

THE CHANGES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE, OF THE LIVING CONDITIONS AND THE WAYS OF LIFE AND THEIR IMPACT ON RELIGION IN HUNGARY

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According to the old vulgarized form of the secularization hypothesis, modernization of the economy and of society and, in more general terms, rapid economic and subsequent social changes result in the diminishment of religious interest of the members of society. Although recently this vulgarized form of the thesis was revised and refined by sociologists of religion (Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1967; Martin, 1969; Dobbelaere, 1981), it might be of interest to study what happened in Hungary, where the economy and the society underwent an especially rapid process of social change since 1945.

Social Structure and Mobility

Before the Second World War Hungary was a relatively backward capitalist country, whose economy and society still bore many feudal characteristics, most of all in agriculture and in the villages. About 40% of the land area was in the possession of large estates (landlords), and in consequence more than 20% of the population were landless agricultural workers.

In the postwar period the governments and the Communist Party considered rapid industrialization to be one of the most important goals. In consequence of the industrialization efforts, the share of the agricultural population declined sharply and that of the industrial working class increased strongly. Around the mid-1960's the country entered a new phase of development in which the growth of the tertiary sector and of the non-manual strata became predominant. Although the structural changes has slowed down somewhat since the second half of the 1970's, the social structure is today completely different from that of the inter-war period. (Table 1)

Not only the proportions of the different classes and the strata changed, but in addition some classes disappeared (capitalists, landowners), while others almost completely disappeared (self-employed artisans and merchants). The social situation of the agricultural population changed twice in the past decades: first in 1945 most of the landless workers obtained a little farm by the land reform and in consequence became self-employed peasants, later in 1959-1961 almost all self-employed peasants became cooperative peasants, whose social situation later became more and more similar to that of the non-agricultural workers.

It ought to be added that social changes are continuing in Hungary, although less abruptly; recently the possibility to engage in self-employed work, both as a main job and as a second job, increased first in agriculture, later in the other branches. It is difficult to foresee the exact direction and meaning of these new changes.

These structural changes were obviously accomplished through social mobility processes. While in the 1930's the Hungarian society was relatively closed, few persons being socially mobile, since 1945 mass mobility processes occurred in Hungary, and the intensity of social mobility did not decline - in spite of all predictions - in the recent years. The percentage of persons being in a social stratum different from the stratum of their father (when they were young, i.e. ages 14-18) was the following at the time of the 1962-1964, 1973 and 1983 social mobility surveys among the male and female earners (Andorka, 1978).

Intergenerationally Mobile, percentage

men women

1962-1964 59 59

1973 64 63

1983 72 74

Thus about 3/4 of the Hungarian adults belonged to another social class or stratum at the time of the survey of 1983 than the social stratum of origin (using a 7-stratum categorization, namely: 1. manager and professional, 2. clerical, 3. self-employed artisan, merchant, 4. skilled, 5. semi-skilled, 6. unskilled worker, 7. agricultural manual). By using a more detailed classification (most of all by distinguishing self-employed peasants and agricultural workers and cooperative peasants) the percentage of mobile persons would be even larger.

Analyzing the outflow and inflow mobility rates of different selected strata, we find that e.g. in 1983 75% of the sons and 74% of the daughters of peasants and agricultural workers belonged to some other (worker or non-manual) stratum, 37% of the sons and 54% of the daughters of skilled workers belonged to the non-manual strata, 37% of the sons and 20% of the daughters of managers and professionals were in some manual (mostly the skilled) stratum. Sixty-four per cent of the male and 56% of the female managers and professionals were of manual origin, 33% of the male and 24% of the female skilled workers were of agricultural origin.

Urbanization and Migration

The changes of social structures were accompanied by the growth of the urban population. In 1930, the country was predominantly rural; 67% of the population lived in villages. In 1986, the percentage of the population residing in villages was 41.6%; 19.5% lived in Budapest and 38.9% in other urban places. (Since 1930 several villages obtained

the administrative status of town; these changes of status contributed to the decline of the percentage of rural population.)

The data on migration demonstrate an even higher intensity of change of residence. At the time of the social mobility survey of 1983 among the persons aged 15 and over, only 55% of the residents of Budapest were born there, 13% were born in other towns and 32% in villages. In the other towns 48% were born in the same town, 14% in some other town and 38% in villages. In the villages 65% were born in the same village, 28% in some other village and 7% in towns. Altogether 43% of the population aged 5 and over were living in a place different from the place of birth.

It ought to be added that in 1984, 22% of the active earners were daily commuters, i.e. their place of work was different from their place of residence. Commuting mostly meant to travel from a rural residence to an urban working place.

