Introduction

Some years ago, the present authors initiated a project having the working title "World-View and Personality." Our points of departure were as follows.

It is self-evident that people's contemporary views are subject to influences from many diverse sources. Two hundred years ago, practically all the inhabitants of Western Europe were, essentially speaking, practising Christian believers. Likewise, the citizens of most nations at that time may be easily classified as adherents of one specific religion, i.e., that typical of their particular culture. It seems a safe hypothesis to suggest that people did not question the beliefs they were brought up with to the same extent as the people of today's world do, due specifically to the following two reasons: 1) They did not possess adequate knowledge about other religions or world-views, 2) in pre-industrial society, people were to a much greater degree than at present dependent upon their kin and immediate neighbours for economic support. Accordingly, they were also subject to a much stronger social pressure. This further discouraged the exchange of one world-view for another in the fewer cases where knowledge about other outlooks had been obtained.

In this century, the factors mentioned above have decreased in significance. Information is spread quickly from one culture or continent to another owing to television, radio, cinema, and the press, and more books are printed than ever before. Transcontinental travel is fairly easy. Thus, most people have at least some knowledge about foreign cultures and religions, and many have first hand knowledge through journeys undertaken or immigration.

The industrialization process which took place during the last and the present century, somewhat in advance in Europe and North America of that which occurred in the rest of the world, has altered the social fabric in the direction of reduced social pressure on the individual from family and relatives. Accordingly, people today may generally choose, at least in principle, whatever work they prefer and change their place of residence to wherever they care to live. One consequence of this is the liberalization of attitudes and greater mental freedom.

Allegorically speaking, in the same manner as one may enter a supermarket and purchase the product of one's desire, one may today enter the supermarket of ideas and thoughts, and select whatever ideology that is appealing. This is a totally novel situation, conceivable only in an industrialized society that provides rich information about other cultures and ways of thinking.

Being a Christian today does not necessarily imply strict adherence to church dogma; in the same way, being Hindu or a Jew by birth does not, ipso facto, indicate clear acceptance of the traditional belief systems found in these religions. One has, to a much greater degree than ever before in history, the freedom to modify and construct one's personal world-view, or Weltanschauung.

It is a safe hypothesis to suggest that educated young people, such as university students, construct their own world-view more independently of tradition than people from other strata of society do. They read more, their youth is in their favour, and they are less prone than others to be victims of social pressure exerted by traditionalists. Accordingly, if one wishes to investigate the melting pot of world-views, students of various countries should be an interesting subject group for cross-cultural comparison purposes. What university students believe today, the rest of society may believe tomorrow.

If people today have, to a large extent, the freedom to select and further construct their own world-view, traditional collective belief systems are bound to be susceptible to considerable pressure, and personal belief systems, "world-views", will be more typical. The emerging patterns ought to be investigated.

When people select or construct their own world-view or Weltanschauung, they do not do so in a vacuum. They do so, rather, on the basis of accessible information, they are affected by people who are important for them, and, finally, their own personality structure is likely to play a significant role. We decided to investigate whether a relationship actually exists between an individual's world-view and his/her personality structure. Assuming that such a relation may be discerned, is it then systematic regardless of age, and is it cross-culturally consistent?

Something should be said about the concept of Weltanschauung or "world-view", which we have chosen to use in want of a better term. When speaking of a person's "world-view", we refer in this connection to the pattern of religious, non-religious, and quasi-religious belief systems by which the individual conceptualizes his/her world. We are not referring to cosmology as such, but rather to a holistic view of man, his place in society and nature, his purpose in life, including whatever supernatural ideas the individual may hold. We assume that all thinking people must of necessity conceptualize their world in some way, and decide what they think is the most plausible relationship between different aspects of it. Man's place and role in nature must be decided upon. We are not suggesting that individual world-views are always logical and consistent – on the contrary, they may certainly often seem paradoxical, mixing rational and irrational elements, due to the fact that people are subject