

Kamarás: Attitűdök – [Attitudes]

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIALOGUE AND RAPPROCHEMENT AMONG RELIGIONS

[ATTITŰDÖK A PÁRBESZÉD ÉS A KIENGESZTELŐDÉS JEGYÉBEN]

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Abstract. Is the chance of rapprochement and dialogue among religions growing in Hungary today? What kind of reception can the ideas of such thinkers as Hans Küng, Bede Griffith and Fritjhof Schuon, expect? Is a change of paradigms possible today in Christian missionary work? I will try to give the answers on the evidence of my empirical, sociological surveys on different religious attitudes concerning ecumenism and dialogue among religions.

Keywords. attitude, rapprochement, religiosity, tolerance, dialogue

About the survey and the basic religious attitudes of the interviewed

In the programme of an ongoing empirical, sociological survey I am studying the attitude of people towards rapprochement and dialogue among religions. The interviewed are regular church-going Christian intellectuals between 30 and 70 ("lays"), priests, pastors and RE teachers between 30 and 50 and undergraduates of seminars and RE students in teacher training colleges between 20 and 30 ("clerics"). I wonder

- what their opinions are about the border of orthodoxy and heresy,
- how much they can accept from the doctrine of official Christian churches concerning rapprochement and dialogue among religions,
- how much they can accept from the radically open-minded ("avant-garde") teachings of e.g. Bede Griffith, or Hans Küng concerning the same issue,
- what they think about Fritjhof Schuon's view on transcendent unity of religions,
- how close or far they feel their own religions/churches/ denominations to other religious groups.

As I haven't finished my work yet, in this lecture I am dealing with Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Evangelical Neoprotestant¹ answers only. First of all I am showing the characteristics of their attitudes towards rapprochement and dialogue using the percentages of agreements and rejections, then on a 1-5 scale I will give the index of agreement.

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Table 1. Characteristic features of religiosity towards dialogue

	Catholics (77) ²	Calvinists (74)	Lutherans (25)	Ev. Np. (37)	“lays” (63)	“clerics” (139)
A, There is no salvation outside my religion, or denomination.	12-48% 2.1	7-60% 1.8	7-56% 2.1	6-65% 1.7	3-76% 1.3	12-46% 2.3
B, God has definitely manifested himself in Jesus –so Christianity is the only and valid religion.	33-22% 3.4	41-14% 3.8	50-15% 3.9	74-6 4.5	15-39% 2.5	51-11% 4.0
C, As Jesus is the Way, Truth and Life only the different ways of Christianity can lead us to salvation.	12-23% 2.3	24-24% 3.2	35-15% 3.9	43-18% 4.5	9-42% 2.1	21-18% 3.2
D, Only one of the monotheistic religions can lead us to salvation.	25-33% 3.0	43-15% 3.7	29-33% 3.0	39-39% 3.0	21-44% 2.6	34-16% 3.6

In one case out of the four the interviewed expressed a unanimous opinion, as they rejected the statement: “outside my religion/church there is no salvation” (A). Of course in this respect we can find quite big differences between the more open-minded “lays” and the more careful and conservative (sometimes biased) “clerics”. Although while valuating the other statements we can see that the interviewed are rather divided, it also looks unambiguous that a considerable percentage of them (30-50) do not suppose Christianity to be the only way of salvation (B). We have to be aware that the interviewed accepted Christianity as the only valid religion, rather than the statement about the different Christian ways to salvation (C). There are quite a lot of people among the interviewed who think that any of the monotheistic religions leads to salvation (D). Two thirds of Calvinists and a bit less part of Catholics, Lutherans and Evangelicals think like this. It is interesting to consider that “lays” are more open-minded than “clerics” while the former represent the generation of parents (or sometimes grandparents) and the latter belong to the generation of sons and daughters. It is also striking, that the Evangelicals are the least of all open-minded in this respect.

Reception of “official” Christian doctrines

All the Christian churches and denominations got a long distance from their original points of view concerning mission. Avery Dulles, the Jesuit distinguishes four different models of Christian mission:

- a) model of compulsion – in case the inhabitants of a certain area are forced to follow the religion of the rulers;
- b) rapprochement – in case missionaries base upon the similarities in the religions in question and upon a certain religious openness in everybody;
- c) pluralism – in case the Christians living in a non-Christian area claim that diversity of religions is a blessing and religions together surpass the barriers and mistakes in any of them³;
- d) tolerance, or peaceful coexistence – this view coincides with the notions of Vatican Council II. and with those of most protestant churches.