Education

In parallel to the changes of social structure the level of education of the population increased considerably. The population aged 15 and over was distributed by educational level in the following way:

1941 1980

0-7 years education 78.7 5.8

8 years education 15.1 66.1

Secondary school (12 yrs.) 4.9 22.3

Tertiary diploma 1.3 5.8

Total 100.0 100.0

In consequence the great majority of the population had a higher education than its parents. At the time of the social mobility survey of 1983, in the male population age 25 and over, 69% had a higher education; 29% had a similar education, and 2% had a lower education than the father and in the female population of the same age; 51% had a higher education; 40% had the same education, and 9% had a lower education than the father (using a six-category classification of education, namely: 1. tertiary diploma, 2. secondary + skilled worker school, 3. secondary, 4. eight years primary + skilled worker school, 5. eight years primary, 6. less than eight years primary).

Living Conditions

The most important changes of the living conditions in the past decades happened in the poorest part of the population, first of all in the villages. The per capita personal income

increased considerable, but, in consequence of the methodological difficulties, an estimate of the increase might present a misleading picture. I would like to state simply that the inequalities of income declined considerably after the war and has remained more or less unchanged since the first half of the 1960's. The inequalities might be characterized by the following two data: in 1982 the highest income decibel (i.e. the most well-to-do 10% of the population) obtained 18.6% of the total personal income and the lowest decile (i.e. the poorest 10%) 4.9% of it. Thus the most well-to-do 1/10 of the population received on the average an almost four times as high per capita income as the poorest 1/10 of the population. This means that there are still important inequalities, but the income inequalities are lower than in the majority of advanced societies. (The income distribution after personal income taxes in Sweden is more or less similar to that of Hungary.)

The improvement of living conditions might be best illustrated by the changes of dwelling conditions. In 1930, 25% of the dwellings had electricity, in 1984, 99%. In 1930, 13% of the dwellings had piped water supply, in 1984, 77 per cent.

Two data on consumer durables might provide some additional information: 1984, the number of personal cars per 1000 population was 122 (about 1/3 of the households had a personal car) and the number of television sets per 1000 population was 276 (about 80% of the households had a television set).

Way of Life

The way of life is a sociological concept widely used in the Hungarian literature (Andorka, Falussy, 1982). It is defined as the system of regular daily activities. Therefore, it is measured first of all by the daily time budget. Three time budget surveys (1962, 1976/77, 1986/87) provide information on the changes of the way of life. We do not have data on the time budget in the inter-war period. We know, however, from sociographic description of the life of the village population, that the daily activities were on the one side considerably changing by seasons, and on the other side, the life of peasants, most of all in the peak season of agricultural work, consisted of work from dawn to late evening. Little time was left for leisure, participation in national (as distinguished from local folk) culture and in personal contact outside the household and the neighborhood. The pattern of activities of men and women was strongly segregated.

Working activities predominate in the daily time budget of the Hungarian population also today. In addition to a relatively long statutory working time and almost full employment not only of adult men, but also of adult women, a relatively long time spent in household chores (for women), a long time spent in transport (commuting) and most of all much time spent in income-supplementing activities (work in the agricultural household plots, second jobs, and private house building) cause a strong overburdening of the adult population with working tasks, leaving relatively little time for leisure. The time remaining after working is to a large extent used to view the television programs, this being the leisure activity requiring the least effort. Nevertheless, through television (and

the reading of newspapers) almost all Hungarian citizens participate in the same national culture, which is a strong factor shaping the ideas and the world view of the population.

The extent of the homogenization of cultural values and norms might be illustrated by the desired and the actual number of children. In the inter-war period 19% of the married women had 6 and more children and 20% had 4-5 children (the data refer to the 45-49 year old women married for 20-29 years since 1949). Seventy-four percent of the couples married in 1983 desired two children, only 14% three children and 1.4% four or more children (10% desired one child and 0.3% did not plan a child.) According to these data there are almost no married couples at present in Hungary which follow the traditional norms concerning the number of children.

The Role of Religion in the Hungarian Society

As the above-mentioned data indicate, both the objective conditions and the way of life have profoundly changed in Hungary since the Second World War. These changes might be interpreted in terms of a late but rapid modernization, although the Hungarian society is still far from a really modern society (Kulcsar, 1984). According to the traditional secularization hypothesis, we ought to expect a strong decline of the role of religion.

