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Review of Kuburić's "The Self-Image of Adolescents in the Protestant Family"

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Zorica Kuburić, *The Self-Image of Adolescents in the Protestant Family*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2015.

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The Self-Image of Adolescents in the Protestant Family, written by Dr. Zorica Kuburic, will be of interest to scholars of sociology and psychology because of its original and very interesting attitude towards religion and religion's influence on children in Protestant families. It is a voluminous work that deals thoroughly with the religious self-image of adolescents through theoretical and empirical research on the issue.

The book is structured into two parts, theoretical and empirical, while the theoretical part consists of three separate sections. In the introduction, the author speaks about her reasons for writing the book, as well as the questions that accumulated in her mind from early childhood to adulthood, such as: In what areas of personality is religion particularly reflected and how does it change a person's life? Is religion a need of the individual and which needs does it satisfy? What does God mean for the happiness of an individual?

The theoretical part is divided into three sections: The Family, Religion, and Youth. 'The Family' section, as suggested in the headline, refers to the living community of parents and their descendants. The author emphasizes diverse approaches to the family and various typologies depending on what is taken into account - marital structure, generational structure, and so on. The functions of the family have changed over time, and the focus has been transferred from the economic to the psychosocial sphere. Particular importance in the research is given to the behavior of parents toward their children in three dimensions, defined by Shaffer as: parental acceptance-rejection, possessiveness-neglect, and democracy-authoritarianism. The way that parents treat their children greatly affects their personality,

especially when it comes to rejection, which results in children who become emotionally unstable adults who are inclined to judge themselves negatively.

The author builds on the work of Djuro Šušnjić, who claims that religion has three forms of existence: a) religion in itself; b) historical forms of religion; c) religion as a personal fact. Religion is at the same time both objective and subjective, an individual and collective phenomenon. Accordingly, we have different types of religion, where Christians represent the largest share of the religious population (33%) followed by Muslims (21%). Special attention is given to the position of Protestantism and Adventism from an historical perspective, including the doctrine of Ellen White and her role in the Adventist Movement.

The third part, entitled *Youth*, deals with the concept of 'self' in various fields of life and activities. The author speaks about: the psychological self, social self, sexual self, familial self, adaptational self, and religious self. The religious self includes: *attitude towards God*, beliefs regarding God and their influence on personal life; *the way of salvation*, the way a person believes salvation is acquired; *lifestyle*, which deals with restrictions in food, drink, clothing and behavior affected by religious beliefs; *attitude toward the Church*, including devotion to the church, respecting church rules, a feeling of acceptance in church and the attitude of tolerance towards the believers.

The second part of the book is formed by empirical research, with a focus on the Adventist family. The fundamental goal is to determine the effect of religiosity on the family life and self-image of adolescents. The research was conducted in the larger towns of Yugoslavia, in Adventist churches and in primary schools, secondary schools and universities, using a retrospective-transversal study.

The results of the research are presented in five parts. Part I shows the results of a qualitative analysis, where the believers give their thoughts on differences between Adventists and the general population, as well as the differences in lifestyle and education of Adventist

children. The results show that fundamental characteristics of Adventist families are that religiosity affects all spheres of their lives and sometimes isolates them from the society. Some positive characteristics of Adventist families are values such as: stability, contentment, peacefulness, tolerance, less conflict in the family unit. They try to live honestly, even though they acknowledge it is not so easy nowadays. However, there are also some negative characteristics of those families, such as formalistic way of life and lack of intimate communication among the family members. The author concludes this part by noting that the self-image of adolescents can be both positive and negative, realistic and idealistic, depending on the parts of their own self that are taken into account.

Part II presents the results of the quantitative analysis, showing the differences between the polled groups on a variety of variables. The results were obtained from two samples of the respondents: adolescents from Adventist families and adolescents from the general population. The main difference between the groups deals with religion. In Protestant families, religious education is highly appreciated and the family atmosphere is authoritative. The father is the key figure in forming the attitudes towards God and religion, and fathers contribute the differences between the examined groups more than mothers. The dominant value that determines all other activities of the family is the influence of religion on the family life-style. According to the results, the difference between young men and women is significant when it comes to emotional tone, body picture, and attitudes towards sexuality and church. The young women in both groups are more conservative about sex and the family is more important to them in comparison to young men's attitudes. The results show that adolescents from the general population do not differ significantly among themselves regarding their self-image. However, there is a difference regarding the religiousness. The adolescents who come from Orthodox families are more likely to believe in God and are more loyal to the church than those whose parents are non-believers.

Part III deals with families of adolescents in terms of the goal of education, the importance of money, religious upbringing and social activities. Parents in Adventist families give priority to religious values and personal happiness. The most important goal for them is to make their children acquire trust in God, and it is much more important than achieving higher education. Religious upbringing includes development of habits such as praying, fasting and adopting church rituals. The biggest difference between the adolescents from Adventist families and general population is the attitude toward friendship, where the members of Adventist families are more friendly by nature and more interconnected because of the religious services. The role of the parents—both mother and father—is very important in the development of the personality of the children. The Adventists are more dissatisfied with their children because they have a strong desire for perfectionism.

Part IV presents the religiosity of Adventists which is examined through four variables: attitudes towards God that is expressed either as mistrust or trust and belief in the way of salvation, either by the merits of Jesus Christ or by their own merits. Most Adventists who believe in God say that their religion takes priority in their system of values, while only a small number of respondents do not take notice of the demands and promises of religion. The results also show that religion for many provides the meaning of life. However, there are some adolescents in Adventist families who do not realize the meaning of life, as well as some adolescents from the general population who are non-believers who give the same response to the question on the meaning of life. The variable *the way of salvation* is the most significant according to the author, because it shows the way the person believes he/she will be saved. There are two types of beliefs in salvation, by faith and by holding onto God's Commandments. Young people from Adventist families are inclined to believe in justification by deeds, because they have to hold to the Ten Commandments as a precondition for

membership in the Adventist community, believing that they can receive faith by obedience, leading a healthy life, and loyalty to the church.

Part V deals with the object of the study, the self-image of adolescents who are exposed to the influence of religion since birth. The life-style of Adventists is influenced by their beliefs, they believe in God and lead their lives in a way they think God expects them to, they have high moral standards, and their goal for education is develop trust in God. The role of the family in forming the attitudes towards God is of vital importance and the results show that young people share the same opinion regarding religion as their parents.

At the very end of the book, the author speaks about the practical implementation of the results of the research. The research was directed towards family and the role of the family in religious transmission and formation of the personality of children. The feeling of acceptance within the family results in high levels of trust in God. When the child is afraid of his/her parents, he/she is also likely to be afraid of God. The overall conclusion is that religion has a strong influence on the family life, not only in everyday activities, but also on the system of values and control of behavior. Adolescents from religious families, according to the results, have better developed egos and are more mindful and responsible. However, they are more dissatisfied than other adolescents because they and their parents put higher demands on themselves that are not so easy to achieve. They seek harmony in life, but religiosity by itself does not provide it.

To conclude, the author asks herself and readers some questions that cannot be easily answered and that can be the subjects of independent studies, such as why there are so many misunderstandings between people, when religion teaches us to be more human and more tolerant. This book is very valuable not only for pedagogues and sociologists, but for every person who intends to develop personal competences through life-long learning and acquiring knowledge.