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Contemporary Religiousness of University Students and Desecularization of Serbian Society

Abstract: *In the first part of this paper the author is trying to place contemporary religiousness of Serbian university students both into the wider context of the religious situation in Europe and the world and into the context of the sociological theory of (de)secularization of the world and of the post-socialist Serbian society. In the second part of the paper the author states and analyzes the data about Serbian students' commitment to religion and church.*

Key words: *atheization, counter-secularization, university students, religiousness, Serbia.*

Secularization paradigm, desecularization of the world and of Serbian society

In the 1960s and 1970s sociology of religion used to have ample experience-based corpus of evidence to prove that the process of secularization was a current trend, primarily in Western societies, and it utilized numerous religious indicators, and at the same time developing adequate research methods.

i.e. in quantifying religiousness and/or commitment of people to religion and church in a particular religious and denominational area. These developments had an impact on sociology, particularly in the field of sociology of religion, because it raised awareness of some major deficiencies not only in quantitative expression of the process of desecularization, but also in the conceptualization of the secularization paradigm, which had to have an impact on its theoretical rethinking. However, we cannot say that every *challenge* of the secularization process was free from ideological admixtures and meta-scientific assumptions, although they attributed the same features to the secularist stance. All these instances illustrate the complexity and multidimensionality of the secularization problem and the incompleteness of this very concept and of certain challenges of the secularization paradigm in sociology of religion.

There are several models which dispute the process of secularization: let us first mention the model which disputes it by way of viewing religion as a necessary, universal and irremovable ingredient of human life. There are no such quantitative or any other kind of data which can challenge religion, for everybody is religious just as nearly everyone speaks a language (Yinger). That is why this way of disputing secularization is closely linked to the model of calling its paradigm into question through viewing man as *homo religiosus*, i.e. a being religious by nature. Religiousness is not associated with man's social life; it is therefore not necessarily a social phenomenon, but comes from his biological being (Luckmann). In the end, this means that parents pass on to their children an inborn disposition for religiousness.¹

1 It could rather be said that the only thing that parents pass on their children is the disposition to adopt certain values, to think, believe, feel, learn etc. When we put it that way, we cannot neglect the impact of socialization on religiousness, which is something all churches bear in mind when they organize denominational religious instruction in houses of

Closely related to this challenge of secularization is the view that there are three crucial and irremovable transhistorical constants of human life: the above-mentioned transhistorical constant of human which seeks fulfillment of true and unique religious need, the transhistorical constant of human situation in general, i.e. certain borderline questions of human existence (primarily death) and existential problems.² Regardless of how these problems are presented to the individual or a social group, one can always cope with them with the aid of the transcendent. Finally there is the transhistorical constant of existence and functioning of human society itself, which, in order to survive, must seek its fundament out of itself, out of the political, in fact in the pre-political, absolute and transcendent, since permanent critical relation to oneself, permanent questioning of oneself and society in which one lives, or centering itself and placing its fundaments in what is relative causes one's own downfall (Vrcan, 1997: 68).

Secularization is also disputed in the field of defining the concept of religion. The conclusion about the process of secularization depends on the meaning in which the concept of religion is used in empirical research of this field (Blagojević,

worship or public schools. It is difficult to neglect individual's psyche, his/her experience of living with other people, historical period, the totality of social space etc. when explaining the phenomenon of religiousness.

2 Daniel Bell, who launched the idea of the 'return of the sacred' in the 1970s and thus launched a fruitful discussion, is a good example of how culture and religion can be viewed as a response to the predicament of human life. According to him, neither human nature nor human history are starting points to understand culture. Culture is a set of different, coherent or contradictory and troubled answers to essential questions of human existence (death, duty, love, tragedy etc.). In the context of this view on culture, religion is a set of coherent answers to essential existential questions which implies the codification of these answers, a certain ritual form which provides emotional bonds among people within the framework of institutionalized organization as a form of human association, which, in turn, provides continuity and permanence of these rituals. (Bell, 1986:14-15).

2005). There is another model that challenges the concept of secularization through ideological focus and characterizations which insist on its fictitious or mythological meanings, ostensible relevance or, at best, on the meaning of a great historical story (Luckmann). We will also mention the model which challenges secularization by reducing the scope of empirical evidence to the so-called conventional religiousness, which is actually subject to this process, but it does not hold true for the so-called non-doctrinal religion, which is invisible, diffuse, not institutionalized and is supposedly not affected by the process of secularization. This is an important distinction, which secularists do not perceive, although one should distinguish between religion and religious, between the conventional, i.e. church religiousness and religiousness in general (church-going is just one form of religiousness), and between religion and secular religion. Secularization simply a make-believe, since religiousness lies in the domains which are still not clearly distinguishable, beyond the public and political, because “there is abundance of what is sacred, but we do not recognize it because it is wrapped in religious attire” (Hammond).

