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IMAGE OF GOD IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract. *In this article we present results of an empirical research in the field of religion, on a sample of adolescents and their parents, in comparative groups of protestant, orthodox and atheistic families. In the doctrine of the church, as well as in one's personal religiosity, we can see how one's picture of God (imago Dei), good or severe finds its place in family education and the self-concept of a young person. These two images of God make three states of man: calm and believing; afraid and anxious; ambivalent. The main results of the research showed that the faith in God and in his unconditioned love, are at first learnt in the family, where the child receives the first kind of love, parental love. A child conceives God through the image it has of his parents. A man is an image of his god.*

Key words: *Image of God, Self-concept, Adventist, Adolescents, Family,*

Man's opinion of God influences his relationship with everything else and, most importantly, it determines his attitude towards himself, towards other people and, generally, towards the meaning of life. What kinds of thought can men have about God? Who is God? What is God like? Throughout the centuries, the concept of God was differently interpreted, explained, used and abused. Different answers to these questions shape an image of God in the conscience of man, which presents two fundamental (basic) aspects: descriptive-representational and emotional-valuable. The image of God is a subjectively experienced entity, total conscience of a person, integrating, in a unique experience, the observations, emotions and thoughts about the divine Being. The image of God is a concept wider than representation of God or comprehension of God, for it integrates intellectual, emotional and conative processes in a unique experience. We shall direct our attention to the question of God's goodness, one of the various features attributed to God or gods in archaic, polytheistic and monotheistic religions.

In all monotheistic religions God is absolutely good and His goodness does not consist

only of His love towards His creatures, but it is also embodies His inner nature (Kolakowski, 1987). This very feature of God in Judeo-Christian interpretation is a fundamental doctrine which can be read and interpreted again and again in the Holy scriptures. In the Ancient Testament we can follow the development of monotheism in a polytheistic environment. God in monotheism is the only divine Being governing all and everything. The creation (reality) is not divided among different centres of divine influences. An indivisible whole of man and God is the first requirement followed by loyalty: "Hear, o Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6,4,5).

In the New Testament the same requirement is imposed: "We love him, because he first loved us... He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1.John 4,19.8). *Agape* is a kind of love originating exclusively from the nature of the one who loves, and does not depend on desirable characteristics of the one for whom it is intended. This love is unconditional and lasting regardless of the fact whether it is answered or not.

Irinej Bulović (1996), comparing the philosophical and the Christian concept of God, states that the philosophical concept of God is, in essence, an intellectual, speculative-meditative category, independent of the concrete religious milieu in which a philosopher lives and thinks. The God of Christian Revelation is neither a God of religion, nor a god of philosophy, but a God of the Church. Man, by his nature, has a need and capability to meditatively make sense of and conceptually articulate his being, his life and experience, for himself as well as for others. However, this concept does not have its source in the logic of human opinion, but represents a subsequent description of primary experience in *direct communion with God*. Collaboration between God and man is founded on liberty and love, where God and man unite and operate as the Church or as a divine-human community of love, penetrating each other in the person of saintlike authentic men. The way of conceiving God is by means of love with the participation of reason, but without its monopoly. Christian theology can be rightly considered as an exact spiritual science, based on practice, for practice is the foundation of theory. "Therefore, we should meet, experience God and, then, tell a humble, true word about it, well aware of the fact that it is just partially said. A word is a symbol, experience is complete reality. Experience transcends the word, even if it is authentic and true" (Bulović, 1996. p. 131).

Without considering the philosophical and theological meanings of God's nature, we shall direct our attention, in this paper, to something which has been lived by an individual in his own religious experience of meeting God. In this research paper, I would like us to see a part of reality, on incarnation of the idea of God in family education and of self-concept in the adolescent who looks again for this incarnated God in himself. The main question I am attempting to answer is *how the idea of God is experienced and, then, how it is transformed into the religious experience of believers in the present time*.

