49 % (Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky 2025).

The decline between 2011 and 2021 is quite high, indicating that society is thus orienting itself away from the religious sphere. The results confirm a trend that is taking place across Europe. Many experts point to the fact that dechristianization is currently taking place in the European area. The 2014–2016 European Social Survey, evaluated by Stephen Bullivant of St Mary's University of London in a report entitled *Europe's Young Adults and Religion*, showed that the number of young people in Europe aged 16 to 29 who do not identify with any religion is on the rise. In Austria, for example, only 37% of respondents overall identified themselves as non-religious, compared with 67% in Hungary, 75% in Sweden, 81% in Estonia and 91% in the Czech Republic. By contrast, in Poland as many as 83% of respondents declared themselves to be Christian.

Indicators of private religious practice were the frequency of prayer and reading of the Holy Scriptures. Indicators of public religious practice were frequency of attending Mass, recognition of the obligation to attend Mass, frequency of confession and receiving the Eucharist, recognition of the importance of baptism, church wedding and church funeral. Parameters of religious community were ascertained using indicators such as the frequency of seeking priests from the parish in addition to attending Mass and administering the sacraments. Parameters of religious ethics were ascertained using indicators such as abstaining from work on Sundays and holy days and avoiding Sunday shopping.

This research has also shown that the political, cultural, or social views of practising and non-practising Christians differ markedly in many cases, even though both groups share a common Christian identity.

The research shows that religiosity in Slovakia is not on the decline, as has been assumed with regard to secularism, quite the contrary. It should also be said that what is changing is the content of faith, as it is much less tied to the institutionalized church.



One more research on youth religiosity was conducted in Slovakia in 2006. It was conducted by Ondrej Štefaňák and the main research problem was to describe the religious attitudes of the youth of the Spiš Diocese, as well as to try to establish the demographic, religious and social characteristics that condition these attitudes. Quantitative research was conducted, and its basic population was the youth of the Spiš Diocese (663 people) aged 17–18 years. The main research problem was to describe the religious attitudes of the youth of the Spiš Diocese, as well as to attempt to establish the demographic, religious and social characteristics underlying these attitudes. Štefaňák distinguished the religiosity of the studied youth into five types - religiously oriented religiosity (18.6 %), traditionally oriented religiosity (10.8 %), selective religiosity (29.3 %), doubting religiosity (26.1 %), indifference to faith, and disbelief (15.3 %) (Štefaňák 2009a). Subsequently, in 2011, he conducted further research on the morality of Slovak youth (again using the example of the Spiš diocese, The main goal of the mentioned research was to describe the school-leaving youth's moral values and the effort to point out those demographic, social, and religious features which differentiate those values (2015, 169).

Characteristic features of the most represented selective religiosity are: willingness to declare faith; less frequent practice of religious acts; in relation to the acceptance of the Church's teachings, an increase in the exercise of one's own choice can be seen in some moral issues. In turn, the characteristic feature of doubting religiosity is: the absence of automatic acceptance of institutionalized religion; the abundance of questions, doubts, and indecision in religious issues (Štefaňák 2012, 70–79).

Based on the obtained research results in the socio-cultural context of Slovak society, it can be concluded that currently, the religiosity of youth is selectively and hesitantly oriented. The examined indicators of religiosity point to the fact that although Slovak youth perceive the Church as a community of believers (53.9 %), only 22.1 % present in their consciousness a religiosity guided by the teachings of the Church. As many as 54.4 % of the surveyed youth define their own religiosity by the statement: "I am religious in my own way." The results point to a selective religiosity ("I am Catholic, but...") rather than a strict religious individualization, since 58.7 % of those surveyed identify with the Church on various levels. The individualization of religiosity of the studied youth is confirmed by the low level of their involvement in religious associations and the difference between the views on the contribution of priests in society and the willingness to have a priest in their own families (Štefaňák 2015, 165–166; Caban 2017, 72–73.) The results of this research confirm the results of Matulník's research that when evaluating their own religiosity, the youth four times more often declare its decline than its deepening. If we compare the religiosity of youth with the religiosity of their parents, we can see the phenomenon of "heredity of faith," as well as its weakening in the young generation.

The results of the research presented above confirm not only the model of religious stabilization and the model of progressive secularization (e.g. the decline

in the indicators of frequency of participation in religious services or the sacrament of reconciliation, the so-called church religiosity or involvement in religious associations and movements), but also partly the model of religious revitalization (e.g. slight increase in indicators of belief in the existence of God, the importance of prayer, watching religious television or websites, and believing in God, as well as being religious or believing in God's help in times of trouble), a model of religious or worldview pluralization (e.g. a slight increase in indicators of belief in reincarnation or seeking sensory values outside of faith), and a model of religious syncretism (e.g., an increase in indicators of religiosity "in its own way" - selective, private, or syncretic) (Štefaňák 2021).

Based on the presented research results and Population and Housing Census in the Slovak Republic 2001, 2011 and 2021, it is possible to conclude that the indicator of religious affiliation is relatively stable, but linked to a decline in religiosity in its basic dimensions, we must recognize the phenomenon of "believing without belonging" (belonging without religious practice, religious knowledge, religious beliefs, religious experience, religious community, or ethical dimension religiosity). If various specific indicators of religiosity decline and the indicator of religious affiliation does not, then this is precisely a strengthening of the phenomenon mentioned above.

## 4. Conclusion

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Modernity, therefore, has not removed religion but has caused its decomposition, the pluralization of its forms and often its transfer from the institutional framework of identity to the subjective world of religious experiences and sensations.

Grace Davie's concepts seem to accurately describe only part of the transformations that are taking place in the religiosity of contemporary British society. A particularly interesting and important field of further research may be the relationship between declared faith and religious activity, as well as their consequences for religious institutions (Davie 2000, 30). Elements of this concept can be used to analyse the changes taking place in Slovak society as well. This concept is one of the appropriate approaches for interpreting the development of youth religiosity in Slovakia. But taking account of different cultural and social contexts.

In conclusion, "*believing without belonging*" is a concept that highlights the changing nature of religion and spirituality in contemporary society. It challenges us to rethink traditional notions of religious affiliation and community, and to explore new ways of expressing and practicing our beliefs. While it presents both challenges and opportunities for religious institutions and individuals alike, it ultimately reflects the ongoing evolution of human spirituality and the diverse ways in which we seek meaning and purpose in our lives.

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