The model which disputes secularization directly in the domain of empirical evidence might be the one with the strongest power of evidence. It is based on the evidence used by secularist paradigm itself; since the mid-1970s and particularly 1980s, and in post-communist societies since late 1980s and during 1990s, the revival of religion is becoming more evident, not only by “the return of the sacred” and different kinds of the so-called post-modern religiousness, but also in its traditional, institutionalized and even in conservative forms. This kind of argumentation is supplemented with qualitative analysis of the contemporary social and spiritual situation in modern, secularized societies with widest framework for spiritual movements which head in the direction opposite from the one set by the

strong dominance of the secularization process. That is what brought us to the concept of *deseccularization*, which is indispensable for an analysis of religious changes both in modern post-industrial and post-socialist 'transition' societies, including university students who live in them, who are a special indicator of religious changes that lead to deseccularization.

However, not all authors use the term deseccularization to denote the process of religious changes which came to the spiritual scene of many societies in the late 1970s. Still, even when we talk about the revival of conventional religion or its resurgence, about the return or awakening of the sacred, about new religious movements or cults or the appearance of Charismatic Christianity, about return to mysticism, about esoteric or occult religiousness etc., we actually refer to the same process which now questions the more or less accepted theory of secularization as the dominant trend in religious changes took place the then modern industrial societies. Of course, in the 1980s there were still texts about secularization and its concept, but from a particular viewpoint, which questioned its validity and heuristic fertility. There was also a viewpoint which questioned argument-based reliance on facticity, particularly in terms of facts which referred to social and religious situation in the world of the 1970s. Against the backdrop of this social and religious flux, there was a turn in sociology of religion, an attempt to change the ruling paradigm (disputed in the 'defense' of this paradigm by consistent secularists, such as Wilson), which could conceptually be expressed as a movement of society from secularization to deseccularization, or even religious *reconquista*. Consequently, religion regains its own domain of the religious, but it also regains the public and social domains, areas which gradually became suppressed in previous centuries due to the influx of secular order and mentality, especially in the domain of moral (religious) values. This turn was also seen as a standstill

in secularization or a crisis. Naturally, now it was not a crisis of religion, but crisis of secularity; it has also been viewed as movement from desacralization of the sacred to its return and renewal, especially since 1980s, when sociology of religion started to focus sects and modern cults or religious groups which termed themselves as religious movements or groups which belong to new youth religions (*Neue Jugendreligionen*).

Deterministic framework of this turn is complex due to a number of major changes in society which are seen by most sociologists as events which paradigmatically confirmed that both the positions of religion and religious institutions in society and spiritual atmosphere in culture had changed. On the one hand, religious traditions are gaining political importance, while on the other, these traditions are announcing their return by deprivatizing the adopted syncretic beliefs and behaviors, which are important elements of the process of desecularization of religious life. These occurrences show that religion has not lost, and that it regained potential to inspire great collective efforts of people to introduce changes which concern the essence of their political and religious lives. In particular, these occurrences include the following: 1. Growth of fundamentalism in Islamic states in the 1970s, first through the Islamic revolution in Iran, and then in a series of Islamic political movements in other countries 2. Changes in religious situations in many Western countries, such as the rise of Christian conservatism in the US, growth of radical Christianity in Latin America, or changes in the strategy of Catholicism in Europe, starting with adaptation to the modern world to re-evangelization of the same world, particularly with incentives that were supposed to come from Catholicism in the East, primarily from Polish Catholicism as the most efficient role-model. In that sense, next important deterministic framework is the following item 3. Active, or at least supportive role of religion and church in toppling communism

in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, which laid foundations for the religious situation which can be described as radical deatheization of these societies when large sections of the populace approached or returned to religion and church, which had been suppressed or stigmatized for decades. Consequently, religion started to assume a more important role in the public in communist countries, first in Poland, where the opposition movement named *Solidarity*, headed by Lech Wałęsa, expressed its political rebellion against communist totalitarianism through traditional religious imagery, then in East Germany, in the USSR, where traditional Christian Orthodoxy started to wake after more than fifty years of persecution and being completely marginalized by the socialist society. Finally, in the former socialist Yugoslavia and in present-day Serbia, there was a huge growth of public, or to be more precise, political (mis)use of religion during the 1980s, and particularly in the 1990s during wars, regardless of denomination. However, stabilization of religion calmed down in the first decade of this century after the identity crisis that dominated the previous period of crises, which still cannot be called a memory from the past.