A precondition of religiosity is to believe that God exists "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11,6). As Đuro Šušnjić (1994) says, there is faith if man meets God. M. Elijade (1986) states that myth is a certain penetration of man by the reality of metaphysical Being, that myths derive from true religious experience and are the true stories about the meetings of the saint force and men. Myth is the "rushing" of the saint into the World. Once "said", i.e. revealed, myth becomes direct truth and the basis of absolute truth.

We could speak here about various kinds of meeting, about God who reveals Himself to man, as well as about man who wishes to meet God. However, whether they are true or not, the biblical stories are often deformed in time without the true meetings with God by men who tell them, like the stories of serial reproduction in which the story is always developed in an uncertain direction. Religious idea, myth, the first message becomes, in serial reproduction in thousands of variants, enriched and deformed, by adding new contents, omitting some parts, stressing others... Thus richness resulted, in which the true idea was lost like a needle in a haystack. Those who seek the truth are disappointed in their attempts to answer the questions: What is the truth? Who is God? What is God like? On the other hand, those who seek an aesthetic experience and diversity, enjoy even the labyrinth of untrodden territory. There are also some who elevate themselves above individual truths, and in their own experience are aware of their own truth.

If a man believes in the existence of God, he will try to establish a communication, especially in prayer, to conceive Him intellectually; so he studies holy books, attempts to show his love to God by giving various offerings and by sacrifices. In his search for God, man looks for believers. Sometimes, he seeks God in himself. The intensity of religiosity gets gradually greater, which contributes to the quality of life. Elijade (1986) thinks that the more religious a man is, the more exemplary his behavioural models and activities are, the more he dives into the real, and the less he risks to be lost in non-exemplary, subjective and odd activities.

As every man differs in something from another, it is logical that his experiences of the holy and his statements about the divine are different too (Šušnjić, 1994). Differences in the degree of religiosity can be studied through various indicators of religiosity, every one of them contributing to a more complete understanding of personality and its relation to God in whom one believes. Đuro Šušnjić (1995) is of the opinion that the sociologist of religion should avoid philosophical and theological debates, directing his interest to empirical study of religion: the very subject of the sociology of religion is not religion in itself, but the religious behaviour of men. For a sociologist, God exists as long as man believes in Him.

In the sociological research of religion, it is important to pay attention to religiosity indicators, to religion components by which both quality and intensity of religiosity can be measured. Indicators are manifested in a series of individual concrete moments and forms; so their number and the level of their presence with the believers determine the type and intensity of religiosity.

Dragomir Pantić (1993) asserts that religiosity, like other valuable orientations, can be operationally expressed in the sense of dimension, i.e. religiosity against non-religiosity with a series of transitions (intensities) which can also be a particular quality, as well as by a neutral zone between two orientations, which is called the *mixed type*.

Each component of religiosity can be expressed as a dimension. The *cognitive component* is manifested through beliefs in supernatural being and varies from absence of such beliefs to acceptance of complete creeds of a doctrine. The *emotional component* is measured as intensity of affects of reverence, adoration, humility, thankfulness towards the divine Being. The *conative component* is demonstrated by the degree of readiness to act according to convictions and emotions. The *action component* refers to religious behaviour, the practice of religious rites, varying from their absence to maximum respect of prescribed rites. A particular component of religiosity concerns the attitudes of

believers and non-believers toward religious organizations and priests, and can vary from consideration and placing them on the same level with God to their total denying them and identification with manipulators. The importance of the moral components of religiosity is also emphasized, starting with complete moral reliance on faith to moral autonomy concerning the Church and God. Within the mentioned components of religiosity, there is a wide range of indicators, which point to the fact that we can speak about a hierarchy of religiosity indicators being the base for determining stratification of religiosity itself and its components (Pantić, 1993).