According to the investigations of M. Tomka, however, a considerable percentage (in 1983 43%) of the adult (aged 18 and over) population defined itself as being religious and since 1978 this percentage is slightly increasing (Tomka, 1985a). Hankiss (1982) in 1978/79 found an even higher percentage, 53 percent. Tomka also states that the character of religiousness is changing, the practice of going to church is declining, religious small groups are playing an increasing role (Tomka, 1985b). He also observed a shift of the social background of religion. Till the first half of the 1970's a higher percentage of religious self-definition was found among the lower status groups, in the village population and among elder persons. Recently, a new type of religious interest seems to be emerging among the highly educated, young and urban population groups (Tomka, 1985a).

In this paper I use the data from a new survey carried out by the Institute for Social Science of the Party in Hungary in 1982 on a sample of 15,839 persons aged 18 and over. As the sample is bigger than the samples used by Tomka and Hankiss, the results might confirm and to a certain extent supplement their conclusions.

The survey contained, however, only one rather simple question concerning religious practice, namely: "Do you attend church service or some religious community" and the three alternative answers were: no (0), rarely (1) and often (2). 10.5 percent of the respondents stated to attend "often" the religious services, 21.1% rarely and 68.4% not at all. These data fit rather well with those of Tomka who states that on Sundays 10-20% of the older persons and 3-5% of younger persons attend the church services.

Church attendance is higher among women than among men:

Attendance men women

Often 5.7 14.6

Rare 17.2 24.3

Never 77.1 60.1

Total 100.0 100.0

Also the attendance is higher among the older than among the younger persons, higher among those having a low education than among those having a high education, and higher in the villages than in the big cities. This seems to point to the existence of the traditional social background of religiousness and would suggest that with the growth of education and urbanization, and with other changes in the direction of modernization the interest in religion will continue to decline in the future.

If we consider, however, three-dimensional tables the signs of change become apparent. Female predominance is the strongest among the old persons having a low education and it disappears among the young having a tertiary school diploma (although the last mentioned data ought to be evaluated with caution, as in this group the number of both men (72) and women (90) is below 100):

Category Attendance

often rare never total

Aged 50+, education 0-7 years

men 12.7 26.5 60.8 100.0

women 27.2 31.4 41.4 100.0

Aged 18-29, university education

men 4.2 2.8 93.0 100.0

women 3.3 4.4 92.2 100.0

Analyzing the tables 2-4 we first of all find that the percentages attending rarely and often the services show different tendencies. The percentage of those who attend rarely the church services show in almost all cases the traditional pattern: rare attendance is directly related to age and inversely to the size of residence and education. The percentage of those who attend often the services, however, in some cases shows the opposite pattern.

The percentage of those who attend often the services shows a U-like relation to education in each type of residence (Table 2): it is highest among those having the lowest education, lowest among those who have medium-level education (skilled worker school, secondary school diploma) and rises among those who

have a university or other tertiary diploma. In Budapest and in the larger towns the frequent attendance of services is clearly higher among university graduates than also among the persons having eight years primary education. The percentage of those university graduates who often attend the services is higher in Budapest and in the large towns than in the other types of residence. It might be hypothesized that a new kind of intensive interest in religion is appearing in the most highly educated part of the population and most of all in the larger towns.

Analyzing educational levels by age groups (Table 3) we find that in the youngest age group frequent attendance of services shows a U-shaped relation to the size of the settlement, or more exactly: it is highest in the small (most traditional and backward) villages, drops to a very low level in the larger villages and from that category to Budapest the relation is direct, frequent attendance grows with the size of the residence. In the older age groups the relation is of the traditional type. It might be hypothesized that a new kind of intensive interest in religion is appearing in the youth of the large urban centers.

Analyzing educational levels by age groups (Table 4) the percentage of those who attend often the services shows a U-shaped relationship of attendance to education in each age group, but the upturn at the higher levels is the clearest among the young university graduates. We might hypothesize that a new type of intensive interest is increasing among the young university graduates.

The type of religious interest of these young persons seems to be predominantly rational, non-dogmatic (non-fundamentalist), ecumenical and tolerant toward other belief systems. It is based in a general interest in the non-material aspects of life. It is linked with a high level of commitment to national and social issues and tends to be moderately critical of existing conditions and willing to be active in their reforming.

Some Tentative Interpretations and Conclusions

The above-mentioned hypotheses should obviously be treated with utmost prudence. First of all the sample of the survey, although a rather large sample, is not large enough to give a really reliable number of cases in each cell of the tables. Second, the question used to measure religious interest provides only a very crude indicator. In addition, as mentioned earlier, "rare" and "frequent" attendance show different tendencies.

In addition to these methodological precautions the author would like to emphasize that he is not an expert in the sociology of religion but a researcher in social stratification, mobility and the way of life.