At the turn of this century, authors faced problems and ambiguities of religious changes toward desecularization, just like those who wrote between the 1950s and 1970s faced problems concerning the concept and process of secularization. Paradoxically as it may seem, there are some authors who meanwhile “dismantled” their own theoretical foundations. An obvious example would be that of Peter Berger, who was once a strong proponent of the secularization theory (Berger, 1969). At the end of the 20th century, in his famous and often-quoted text (Berger, 1999; 2008), he wrote about the process of desecularization of many societies or even the entire world and the assumption that we are now living in a secularized world is false. “The world today [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places

more so than ever. This means that the whole body of literature by historians and social scientist loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken” (Berger, 2008:12).³ The most erroneous assumption comes from the Enlightenment, i.e. that modernization leads directly to the decline of religion and religiousness, although it can hold true in cases of some societies, for example Western, and that is what brought certain geographical and civilizational blending of the secularization paradigm, which is what David Martin did (Martin, 1994:123-128; Berger, 2001:23-24). However, it is clear that the relationship between modernity and religion is neither simple nor unilateral even in the aforementioned Western societies, let alone other societies, which do not belong to this group. Bearing all that in mind, social groups and individuals who do not adapt to the modern secularized world, but fight against secularism and oppose it, are of special importance. At this point we can neglect the individuals and social groups that are not active in this opposition, and cannot tolerate the relativity of social values, individuality, uncertainty and uncertainty in the modern secularized world. Conservative, orthodox and traditional religious organizations and movements, not only in Christianity, but also in other world religions, writes Berger, which are active at the international scene in rejection or fighting against the effects of secularization, are growing everywhere, unlike the movements or organizations that had invested much energy during many decades to adapt to the modern world. All of this is important, because the current process of desecularization is primarily defined and understood through the concept of *counter-secularization*, and it is supposed to denote a social process opposite to secularization (Karpov, 2010; Карпов, 2013). On the other hand, it tells about

3 “Let me, then, repeat, what I said a while back. The world today is massively religious, is *anything but* the secularized world that had been predicted (whether joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity.” (Berger, 2008: 20).

the complexity of religious and social situation throughout the world: in many modern societies there is a co-existence of secularization and counter-secularization tendencies, protagonists and force, and studying them as non-opposite processes is still an important task of modern sociology of religion.

Therefore, if desecularization of the modern world is always interpreted as some kind of response to earlier or current secularization or atheization, it means that every religious expansion or increase of religiousness or connection of individuals and social groups with religion/church is not desecularization, but a special case of growth of religion and expansion of its social impact within the context of responses to previous or current trends of secularization. In his text about desecularization of the world, Berger is imprecise, since while mentioning examples of numerous manifestations of desecularization in the world he mentions the examples of viability, survival and adaptation of religion to the conditions of the modern world, which cannot be interpreted as reactions to the process of secularization or the corresponding trends. Karpov clearly emphasized this imprecision in his text, a successful and pioneering attempt to systematically conceptualize the concept and process desecularization as counter-secularization, a multifaceted transformation of religion which encompasses society as a whole (Карпов, 2012: 114–164). Growth in religiousness in America, between the 18th century, when it was low (17%), and the 20th century, when it was very high (62%), can hardly be termed as desecularization, since the once low percentage of religious people was not connected with secularization of the country, whereas the growth of Orthodoxy and other religions (e.g. Islam and Protestantism) that took place in modern Russia, can be directly linked with the response to the previous process of coercive desecularization or atheization of the Soviet society. This confusion is further exacerbated by the absence of conceptualization

of desecularization and unambiguous use of this concept in comparative research throughout the world, which are desirable. Now there are many terms which sometimes denote tendencies that are quite opposite to secularization (secularism), and sometimes they are not connected with the response to the secularization of society: flourish and renaissance of religion, its renewal and revival, fundamentalism, growth of religion, religious movements – these are just some of these terms.