Religiosity, therefore, is a multidimensional phenomenon. We can consider it as a generalized dimension with different subdimensions mutually connected. Indicators and their classification can be organized in different ways. We shall start from the system of beliefs that an individual accepts intellectually and emotionally, by participating in religious rituals which are, somehow, manifested, visible religiosity, but, if practiced in themselves, they become only a form. The indicator of religiosity is also communication or transmission of one's attitudes, i.e. missionary activity, when a believer transmits his creeds to others, from family members to accidental acquaintances. The next indicator is loyalty to the church, as a form of religious affiliation. The variables "Attitude towards God", as a religiosity dimension, designates at one end trust and at the other distrust.

The question relating to the way salvation can be gained is crucial and because of that comprised by this research. Within the church ideology two ideas are interwoven - justification by faith and justification by one's own deeds. They are opposite or complementary, depending on how these two tendencies are refracted in the conscience of an individual. The image of God revealing the truth and starting the story stands in the very beginning in the conscience of every man. Depending on what God is like in one's experience there are two ways of salvation. We start from the assumption that two images of God are possible in Christianity: the image of a good God, a guardian, who loves unconditionally and saves by Christ's sacrifice all who love Him; and the image of a severe God, a controller, who punishes, judges, requests men to keep all the commandments so as to be saved. These two images of God create three states of man: one of peace and confidence; one of fear and anxiety; one of insecurity and ambivalence.

"The way of salvation" is a variable which determines if a believer intends to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ's merits or by his own merits. "The life style" of the believers is often marked by self-denial, by a sober and careful way of life, in contrast to those who do not answer neither to themselves or anybody else. "The attitude toward the church" constitutes a dimension of adhering or non-adhering both to the institution and to believers.

A very interesting group for scientific research are Adventists who belong to Protestant Christianity: however, by their return to Christian origins, they have also accepted, almost completely, Judaism. Relatively small in number, but widely spread, The seventh-day Adventist church "wins", in all cultures throughout the world, believers who, relatively quickly, change their life style and become "typical" believers, recognizable among themselves and at large. In the second half of XX century tens of thousands of Adventists have been subjected to numerous medical tests. The main cause for that interest is the Adventist life style which improves health and prolongs life by 6-8 years (The Adventist Health Study, 1978; Milošević, 1992; Kuburić, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d; 1996e).

In October 1994, the 150th anniversary of the official foundation of the Adventist movement was celebrated. During these 150 years the number of Adventists has grown so much that the movement, proclaiming hope in Christ's Second Coming in the near future, has turned into a church with its own organization system, having the task to proclaim the threefold angel message from the Revelation, underlining the second coming of Christ. The people who accept the message endeavor to transmit it further, to their relatives and friends, as well as to their children.

One cannot become a member of the SDA church without a previous "reorganization" in life, i.e. a conversion confirmed in public, before witnesses, by baptism (by immersion). Believers do not smoke, do not drink alcohol, coffee, do not wear jewelry, do not swear, do not work on Saturdays... those are quite measurable entities of behaviour. Besides, one can be a believer only if he respects the Ten Commandments of God and goes to church. On the contrary, a church member who publicly transgresses some of the commandments, for instance, works on Saturdays or has committed adultery, as well as a member who, without a good reason, does not attend public worship for two years can be excluded. Members are faithful believers, authentic believers who do their best to live according to the religious requirements and believe they are "a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1. Corinthians 4,9). It seems to me that I can handle concrete and measurable variables of religiosity comparing them with an orthodox and an atheistic environment.

1. METHOD

The research was planned according to the conception of a retrospective-transversal study. The research was done in ten towns in Yugoslavia, in Adventist churches and public schools and in faculties.

Sample. The sample consisted of 541 subjects (257 male and 291 female). The sample included adolescents (from 13 to 19 years old) and their parents from varied religious backgrounds (adventist, orthodox, atheist) and from lower to upper middle class socioeconomic levels. The sample comprised the experimental group (N=266) and the control group (N=275) ones. The experimental sample consisted of the Seventh-day Adventist believers who live in a nuclear family. Answers were given by Adventist members, pastors, parents, teachers and teenagers. The control sample was formed of high school students coming from the general population and their parents. The subjects of these groups were well standardized in relevant characteristics.