Vatican Council II. emphatically declared that Christ has an extraordinary intermediary role and that non-Christian religions often contains some “seeds of truth” and “rays of divine truth that illuminates everybody”⁴. At the same time the Council does not claim that non-Christian religions can be considered either revealed religions, or ways towards Christianity.⁵ “Dialogue has a high value, but it is not a panacea. We must not expect dialogue to overcome the divergence of views. Religions definitely insist on their contradictory doctrines – they cannot give them up in case they want to keep their identity” - writes Dulles. He goes on as follows: “it would be possible to have a dialogue about some really important religious issues, e.g. values of prayer, the nature of mystic experiences etc” (Dulles 2007: 25-26).

Dulles thinks that some authors like Bede Griffith and Thomas Merton clarify how the experiences of mystic prayer can become bonds of unity for the members of different religions, or denominations. Ghislain Lafont, the Benedictine theologian even surpasses this statement when in his book entitled *How should we imagine the Catholic Church?* he writes: “Instead of using a unified language it is necessary to acknowledge mutually the validity of different languages.” Later he adds: “neither the Catholic Church has understood so far all the elements of revelation” (Lafont 2007: 162,164).

Today Christian missionary practice and its theological conclusion go even further saying that among different religions there should be a dialogical communication in which the partners are ready to understand the truths of the others. I have had the interviewed give their opinions about some statements originated in the spirit of dialogical communication.

Table 2. Possibility, method and chance of dialogue among religions

	Catholics (77)	Calvinists (74)	Lutherans (25)	Ev. Np. (37)	“lays” (63)	“clerics” (139)
A. There is a point where the different religions meet.	56-6% 4.2	45-1% 4.0	36-4% 3.7	17-25% 2.9	51-9% 4.1	51-1% 4.2
B. They all make an answer to the secrets of human existence (Vorgrimler 2007: 696).	36-10% 4.0	12-4% 3.6	25-4% 3.6	24-3 3.6	42-7% 4.8	18-5% 4.4
C. They all contact their followers with the sacred, help them experience the secret power that is present in the proceedings and events of human life (Vorgrimler 2007: 696).	36-3% 3.9	39-11% 3.7	56-4% 4.2	26-17% 3.5	38-6% 3.9	36-7% 3.9
D. It is necessary to make up a dialogical communication among religions that helps the partners become open towards the cultural richness, teachings and religious evolution of the others (Tomka 2001).	52-2% 4.2	34-9% 3.7	28-4% 3.7	13-17% 3.1	63-3% 4.4	34-7% 3.9
E. In the mirrors of other religions we can see our faith clearer. Dialogue and self-criticism do not mean that we refuse to stay in our church, or religion.	72-0% 4.6	58-5% 4.4	68-4% 4.4	41-6% 4.3	83-0% 4.8	60-4% 4.4

In all the groups the interviewed more or less agreed with the “official” teaching concerning dialogue among religions. Nevertheless Catholics were more open-minded this time than the other religious groups, and also the “lays” than the “clerics”.

Then I composed the question even sharper and asked where they would put the border between heresy and orthodoxy. In this respect I found a considerable dividedness, cautiousness and uncertainty among the interviewed.

Table 3. The border between heresy and orthodoxy

	Catholics (77)	Calvinists (74)	Lutherans (25)	Ev. Np. (37)	"lays" (63)	"clerics" (139)
A. Both fundamental absolutism and modern enlightened relativism are blind alleys when valuating a certain religion.	54-5% 4.1	37-1% 3.9	71-0% 4.5	27-19% 3.3	54-0% 4.1	41-5% 4.0
B. If we do not disregard distinction of spirits we can really decide whether a religion is good or bad, true or false.	15-27% 2.8	18-18% 3.0	24-28% 2.9	21-48% 2.5	15-50% 2.4	13-12% 3.0
C. The border between true and false runs across our own religion as well. There is no religion in which everything is good or bad.	33-17% 3.4	37-7% 3.9	32-12% 3.6	24-28% 3.0	51-7% 3.9	27-12% 3.3
D. We can decide only on the base of a given historical and social situation which teaching is true or false.	8-33% 2.5	3-36% 2.3	4-38% 2.3	10-55% 2.0	13-31% 2.6	2-36% 2.3
E. We can never find a definite border between orthodoxy and heresy. There are frontier zones only.	15-34% 3.1	3-36% 2.7	16-16% 3.3	0-30% 2.6	12-31% 3.6	2-41% 2.6
F. As there is an evolution of doctrines we have to re-examine them again and again in order to decide which teaching is true or heretic.	23-20% 3.2	32-3% 3.9	33-4% 3.8	17-3% 3.0	43-6% 3.9	22-13% 3.3
G. What we consider to be heretic depends on the source of the teaching in question: as heresy can come from misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, or denial of faith.	23-14% 3.4	16-9% 3.3	33-4% 3.8	18-11% 3.5	33-9% 3.8	14-12% 3.3