Viewing religious changes in the context of reaction to atheization and secularization of society is appropriate due to the process of religious changes within Serbian society since the late 1980s until today. However, this period is not homogenous and there are certain stages one can identify within it, such as the initial turbulent stage of abrupt desecularization, when these religious changes were associated with both the once-present dominance of atheism in culture in deconstruction of social values and to ethno-religious mobilization, or homogenization of nations and cultures in conflicts which occurred in huge parts of the former Yugoslavia (1991–1995); there was also a less tumultuous stage of steady religious/denominational identity and social visibility of religions and churches (1996–2013). Furthermore, while explaining the specific features of how these changes in desecularization had occurred both in Serbia and other post-Yugoslav societies, one should not ignore general, local, social and political situation during the breakup of the Yugoslav socialist community and the creation of independent nation states on its foundations or the ensuing conflicts which involved three denominations. Not because of their merits, until mid 1990s, religions, denominations and churches of these communities had been given social roles that could not be even imagined just a little while ago in the previous system. Of course, in this sense, we are not negating the intrinsic, autonomous religious rationale of desecularizing trends, but we are simply trying to point

to the visible and efficient activists and protagonists of counter-secularization of society after the collapse of the socialist order. Turbulent social circumstances of armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 1999 conflict with NATO in Kosovo and bombing of Serbia, political flux at the beginning of the 21st century, a grave economic crisis, unemployment, brain-drain from Serbia, difficult financial circumstances of many people and collapsing economy are the circumstances in which Serbian population and young people live. In this situation, public opinion polls show that the population trusts the most in religious organizations, i.e. the Serbian Orthodox Church, out of all institutions. Young people, university students included, have lived in these circumstances for twenty years, but they have ceased to be discouraging, disapproving or stigmatizing toward religion and religious organizations. Nowadays young people do not live in an environment in which atheist culture is forced upon. In the 1990s they were the social group which declared in favor of religious/denominational affiliation and trust in God, apart from the oldest members of the population. This piece of information is symptomatic for the desecularization trend of the time, because it was young people and active population who were the most atheistic part of the socialist society of the time.

Some religious changes among youth during 1980s and 1990s

The generally discouraging socio-political pattern of existence of religion and church in socialism was very detrimental to church and people's commitment to church and religion in the long run. It was visible in numerous domains of religious-ecclesiastical complex, in most general terms, including its past importance in society, up to religious beliefs and ritual practices of churches. Even though the process of atheization, which had started right after the Second World War, had not had such radical impact on people's religiousness until 1950s, it became such

in the decades to come, and the consequences remained until the 1980s.⁴ Although one of the rare sociological surveys of the time was territorially limited, since Dragoljub B. Đorđević carried it out in 1982 in the region of Niš, where Orthodoxy is predominant, the results which pointed to fully developed process of secularization can cautiously be generalized and applied to Serbian society as a whole, since it is difficult to presume that the religious situation was essentially different in that region when compared to the rest of the country due to the predominant spiritual climate in the socialist society and culture. Of course, this kind of spiritual and socio-political climate is what leads to the assumption that a great number of subjects displayed a high level of conformity, but this element is also indicative of the process of coercive religious changes toward atheization of society. Therefore, even though it is certain that until 1980s there were more religious people than reported by Đorđević, these dire conclusions are not far from the indisputable fact that religion and church were socially stigmatized, primarily Orthodoxy and Serbian Orthodox Church. Đorđević thus concludes: the process of secularization was deeply rooted in the area which is homogenously Orthodox and was strongest when compared to other denominational areas. In Orthodox areas, regardless of whether this religion was dominant, like in Montenegro or Serbia proper, or multid denominational, like in Vojvodina or Croatia, the most conspicuous was the distancing from religion and Serbian Orthodox Church; Orthodoxy lost its huge impact as moral ground or motivator for action, and also, the participation of people in church rites and church life in general was in steep

4 Several years after the Second World War the percentage of students who attended religious instruction classes was up to 80%, like in Belgrade, and in some places it could go as high as 90%, as shown by the 1951 data, one year before religious instruction in state schools was forbidden. This kind of practice was less frequent in the country, because priests were indolent. (Radić, 1995: 159; 161).

decline. According to Đorđević, Orthodox religiousness faced a deep crisis. The region of Niš, in which Orthodoxy is dominant, was extremely secularized and atheized in the early 1980s, and according to his data about structural elements of religiousness, the process of secularization reached a high level in this area when compared to areas where Catholicism was dominant. This conclusion comes from the results of his survey, regardless of whether they refer to religious identification, incidence of religious beliefs or ritual practices among the respondents. The author concludes that not only some forms of religious consciousness and practice are facing problems, but also that some other forms are in steep decline and are virtually extinct, particularly in case of certain forms of religious practice which are of crucial importance to every institutionalized religious organization, Serbian Orthodox Church included (Đorđević, 1984).