Instruments. The instruments used in this research were:

The valuegenesis questionnaire about faith which has been constructed by the Search Institute in Minneapolis (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992; Benson & Donahue, 1990). We used four scales: the attitude toward God, the way of salvation, life style and loyalty of the church.

The questionnaire about mothers and fathers, which is a version of Rohner's questionnaire: Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire - PARQ (Rohner, 1984). There are four scales: Warmth/Affection; Aggression/Hostility; Neglect/Indifference;

Rejection (Undifferentiated). Our Questionnaire about education methods in the family has two scales: Autonomy/Control and Support/Forbid.

The Offer self-image Questionnaire - OSIQ (Offer et al., 1963; Offer et al., 1981; Offer et al., 1982). There are 11 scales: Impulse Control; Emotional Tone; Body and Self-image; Social Relationships; Morals; Vocational-Educational Goals; Sexual Attitudes; Family Relationships; Mastery of the External Word; Mental Health; Superior Adjustment.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of this research is to identify the areas where youth are confused regarding grace and law. Several items in the questionnaire probed their understanding of grace:

I know that God loves me no matter what I do.

I am loved by God even when I sin.

There is nothing I can do to earn salvation.

I know that to be saved I have to live by God's rules.

The more I follow Adventist standards and practices, the more likely it is that I will be saved.

The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life.

The main emphasis of the gospel is on God's rules for right living.

For both grace and law, a five-point response format was employed ranging from "definitely agree" to "definitely disagree". For ease of interpretation we have combined the two "agree" and the two "disagree". The extent to which the percentages fail to total 100% represents the group selecting, "I'm not sure".

I know that God loves me no matter what I do. That God's love is unconditional believe 80% of Adventists in Yugoslavia and 3% disagree. In American research (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992) the young people were nearly unanimous in affirming their belief that God's love is unconditional (95% agree; 1% disagree). They believed that nothing they could do would change God's gracious intentions toward them. But when it comes to following through to the logical outcome of that belief - that their salvation is totally in God's hands - most could not take steps. Twice as many felt that they must contribute something to the redemption process as they felt that God would provide everything needed. Only 29% agree that there is nothing they can do to earn salvation.

In the statements given above, responses to items on the Law Orientation Scale, show that in every case more youth agreed than disagreed. Youth struggle with legalism. For instance, in the statement *I know that to be saved I have to live by God's rules*, 92% agree and nobody disagrees. (In the American sample 83% agree; 9% disagree). On these items, the more one agrees, the more one is oriented toward law. Adventist youth have grown up with a constant emphasis on the necessity of obedience to the law and with admonitions to hold up the standards ringing in their ears. The problem is that the youth - understandably - have a tendency to connect any call to holy living with their salvation so that being saved is the result of and the reward for right behavior.

Intercorrelations Among Measures

Variables as a bipolar dimension:

The various selves measured by the OSIQ and the scales that constitute those selves:

1. Impulse Control (well-developed ego apparatus - poorly organized ego apparatus)
2. Emotional Tone (affective harmony relatively stable - great emotional fluctuation)
3. Body and Self-image (well-structured self-concept - confusion about body boundaries)
4. Social Relationships (well developed empathy - bad object relations)
5. Morals (well developed superego - poorly developed superego)
6. Vocational-Educational Goals (effective, reasonable plans - failure to work well within the school system)
7. Sexual Attitudes (relatively openness to sexuality - conservative attitudes)
8. Family Relationships (open communications - communication gaps)
9. Mastery of the External World (ability to deal with frustration - inability to visualize oneself finishing a task)
10. Mental health (lack of overt symptomatology - severe psychopathology on a clinical level)
11. Superior Adjustment (well-functioning coping system - poorly developed ego strength)

Religiosity is expressed through:

12. Attitude toward God (trust - distrust)
13. Way of salvation (grace orientation - law orientation)
14. Life style (asceticism - hedonism)
15. Loyalty to the church

Parental acceptance-rejection - Mother:

16. Warmth/Affection
17. Aggression/Hostility
18. Neglect/Indifference;
19. Rejection (Undifferentiated)

Parental acceptance - rejection - Father:

20. Warmth/Affection
21. Aggression/Hostility
22. Neglect/Indifference;
23. Rejection (Undifferentiated)

Family education style:

24. Autonomy/Control
25. Support/Forbid
26. Family worship (there is - there is not)
27. Sex (male - female)

Intercorrelations presented in Table 1 indicate that there is a significant relationship

between self perception, religiosity and perceived parental behavior. These relations, however, are to a certain degree dependent on the sex. We find that differences between male and female persons are revealed through their attitude toward sexuality where girls are more conservative, emotionally fluctuating, more discontented about body changes and more critical of the church. Males and females may sometimes respond differently to parental acceptance-rejection.

Religiosity can be expressed through faith in God, Bible reading, prayers and participation in worship. Adventists believe that a man achieves or receives his salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, by obedience, leading a healthy life and loyalty to the church. Adventist adolescents showed difficulties in resolving the perpetual tension between "saved by grace" and "judged by our works". Their general tendency was to support both law and grace as means of salvation. As they struggled to affirm both streams of thought imbibed from their Christian nurture, they exhibited split personalities, unable to harmonize logical opposites (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992).

Table 1. Interrelation of Independent and Dependent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
1	1.00																											
2	.60	1.00																										
3	.40	.66	1.00																									
4	.43	.67	.59	1.00																								
5	.43	.13	.10	.20	1.00																							
6	.34	.18	.25	.32	.46	1.00																						
7	.13	.41	.50	.38	-.16	-.05	1.00																					
8	.46	.49	.41	.44	.22	.35	.18	1.00																				
9	.48	.55	.51	.45	.29	.36	.27	.42	1.00																			
10	.60	.71	.69	.59	.26	.32	.38	.44	.61	1.00																		
11	.39	.43	.47	.53	.29	.55	.25	.45	.51	.49	1.00																	
12	.28	.22	.04	.18	.31	.24	-.12	.25	.20	.17	.16	1.00																
13	.25	.32	.30	.27	.05	.03	.20	.14	.28	.34	.15	-.33	1.00															
14	.18	.05	-.08	-.04	.29	.17	-.27	.15	.12	.01	.08	.68	-.35	1.00														
15	.09	.05	-.07	.02	.11	.11	-.10	.21	.04	-.01	.10	.63	.66	.66	1.00													
16	.18	.38	.33	.39	.04	.19	.26	.45	.28	.33	.34	.06	.18	-.10	-.04	1.00												
17	.28	.30	.25	.30	.14	.17	.12	.49	.22	.30	.23	.06	.19	-.02	-.01	.57	1.00											
18	.19	.29	.28	.32	.09	.16	.23	.41	.28	.34	.25	-.01	.17	-.04	-.06	.54	.60	1.00										
19	.25	.36	.33	.36	.13	.20	.19	.51	.30	.38	.32	.04	.19	.00	-.03	.68	.73	.73	1.00									
20	.27	.31	.31	.32	.13	.13	.15	.49	.24	.28	.31	.12	.10	.05	.12	.40	.25	.23	.30	1.00								
21	.28	.25	.27	.20	.09	.10	.09	.44	.19	.27	.19	.04	.16	.02	.01	.24	.37	.33	.35	.57	1.00							
22	.30	.32	.29	.31	.11	.13	.15	.50	.26	.35	.25	.04	.19	.01	.02	.29	.36	.51	.43	.58	.56	1.00						
23	.33	.31	.35	.27	.18	.17	.09	.51	.28	.34	.26	.06	.19	.08	.04	.24	.35	.41	.46	.65	.73	.73	1.00					
24	.18	.26	.30	.29	.07	.23	.13	.49	.20	.26	.23	-.06	.30	-.10	-.15	.43	.50	.36	.46	.32	.37	.40	.40	1.00				
25	.17	.28	.37	.26	-.07	.26	.27	.45	.25	.31	.26	-.16	.29	-.23	-.19	.48	.49	.42	.48	.38	.49	.41	.43	.61	1.00			
26	.12	.13	.05	.03	.15	.08	-.12	.25	.08	.01	.08	.55	-.40	.57	.59	.02	.05	.00	.09	.12	.01	.02	.08	-.06	-.16	1.00		
27	.17	.26	.19	.09	-.06	-.16	.47	.13	.08	.17	.10	.09	-.02	.03	.17	.12	.11	.12	.13	.13	.03	.10	.03	-.01	.07	-.14	1.00	