The interviewed rather accepted than rejected – insisting on the golden mean – the evolution of doctrines (F), as well as the attitudes and intentions of people believing in false teachings (G). A great deal of them also agreed with a possibly critical attitude towards their own religions (C). But they rather rejected than accepted the relative statements (D and E)

emphasising that “false teachings are against the Bible”, or “we have to take the situations into consideration, but their importance can never be conclusive”.

Judging orthodoxy and heresy it is definitely the Lutherans and the lays are first of all open-minded, and the Evangelicals and clerics take up an opposite position.

Reception of the theory on transcendent unity of religions

Christians that regularly practice and know well their religion can react either with honour, or also with indignation to some of Schuon's thoughts – e.g: “Religions are essentially – i.e. esoterically – similar, they are different only in their visible forms – i.e. exoterically – and on the metaphysical level they are identical.”, or “In the depth of religions we can find a metaphysical unity that is more relevant than a moral or a theological coincidence.”, or “Impersonal Divinity exceeds personal God” (Schuon 2005: 21-24, 25-26, 70). For the believers of God incarnated in Christ the sentences like these may seem to be false teachings rooted in Buddhism, Hinduism, or New Age. However if they take serious what Jesus revealed in Jn.4, 20-23⁶ – willy-nilly – they must meditate on Schuon's quoted statements.

We have a good reason to think that a number of Christian believers show antipathy against Schuon and his concept of a unified religion when they appear in the above-mentioned spiritual context. In my research the interviewed did not know either about Griffith, or about Schuon – in this way I could continue my studies in an unprejudiced situation.

Table 4. Thoughts of Fritjhof Schuon

	Catholic s (77)	Calvinis ts (74)	Luthera ns (25)	Ev. Np. (37)	“lays” (63)	“cleric s” (139)
A. Religions are essentially (esoterically) similar. They are different only in the way how they appear (i.e. exoterically). On the metaphysical level they are identical.	17-17% 2.9	3-13% 2.7	16-28% 2.6	3-60% 1.8	26-11% 3.2	55-18% 2.6
B. All religions converge in God. On lower levels (in morals, liturgy, or theology) they differ	25-14% 3.4	14-10% 3.1	15-15% 3.1	13-26% 2.7	30-9% 3.6	13-14% 3.0
C. In some respects each religion exceeds the others: this is a sufficient reason for the existence of them all.	10-32% 2.6	2-15% 2.5	0-40% 2.2	13-48% 2.5	18-28% 2.9	4-24% 2.3

D. The meeting point: impersonal divinity that exceeds personal God.	15-37% 2.7	11-24% 2.3	5-45% 2.4	6-55% 1.6	26-26% 3.0	8-32% 2.3
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Although the majority of the interviewed rejected all these statements - except for statement B - it is worth paying attention to the fact that the interviewed accepted them to a certain extent, and that the proportion of rejections – with the exception of Evangelicals – does not exceed 47 %. Explaining their views the interviewed emphasised first of all that the central point of Christianity (i.e. Jesus Christ) is a personal God incarnated in history (= exotery). They rejected statement D the most vigorously giving the same reason. At the same time most of them agreed on statement B (= identity in God), but here we can also find several objections. Some of them say that Taoism and Buddhism do not speak about God as such, others refer to different concepts of God, while others in the same group think that there are very close correlations between esoteric and exoteric levels.