This image of the general situation with religion, but in a more radical way, was typical of young people, and primarily of university students until the late 1980s. There are two authors whose writings are important for comparison of recent research and data about religiousness of young people and university students with the data gathered thirty years ago. They are Dragoljub B. Đorđević, a sociologist of religion, and Dragomir Pantić, whose retrospective papers from the late 1980s and early 1990s (Pantić, 1988; 1993) are important for the explanation of the trends in religious situation of the then Serbian society. He had been investigating this phenomenon by means of public opinion polls and socio-psychological surveys since the 1970s. Socio-psychological surveys of religiousness among young people in the 1970s clearly indicated a low level of common religiousness both on the entire territory of Yugoslavia (Pantić, 1974) and in the City of Belgrade (high-school graduates, data from 1972 and 1975). Pantić identified a low level of religiousness of young people using the indicator of self-assessment of

religiousness: in the first instance there were 11% religious people, and in case of high-school graduates from Belgrade there were only 9% of those who are religious. In the second half of the 1970s there were visible changes of attitude toward religion and church revival in the Catholic areas of Slovenia and Croatia both among general population and high-school students (Rotter, 1984; Vušković 1987; Pojatina, 1988).

However, while empirical evidence show that there were concrete changes in religiousness toward desecularization of society in the aforementioned areas, at the same time, surveys conducted in Serbia and Montenegro which included both general population and some of its segments, say, young people, recorded a very low level of religiousness. In the late 1970s only 3% of young people were interested in religion (Pantić et al. 1981). The result was the same in 1985 among the students of the University of Niš (Đorđević, 1987), while in 1987 there were 10% of religious university students in Belgrade.⁵

In the period between the early 1980s and early 1990s, the general social crisis, crises in economy, politics and widely-accepted values were deepening in the former Yugoslavia. In this socio-political context sociological research and public opinion

⁵ The 1984 research into classic and secular religiousness of both urban and metropolitan areas of Belgrade yielded results similar to those from the research we mentioned, although it is possible to notice certain hints of certain religious changes. At the beginning, the 10% of conventionally religious respondents did not indicate these changes, but rather confirmed that there was a tendency to maintain the low level of religiousness in Orthodox areas. However, an increasingly lower percentage of irreligious respondents and a comparison of the percentage of atheists with the previous decade indicates certain changes in attitude toward religion, which was certainly an omen of religious changes toward the renewal of traditional religiousness. Unlike 1974, when the percentage of convinced atheists was highest (58%), the number of atheists significantly fell in 1984, and there were 38%, whereas the percentage of respondents who belonged to the 'mixed type' increased. (Pantić, 1988:67 and ff.).

polls identified an obvious change in people's religiousness, including the dominantly Orthodox areas. These changes among the Orthodox and other populations are significant for sociologists in terms of their theory: they imply wider changes, starting with an increased level of religiousness and stronger bonds with traditional religious organizations; it leads us to the conclusion that these changes were going toward re-evaluation of the entire social significance of traditional religious systems in the former Yugoslavia and their importance for the increasingly popular national corpus; another trend was the desecularization (or deatheization) process in the eve of conflicts and breakup of the country. These surveys provided several important conclusions about religiousness in general, regardless of the denomination, including those pertaining to religiousness among the Orthodox, including both young and general population.

The fact that the changes in religiousness in the late 1980s were obvious was confirmed through a representative sample of young population in the former Yugoslavia (aged between 15 and 27) in a survey conducted in 1989 by the Institute of Social Sciences and the Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research from Belgrade (Mihajlović et al., 1990). An average of 34% religious respondents was sufficient to prove that the level of religiousness among Yugoslav youth had changed. Like many other surveys, this one also determined that there were differences in religiousness depending on the republic or province where the respondents lived. There were some significant differences in religiousness among the young population in Serbia, depending on the area and ethnicity. The level of religiousness of young people in Serbia proper (provinces not included) was 26% (compare: in 1974 there were 11% of religious young people in central Serbia, and one year later this number amounted to 17%); there were 34% of religious among youth in Vojvodina, whereas in Kosovo there were as many as 48%. This survey also determined