Out of the many problems young people face, we shall confine ourselves in split personalities to the self-concept which presents a general experience of the self in the various fields of life and activities. The results show that there is a difference between adolescents from Adventist families and the general population in variables: body image, moral and sexual attitudes. The adolescents from Adventist families being more religious, with strict moral standards, more conservative and insecure in relations toward the opposite sex, more discontented with their own body. The differences are not statistically significant in the others variables. There is a conflict area between *body* and *moral*. It reminds me of the apostle Paul who said: "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7,14.24).

If we compare these results with earlier research (Kuburić, 1994) we can find that religious experience has specific problems: lower body and self-image and conservative sexual attitudes on one hand and a higher sense of duty, responsibility, and concern for others, on the other hand. The self-concept of the adolescents who have psychiatric problems is considerably lower, compared to the self-concept of the healthy population. The difference is significant at a level of 0,01 in all dimensions of self-concept except for the dimension of sexual attitudes. This research has pointed out that there is a relation between the acceptance of the children in the family, the self-concept, and psychiatric problems in the period of adolescence.

In the variables of parental acceptance-rejection, the difference between the two groups is insignificant. Though family relationships are equally harmonious, the atmosphere in the Adventist family is found to be a little colder because of authoritarianism. The reason for this colder family atmosphere is a necessity for developing high standards in child-behavior. This is easier achieved by discipline. The Adventist family is organized around the principle of work, order and responsibility: therefore, rationalism dominates while emotions, as a changeable category, are pushed aside (Weber, 1989; Kuburić, 1996a).

In America (Potvin, 1977) as well as cross-culturally (Rohner, 1975b), it has been reported that rejected children tend to view God, the gods or whatever form the supernatural takes, as being malevolent - as being hostile, punitive, and capable of inflicting death, sickness, and misfortune. Children raised with love, on the other hand, tend to view God or the supernatural as being benevolent - that is, as being warm, supportive, and kind (Rohner, 1984). It is obvious why there is more legalism in the Adventist family (Kuburić, 1996a).

The picture of God in mental representations depend on real experience in the family or the church with significant others. They may accept *grace orientation* in theory, but they cannot grasp it experientially. As long as religion remains a frustrating, unhappy experience, people are going to walk away from it.

How does God present Himself to man in the Christian religion?

The Bible begins with the following words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". While creating the world, in every phase of His creative act, God admired the beauty of what was created by His word. At the end "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1,4.10.12.18.21.25.31).

In the beginning everything was good. However, according to the Bible, evil entered men's heart, and God repented that he had made man (Genesis 6,6), and decided to prevent the campaign of evil by a flood (Genesis 6,13).

Initially, in men He created God recognized only goodness. Later on, God saw evil in man and destroyed everything, "Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark" (Genesis 7,22.23).

After the flood Noah offers burnt offerings and God promises that seedtime and harvest should not cease... Reproduction of life will not be forcefully interrupted. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow: "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a token of a covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9,11-13).

The rainbow of God's mercy descends from heaven and touches the earth in the name of Jesus Christ. The apostle John states: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his

only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3,16.17).

From then, in the conscience of man there are two images of God. God who admires all he created, and God who destroys His creation; God who accepts and God who rejects; God who punishes, and God who loves. And everything started on the day when man became free. If God gave man the liberty to choose and punished him for choosing, then it is a pure absurdity, then there is no liberty.

