

Census on Religiousness in Poland

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The study, conducted between 1969 and 1979, covered 1,534 young people aged between 15 and 19 from seven selected towns of differing demographic structures and degrees of urban and industrial development. The subjects were asked 98 questions probing their religious self-determination, religious practices, moral attitudes, and attitudes towards the Church and its representatives.

86.94% of the subjects considered themselves religious, 72% regularly attended Sunday Mass, more than 70% went to confession at least once a year and 81.36% saw the priest as having a positive role in the formation of religious values. One of the most interesting points is the relative positions of "religion" and of "socialist ideals" in the hierarchy of values for which young people would sacrifice their lives. Over 50% of the subjects stated that they were prepared to sacrifice their lives in defence of their faith; the respondents from two towns considered religion as the primary value for which they would sacrifice their lives. In one town "religion" was considered as subordinate to "one's country", while in the remaining four towns the young people put "religion" in the third position after "one's country" and "human life" — both of which are concepts strongly stressed by Christian humanism. By contrast, "socialist ideals" emerged at the bottom of the scale of values — only 2-4½% of respondents said they thought such values worth sacrificing one's life for. In answer to a question concerning aims and aspirations, "happiness in mar-

riage", came first, followed by "salvation". "Education", "social advancement" and "lucrative employment" came further down the list.

The survey indicated that there were some tendencies towards the acceptance of secular morality. There seemed to be a discrepancy between declared religiousness and the actual acceptance of Catholic moral values, for example on sexual matters, where Catholic ethics are clearly and rigorously defined: only 70% of the subjects would not live together without a church wedding. Such discrepancies between church teaching and actual practice are testimony not only to the influence of secular ethics, but also to a still widely prevailing traditional model of the "good Catholic" in which ritual behaviour takes precedence over moral behaviour.

It was also noted that out of many factors conditioning religiosity in young people, the two most important were the degree of urbanisation of their home area, and the level of attendance at religious instruction. The smaller the town, and the higher the percentage of young people who regularly catechised, the higher were the indications of religiosity.

These two factors will probably have a decisive bearing on the religious profile of future generations. As the Church has no say in economic policies, it can only turn its attention to improvements in its network of religious instruction. Therefore it is vital for the Church that vocations to the priesthood grow, or at least are maintained at their present level. To influence young Poles effectively the Church also badly needs to legalise its status. Legalisation would not only make it easier to carry out religious instruction of the young, but would also enable the Church to revive the numerous youth associations which existed in Poland before the Second World War.

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