that the number of atheists among non-religious youth had declined both in Serbia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia and in 1989 there were only 12% of atheists. The fact that this was a serious religious shift is further corroborated if the data are compared with the data from the past, e.g. with 1974, when the number of atheists (33%) was almost the same as of those who stated they were not religious (31% – see Pantić, 1990: 213). Changes that took place between 1985 and 1989 in the ‘mixed type’ are also evident. This type included subjects who are hesitant, ambivalent and indifferent to religion. In this period this number dramatically fell from 24% (in 1985) to merely 9% in 1989, and it is reasonable to assume that most young people who belonged to this ‘mixed type’ opted for religiousness in the latter period. According to Pantić, this preference of the young population for religion, or to be more precise, quick revival of religiousness among the young population in the second half of the 1980s is a result of the deepened social crisis which had a serious impact on younger generations, causing widespread unemployment, loss of perspective and mass anomy. Furthermore, the author points out another important conclusion: two years before the breakup of Yugoslavia, young people had become territorially and nationally homogenized, when religious-ecclesiastical complex assumed the role of compensator and national protector. This role was soon to become more prominent among all social strata in the bloodshed of wars in the Balkans. Thus in 1989 the number of religious young Albanians who lived outside Kosovo was significantly higher (72%) than among those who lived in Kosovo (50%). It was the same with young Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina (34%) and those who lived in other parts of the country (51%), and with young Serbs in central Serbia (26%) when compared to those living in Kosovo (43%).

In the summary of the main findings of other surveys carried out in the 1990s which comprised the adult population

of the socialist Yugoslavia and a series of findings of opinion polls conducted until 1993 reported by Dragomir Pantić (Pantić, 1993), one can conclude that significant religious changes are reflected in growth religiousness among the young generation, particularly those who belong to Orthodox civilization. Young people became noticeably more religious than before, and it is new that they were now more religious than those who are ten years their seniors, which certainly contributes to the growth and maintenance of general religiousness in an area, since it is reasonable to assume that basic values, which are accepted during primary and secondary socialization are difficult to abandon later in life. Another conclusion that comes from these surveys points to a steady trend of religious restructuring.⁶ Just as in the mid-eighties atheism declined among irreligious population, in the same manner, in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a dramatic fall in the number of people who were ready to identify themselves as atheists, whereas the so-called militant atheists were reduced to a handful. This was a firm evidence of the depth of religious changes toward desecularization of social communities which emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Serbia and

6 The emphasis on the fact that religious changes in the late 1980s and 1990s were taking place by way of reducing the difference in levels of religiousness between the young and adults, particularly the oldest members of the population, increased levels of religiousness among the young generation, reducing the gap between levels of religiousness between men and women, increased religiousness of urban population, particularly in big cities which have a huge share of that renewal, significant decrease in differences between the so-called typical believer and other people of 20 years ago – all these are the most important results if the research conducted in 1993 and of some other sociological research on fundamental religious changes in post-socialist societies (Blagojević, 1995). The fact that gender, age, place of abode etc. ceased to play a significant role in religiousness, or that the impact of these factors weakened, simply prove that religion has become far more universal and more acceptable than it used to be during socialism.

Montenegro included, where this process can be better substantiated with regard to the fact that the numbers of religious people in the entire population had been low for almost thirty years.

Current religiousness among university students in Serbia

In the period from 2000 until now, commitment of people to religion and church has not declined, but is steadily kept at the level detected through empirical research conducted in the 1990s. Therefore, indicators of religious self-identification are high, indicators of conventional religious beliefs are lower than the previous ones, but the most important belief, belief in God, is always above 50%, as well as belief that Christ is Son of God. Other core dogmatic beliefs are not widespread among the population in this way, but their revival is noticeable if we take into account the situation we had about thirty years ago. Fewest people believe in eschatological dogmas. Indicators of conventional religious behavior point to an ambivalent situation: indicators of traditional commitment to religion and church, such as baptism, church wedding, burial service and celebrating major feasts are high and are close to those of denominational identity, whereas indicators of current religious practice are least present when compared to other indicators of religiousness and commitment to religion and church, but even this domain of attitude toward religion and church displays changes toward desecularization of Serbian society (Blagojević, 2009).