The fact that truths could be different and opposed to each other is obvious even on the level of the senses. If we put one hand in freezing water and the other one in hot water, and then touch an object (or put both hands in lukewarm water), information will be different and true, that one hand is cold and the other warm (Kreč & Kračfeld, 1978).

Man's attitude towards God constitutes his religiosity. From the very beginning we come across two kinds of religiosity in the Bible. Two brothers, Cain and Abel offer to God different sacrifices. "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock" (Genesis 4,3.4).

There is also religiosity when God answers man's call. God accepts the sacrifice offered by Abel. The effects of religiosity are obvious in interpersonal relations. Religious hatred follows us from the first pages of the Bible: evil intended to destroy good. Christianity, on the contrary, bids us to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12,21). It is not an accomplishment to answer hatred by hatred but always to show love even towards our enemies (Matthew 5,44), and it is learnt in one's family. Love overcomes fear (1. Johan 4,18), hatred and "covers the multitude of sins" (1. Peter 4,8). Religiosity, understood in such a way, presents the best psychotherapeutic method. On the other hand, the religion of fear leads to the identification with the aggressor, and it becomes a persecutor, on Inquisition, a war.

In Christianity, the ideas of good and evil, justice and mercy, love and hatred are interwoven and overlap. The opposite in man are settled psychologically. The image of God fluctuates, sometimes it threatens, sometimes it lights up with love, and then fear and uncertainty follow again. The intention of this paper has been to explain some inner laws in the individual vision of God. How much is one's self-concept connected with the image of God whom one sees in himself?

Experiments with ambiguous images, where two organizations are possible, demonstrate that the perception of an ambiguous image mainly depends on previous orientation (Kreč & Kračfeld, 1978). The impact of previous orientation in the system of family stimulants is obvious in religious orientation.

With regards to the fact that in Christianity there are two images of God: a severe one and a good one, we can wonder what the vision of God depends on. Does an individual, a church, or religion on the whole see God as someone who punishes and should be propitiated by sacrifices and offerings, or avoided, or as someone who is merciful and from whom we can confidently ask protection from life and the world we live in.

I have started from the family transfer postulate - family atmosphere and education contribute to religious differentiation, i.e. to the vision of God according to the figures of one's own parents. The feeling of acceptance by the parents leads to the feeling of confidence of God. If the children are afraid of their parents and feel rejected, they will also be afraid of God. The beginning of faith in God starts even in the first year of life, by creating the basic confidence (Jerotić, 1991; 1994). God images are in the shadow of the

first experiences with significant others.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In this research I have not been concerned with religion in itself or with nature of the divine Being. I have not been so occupied in studying the position of religion in the general population and the trends of secularization or desecularization. In fact, I have been interested in man's contact with religion and in his experience, the experience being often muddled and the information ambiguous. I have wondered what contributes to the differentiation of believers. How does religion influence the process of growing up and to what extent it is related to parental behaviour in the process of children's socialization. All my research leads to one conclusion - that in Christianity everything depends on the image one has of God.

According to the results obtained in this study, we can conclude that religion has a powerful influence on family life (family rites, going to church, spending one's free time), life style, diet, clothing, system of values, manner and aim of education, where religious system of values and behaviour control prevail. Parents insist on discipline, they have more requirements and are inclined to perfectionism. There is a tendency to perform work in a hard and honest manner and to avoid everything that could negatively affect the spirituality of family members and their physical health. As for children's education, religious families, in their behavior, are inclined to implement control rather than autonomy, to stop children rather than to encourage them. Adolescents born in a religious family have a more developed superego, they are conscientious and responsible, but they have more requirements towards themselves and their parents, which creates mutual dissatisfaction. Religious parents are more dissatisfied with their children, having more expectations than non-religious parents. Religious children expect more love and warmth from their parents. The children think that they are not loved enough because of authoritarianism.