Among the four statements it is the last one (D) that made the most significant division among the interviewed – especially among “the lays”. Although the statement can be interpreted as “God is spirit”, which is not in contradiction with Christian faith (i.e. the doctrine saying that Christ is real God and real man), the percentage of rejections – 52 – shows that here is the border of dialogue also for non-average, but educated and open-minded Christian believers. We should not be surprised at this information because the essence of Christian faith can be interpreted – in Schuon’s terms – as esotery got incarnated into exotery, which contradicts to Schuon’s conception. On top of all that Schuon considers our period of time to be the era of Darkness, and it can remind a lot of Christians of the millenary sect and their teaching.

The Catholics reacted in a bit more open-minded way than the Calvinists and Lutherans, and much more than the Evangelicals. The “lays” – apart from statement C – were much more understanding than the “clerics” as the latter group is closely attached to tradition and dogmas. We cannot guess whether the aversion of the interviewed Christians shown in their answers is due to Schuon’s super-religion or to mysticism as such. I think that the rejection of the statement in question proves the second hypothesis. The evidence can be seen on table 7.

Table 5. The meeting point of religions is mystic experience

.	Percentage of entire Agreements and entire rejections	Index of agreement (1-5)
Catholics	13-24%	2.7
Calvinists	12-29%	2.3
Lutherans	0-26%	2.4
Evangelical Neoprotestants	3-51%	2.2

“lays”	24-26%	3.0
“clerics”	7-27%	2.3

I have to draw your attention to the fact that this statement can be read in a work representing the “official” teaching of Catholic Church.⁷ Having considered all this I think that less than one third of both the young (also in religion) educated and the other church-going generations are ready to have a dialogue with Schuon’s unified theory.

How far are the different religions and denominations from the views of the interviewed?

I asked the interviewed to sign their distance from 29 different religions, or denominations. From these 29 I chose 19 to show how their attitude towards dialogue in this survey worked. In other words I wondered how they judge the other religions.⁸

Table 6. How far are the other religions from the interviewed

	Catholics (77)	Calvinists (74)	Lutherans (25)	Ev. Np. (37)	“lays” (63)	“clerics” (139)
Catholics	—	5.6	7.1	4.6	—	—
Lutherans	7.9	7.2	—	6.2	7.7	6.7
Orthodoxies	7.7	5.0	6.0	3.8	8.9	6.6
Calvinists	7.2	—	7.6	6.3	—	—
Jews	6.0	6.6	5.1	4.8	6.0	6.2
Baptists	5.6	6.6	7.1	4.4 ⁹	5.6	6.6
Anglicans	4.9	4.9	6.9	2.8	5.0	4.9
Adventists	3.7	3.8	5.2	5.5 ¹⁰	5.0	3.5
Methodists	3.6	4.2	7.8	5.9	4.4	3.7
Unitarians	3.4	3.2	3.8	2.9	3.6	3.2
Muslims	3.3	1.9	3.2	1.6	2.8	2.6
Buddhists	2.6	2.1	2.2	1.2	3.4	2.0
Nazarenes	2.6	2.7	3.8	3.7	3.3	2.2
Mormons	2.5	2.0	2.3	1.9	3.0	1.9
Members in Church of Faith ¹¹	2.3	2.7	3.4	5.4	2.7	2.4
Taoists	2.3	1.7	2.1	1.1	3.2	1.5
Krishna-believers	2.2	1.5	1.8	1.3	2.9	1.5
Jehovah’s Witnesses	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.6	2.8	1.6
Anthroposophists	1.9	2.0	1.6	1.8	2.3	1.8
average ¹²	4.0	3.6	4.3	3.5	4.1	3.1

While the Catholics and Lutherans were a little bit more understanding towards the other religions than Calvinists and Evangelicals, you can realize it seeing the tables before. The Catholics felt themselves close especially to Lutherans and Calvinists and Orthodoxies (above 7.0), the Lutherans to Catholics, Calvinists, Anglicans and Methodists, the Calvinists only to Lutherans. The Catholics felt themselves closer to Orthodoxies and Muslims than the Calvinists who – in the test – preferred Baptists, Methodists, Jews and the Church of Faith. Knowing the situations both in theological and everyday dialogue among religions we needn't get astonished for the Catholics felt themselves closer to Lutherans than the Calvinists; at the same time I cannot understand why the Catholics did not feel themselves farther from the relatively small Protestant groups than the Calvinists. So is it a bit surprising that the Catholics felt themselves more similar to Muslims than to Nazarenes, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Faith – while these groups are Christian.¹³ It is also interesting that not only the Evangelical Neoprotestants, but also Lutherans felt themselves closer to all Neoprotestants than Calvinists. In each case we can see the explanation in the persistent prejudices against the religious groups in question.