In this perspective we should also analyze the present commitment of university students to religion and church. In investigating religious, moral and socio-political values of Serbian students we used more than twenty indicators of their commitment to religion and church. An analysis of these findings is the first stage in gaining insight into students' religiousness. The second step refers to mapping results from previous surveys,

primarily with the results from the 1985 systematic research into students' religiousness conducted by Dragoljub Đorđević at the University of Niš, but we will also compare them with results of recent research into religiousness of the general population in Serbia, primarily with findings provided by the Christian Cultural Centre, Center for European Studies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in 2010. As we have already mentioned, different levels of commitment of students to religion and church can be illustrated with a table containing 16 indicators divided into three groups: A) indicators of religious identification; B) indicators of conventional and non-conventional beliefs of students, and C) indicators of conventional religious practices.

Table 1. Indicators of students' commitment to religion and church in Serbia 2013 (in %)

A	Percentage
Positive denominational self-identification	85.8
Self-declared religiousness	69.2
B	
Belief in God or some power	87.1
Belief that Jesus Christ is Son of God	67.6
Belief in resurrection	47.9
Belief in heaven and Hell	43.5
Belief in transition of soul	34.6
C	
Baptism	79.5
Celebrating major feasts (regular)	76.8
Memorial service common in the family	50.0
Going to church at least once a month	31.3
Attending liturgy (mass, jumu'ah) – regular	9.2

Prayer (regular)	23.3
Holy Communion (regular)	11.6
Fasting before major feasts	26.3
Confession to priest (regular)	6.2

A) Indicators of students' religious identification

Denominational and religious self-declaration are integral parts of every conventional form of religiousness and obligatory indicators which are analyzed in every sociological research on religiousness and commitment to religion and church. However, as introspective and independent indicators, they are not reliable in the assessment of conventional religiousness, since extended denominational and religious self-identification do not guarantee that some other integral parts of conventional religiousness will also be extended, such as attending liturgies, fasting, Holy Communion, frequent visits to a house of worship, or belief in life after death. Even in imposed atheism, the percentage of people who declared their denomination or considered themselves religious was much higher than the percentage of the people who believed in dogmatic foundations of the declared denomination, and was even higher when compared to the findings pertaining to religious/ritual practices. However, even though these two indicators of religiousness were almost always used together in empirical research, the results show that personal religious self-declaration was always below denominational self-declaration, but this discrepancy eventually declined, which was considered to be another indicator of religious changes toward desecularization. Denominational identity is a “soft” indicator of religiousness, because it is used to estimate the number of people who are actually religious in a conventional way when we take into account other indicators in estimating

religiousness of people in a certain religious or denominational area, or, what is more desirable, adequate scales or index of religiousness, for example. Thus a great number of respondents in sociological surveys and public opinion polls who are undecided, irreligious or inclined to atheism have denominational identity, although, according to their own statement and other data they do not fall among believers. Denominational identity is therefore not merely an expression of exclusively religious, but also of a wider socio-historical context in which the traditional religion and church had a prominent place and strong influence in society, on social groups and individuals. That is how denominational identity actually expresses attitudes toward tradition, nation, cultural background and the religion of one's forefathers. That is why denominational identity does not always mean being a believer, but rather being a member of a wider national community. On the other hand, it certainly does not mean that such an indicator is not valid in estimating commitment to religion and church, but rather that its independent use in an analysis of religiousness and of religious situation is not adequate in terms of methodology. It is an indicator which has its own social relevance because it points to historical and traditional commitment of the population to religion and church, and which certainly provides a significant initial insight into religious situation in a denominational area, or simply useful, but still just an initial insight into religious changes.

The indicator which shows self-assessment of one's (ir)religiousness is the most frequently used one in empirical research of religiousness. Self-assessment of religiousness is a more reliable indicator of religiousness than denominational identity, although it has certain limitations which we cannot further explain in this text. Generally, this indicator of religiousness in empirical research conducted since the late 1980s until today shows that respondents are much more prone to see

themselves as religious or believers. University students are by no means an exception, but rather the best example of desecularization of society. We can see that in the following tables and the chart when we compare the values:

Table 2. Denominational identity of university students in 2013 and 1985 and of general population in 2010 (in %)

Denomination/Year of research	2013 students CReS	1985 students Đorđević	2010 general population CCC, Konrad Adenauer
Christian Orthodox	79.1	65.6	78.6
Roman Catholic	1.7	1.1	6.7
Islam	3.4	0.5	6.3
Protestant	0.8	0.3	0.7
Other	0.8	0.8	0.4
None	4.4	31.7	7.1
TOTAL sample of religiously affiliated	85.8	68.3	92.4