On account of the high ideals (the clash between desire and capability), misunderstanding and frequent frustrations in the social milieu, in a traditionally secularized society, more often an individual uses defensive mechanisms (rationalization, projection, repression, conversion). The feeling of sinfulness is more stressed with those who have initially lived a *wordly* life style, only to be converted to God later in their life in some religious organization; that is why they accept more easily the theory of justification by faith. On the contrary, those who have grown up in a religious family and met God by means of parental education, are inclined to believe that salvation is deserved by deeds and can be lost if one sins, which reinforces anxiety, but also morality. The image of God is shaped indirectly, through parental authority.

This research points out to the need to establish a balance between justice and mercy, severe love and tender love. A religious family needs to show a little bit more of freedom and trust towards their children. It seems to me that the more regulations in the organization of a family life exist, the less love and understanding will be among family members.

Religious people can be enriched by a new human experience (a new dimension of life), but they can also be more burdened with new duties and responsibilities, like

parenthood which is fulfillment and joy, but concern and responsibility too.

The harmony is reflected in an intertwining of love and responsibility towards children as well as of love towards God and aspiration to resemble God in relation to other men. This is the essence of humanity enriched by religion or of life burdened by religion - which depends on one's personal vision of it. I wonder whether one religion can discover the essence of all religions. Is it enough to know a man in order to be able to know what a man is? Is it possible to know one's self and to recognize oneself within another person. If so, why then so much misunderstanding among men? Probably because many do not know themselves, do not know their religion, do not know others, for there has been no love among them, and love has an integrating power and protects an individual, family and church from decay. Thus, as it is possible to have a healthy integrated person, it is also possible to have a healthy family, and a sound religious organization.

Therefore, I am of the opinion that religion cannot be considered unambiguously, since there are at least two kinds of religions: some acting positively and others acting negatively both regarding an individual and the community. Even the same religion can influence different individuals differently, who are conditioned by their inner selves or by previous experience. Religiosity also cannot be considered unambiguously, for there are at least two types of religiosity. To one belong those who in the symbol of God see love, justice, mercy and develop in themselves a relation towards others based on trust, who have peace reflected in their creativity and interpersonal relations, bright eyes... On the other hand, there are those with religious fear from a severe God who punishes, from hell and an uncertain future, a fear that leads to magic, neurotic creativity, to the purchase of salvation and final disintegration. Those who are ambiguous in their relation to God neither give up hoping definitely nor surrender to despair. It seems to me that exactly this combination of two presentations of God achieves the most powerful effect. Insecurity and the possibility of a double interpretation impose on the believer a constant readiness and caution. Thus believers become dependent on the institution where they experience, as one of them said, a constant alternation of ups and downs. Our poet Njegoš (Nyegosh, 1930), in his "Mountain Wreath" says:

»None yet e'er drank a honey'd draught,
Unmixed with cup of bitter gall,
And cup of all for honey equally doth call,
That so, the mixture one may easier drink.«

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SLIKA O BOGU U RELIGIJSKOM ISKUSTVU

Zorica Kuburić

U ovom radu prikazani su rezultati empirijskog istraživanja iz oblasti religije, koje je urađeno na uzorku adolescenata i njihovih roditelja. Upoređivane su protestantske, pravoslavne i ateističke porodice. U doktrini crkve, isto kao i u ličnoj religioznosti vernika, možemo prepoznati kako nečija slika o Bogu, dobrom ili strogom, pronalazi svoje mesto i u porodičnom vaspitanju i u slici o sebi mlade osobe. Ove dve slike o Bogu formiraju tri čovekova stanja: mir i poverenje, strah i nemir, ili pak ambivalenciju. Osnovni rezultati ovog istraživanja pokazuju da je vera u boga i njegovu bezuslovnu ljubav, prvenstveno naučena u porodici, gde deca primaju prvo roditeljsku ljubav. Dete doživljava boga posredstvom slike koju ima o svojim roditeljima. Čovek je onakav kakav je njegov bog.

Ključne reči: *slika o Bogu, slika o sebi, adolescenti, porodica*