Let us remember that the majority (57 %) of the interviewed considered Christianity to be the only legitimate. In this way we can understand the cautious and rejecting attitude towards non-Christian religions. The data – here again – show that the "lays" were more accepting than the "clerics".

Some conclusions

Only a few (15 pc-s) of the interviewed people think that there is no salvation outside their religion/denomination/church. Quite a small part (25 pc-s) of them think that only the ways of Christianity can lead people to salvation and the half of them connect salvation to the belief in one God. But only a small percentage (6-20) of them accepted Schuon's views on essential unity of religions. The interviewed were more understanding towards the thoughts of some radical and modern representatives of Christianity – like Griffith, or Küng – most of their statements about rapprochement and dialogue were accepted. The acceptance of ideas that suggest the renewal of Christianity with the help of eastern religions and feminine issues are quite exceptional. This is the border of dialogue for the majority.

The interviewed all agreed – more or less – on the "official" Christian teaching about the dialogue among religions. On the other hand we can experience a rather strong dividedness, uncertainty and cautiousness when they fix the border between orthodoxy and heresy.

Answering the questions the Catholics and Lutherans – nearly always – seemed to be more open-minded than the Calvinists and much more than Evangelicals.. Maybe, it is due to the second Vatican Council. We also can see several differences between "clerics" (i.e. priests, pastors, RE teachers, students of theology and future RE teachers attending one of

the teachers' training colleges) and "lays" (i.e. church-going Christian intellectuals). It is the "lays" that show a more understanding attitude.

Judging the other religions all the interviewed (especially the "clerics" among the Calvinists and Evangelicals) are rather cautious, or definitely refusal. They think both the eastern religions and the small Christian denominations to be something that is called "sect" by public thinking.

On the base of all these we can conclude that the chance of further rapprochement and dialogue among religions depend quite a lot on correct pieces of information and knowledge about religions. We should organize more and more meetings, common religious, cultural and political actions for the believers of different religions, churches and denominations. Readiness and willingness for rapprochement and dialogue can be influenced by theories and ideologies on essential similarity, or transcendental unity of religions. That's why it is very important in which cultural, ideological, or political context they appear. Their chance may decrease if these – essentially positive – thoughts take the forms of fundamentalism, pseudo-science¹⁴, nationalism, or right-wing extremism.

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Absztrakt. A vallások közötti további közeledés és a párbeszéd esélye nagymértékben függ egyfelől a vallási ismeretek, másfelől a közös vallási, közéleti, kulturális és politikai akciók gyarapodásától. A közeledés- és párbeszéd-készséget az is jelentős mértékben befolyásolhatja, hogy a vallások lényegi hasonlóságára vonatkozó nézetek, valamint olyan elméletek, mint a vallások transzcendens egysége milyen kulturális, gondolati, ideológiai és politika kontextusban jelennek meg. Csökkentheti esélyüket, ha ezek a gondolatok fundamentalista, vagy a tudomány és a vallás szokatlan (sokak számára áltudományosnak érzett) ötvözetét képviselő, vagy a szélsőséges politikai nézeteket is felvállaló „szkíta-hum-magyar” kontextusban jelennek meg.

APPENDIX

1 Baptist, Adventist, Methodist and Pentecostal-

2 The number of persons

3 This notion is similar to that of Symmachus, the famous orator in the 4th century. Having a dispute with St. Ambrosius he claimed: „It is impossible that such a tremendous mystery can be reached from one direction only.”

4 Dei Verbum, a dogmatic constitution on divine revelation (Second Vatican Council – documents published in 2000).

5 Except for Judaism, of course, as it has a special position.

6 He reveals this teaching not to his disciples, but to the Samaritan woman, to an alien.

7 Herbert Vorgrimmer: New Theological Dictionary (Vorgrimmer 2006: 696)

8 The distance is measured on a ten-degree scale. If a religion, or church is given 10 it means that the interviewed feels very close to it.

9 Without Baptists.

10 Without Adventists

11 A pentecostal fellowship founded in Hungary. (Outside Hungary it does not exist.)

12 Except for degree 10 given to their own denomination.

13 In the eyes of several theologians Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christian (just Restorian), but they declare themselves to be Christian.

14 Public thinking take these phenomena as mixtures of science and religion.