One main conclusion seems to be valid in any case: the process of secularization related to modernization is much more complicated than assumed earlier. Religion and its role in the Hungarian society seems to change, but not to disappear. This was stated earlier also by M. Tomka. It would be therefore hazardous to predict any future tendency. This tendency will obviously be influenced by many factors, among others by the attitude of the leadership and the members of the churches toward the hypothesized new interest in religion.

As for the possible reasons for the non-disappearance of religious interest and its hypothesized new growth in some population groups, I would venture to point to two established facts:

1. As Berger and Luckmann (1966), Berger (1967) and Greeley (1974) pointed out, the members of any society need to find meaning on the basic questions of life, a human need for an ultimate interpretative system seems to be permanent. Religions provide such an interpretative system. Other competing interpretations like philosophy, are not very efficient in providing a meaning system acceptable to young persons at present in Hungary, as it was pointed out recently by Marxist participants in a discussion on the growth of religiousness in the Hungarian youth (Feher, 1987; Gonczi, 1987). One of the participants even spoke about a general value crisis (Lendvai, 1987).

2. There is a persistent need for participation in small groups and face-to-face communities. This need does not seem to diminish with modernization, on the contrary, as the rapid social changes cause the

disappearance of many types of face-to-face human relations (e.g. neighborhoods in small villages), the demand for the existing forms of community seem to increase. As Hankiss (1983) demonstrated, at present there is a general crisis and shortage of these communities in Hungary. Religious congregations might provide the possibility to participate in face-to-face intimate small groups.

By offering a meaning system and communities religion might play an important useful role in the present Hungarian society. Whether the existing churches will be able to take upon themselves these tasks and whether in consequence something like a civil religion will develop in Hungary, will be investigated and decided by the sociologists of religion of the next younger generation after several decades from now. Thus the sociology of religion will remain an interesting field of research in future Hungary.

Table 1.

Social Structure of Active Earners in Hungary 1930 and 1980

Social class and stratum Percentage

1930 1980

Capitalist 0.4 -

Landowner 0.3 -

Manager and professional 1.8 7.8

Clerical 5.6 20.5

Foreman 1.6 2.2

Self-employed artisan, merchant 9.0 1.5

Skilled worker 11.1 23.2

Semi-skilled worker 15.8 20.8

Unskilled worker - 7.7

Manual in agriculture having a
non-agricultural occupation - 6.7

Manual worker and cooperative

Peasant in agriculture 21.2 8.4

Self-employed peasant 33.3 0.6

Helping family member of
non-agricultural worker - 0.6

Total 100.0 100.0

n/thousand 3834 5069

Table 2.

Church Service Attendance by Education not Residence

1982 percent

Residence Attendance Education

7 8 Skilled Secondary University

Budapest

rare 23.2 14.7 7.4 8.1 6.1

often 11.9 4.2 0.9 3.4 8.5

Larger towns

rare 28.6 15.7 10.9 10.3 7.5

often 17.8 7.3 1.0 4.0 9.1

Smaller towns

rare 25.2 19.9 14.6 14.0 3.2

often 15.9 5.3 1.3 4.9 5.2

Larger villages

rare 33.3 23.8 15.2 15.5 11.5

often 17.7 5.5 0.3 2.7 5.1

Smaller villages

rare 28.0 25.4 21.4 20.7 2.2

often 23.6 11.5 2.9 5.3 6.6

x=percentage calculated from less than 100 cases

Table 3.

Church Service Attendance by Age and Residence 1982, percent

Residence Attendance Age

18-29 30-49 50+

Budapest

rare 6.1 7.0 20.5

often 2.4 2.4 10.1

Larger towns

rare 5.2 10.7 23.9

often 1.6 2.7 16.4

Smaller towns

rare 12.7 16.8 23.4

often 1.9 2.9 15.6

Larger villages

rare 12.9 21.4 33.7

often 0.7 4.8 17.5

Smaller villages

rare 17.5 25.5 28.8

often 3.1 9.8 25.0

Table 4.

Church Service Attendance by Age and Education 1982, percent

Education Attendance Age

18-29 30-49 50+

less than seven

rare 8.6 23.6 29.6

often 3.7 7.2 21.7

eight

rare 13.9 21.2 24.5

often 1.5 6.9 11.6

Skilled worker

rare 13.1 17.6 23.4

often 1.3 1.6 6.4

Secondary

rare 13.1 10.8 16.4

often 2.4 2.4 10.7

University

rare 3.7 5.3 9.0

often 3.7 5.9 13.4

x = percentage calculated from less than 100 cases

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