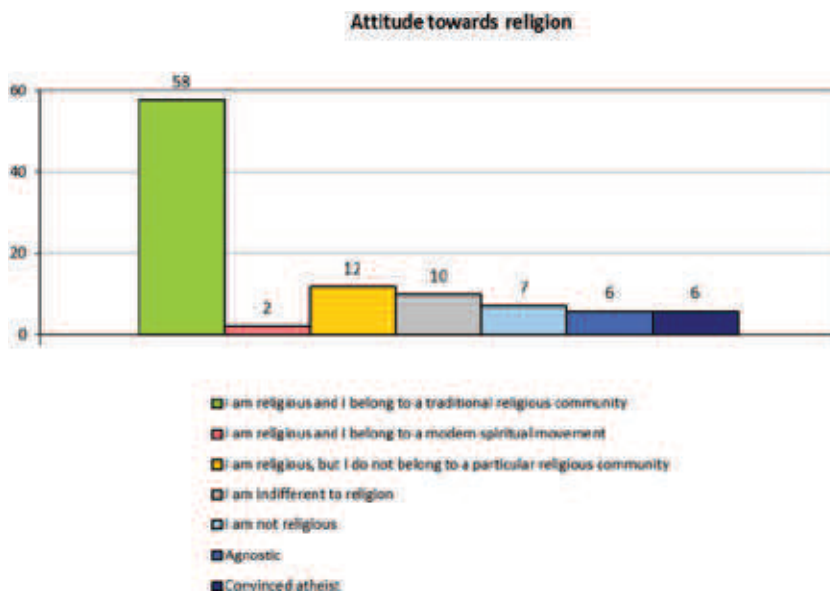
Sources: students of the University of Niš 1985: Đorđević, 1987; religiousness of Serbian citizens in 2010: Blagojević, 2011.

Table 3. Personal religious self-declaration of students in 2013 and 1985; general population in 2010 (in %)

Religious self-declaration / Year of research	2013; students CReS	1985; students Đorđević	2010; general population CCC, Konrad Adenauer
Religious, member of a traditional religious organization/believer	55.8	2.9	77.9
Religious, belongs to a modern spiritual movement	2.0	–	–

Religious self-declaration / Year of research	2013; students CReS	1985; students Đorđević	2010; general population CCC, Konrad Adenauer
Religious, but does not belong to a religious community	11.4	–	–
Indifferent to religion/ambivalent	9.5	16.2	3.9
Not religious/not a believer	6.9	51.2	10.7
Agnostic	5.5	–	–
Convinced atheist	5.6	29.7	3.1
TOTAL religious	69.2	2.9	77.9
TOTAL non-religious	18.0	80.9	13.8

Chart 1. Students' responses, 2013. Question: "What is your attitude to religion?"



Data from the tables offer some basic conclusions: denominational identity of Serbian university students is now widespread and is more pronounced than denominational identity of the University of Niš students about thirty years ago, although more than half of students of this university used to be willing to declare their denominational origin even then, which is an indicator of traditional commitment to religion and church. The information that even 10% of students in the 2013 survey did not answer the question is indicative, and the percentage of denominational identity might be higher if we disregarded those who did not respond. All in all, students primarily identify themselves with the dominant denomination in Serbia, i.e. Orthodoxy, and prevalence of this identity almost absolutely corresponds with the percentage of those who declare themselves Orthodox from the 2013 general population survey. According to this indicator, we could not conclude as we did before that students are one of the most atheized social groups, although we might mention that in order to explain this phenomenon, both in the period of socialism and today, one should not disregard students' conformity, acceptance of dominant ways of thinking, the stigma it used to carry and the currently positive status of religions and churches as public institutions. Of course, the same goes for the second indicator, which is given in the tables: religious self-declaration of students is rapidly growing today when compared to the data from mid-1980s, when there were less than 3% of respondents who declared themselves believers. Today there are almost 56% of students in Serbia who are religious in a conventional way and who belong to traditional religious communities, another 2% are religious and belong to other spiritual movements, and more than 11% are subjectively religious. Therefore, the total population of conventionally and unconventionally religious students is almost 70%. On the other hand, almost one fifth of the students are not religious: they

are agnostics, irreligious or convinced atheists. The number of irreligious people in general population is somewhat smaller (about 14%), and it is reasonable to suppose that students accordingly have an important part in the irreligious population of Serbia. The conclusion is not problematic, although it is quite expected, that according to denominational self-identification standard, students are generally very religious in a conventional way and that there is no significant difference between them, as a specific social group, and the rest of the Serbian population. This simply shows that denominational affiliation is widely accepted as a significant and strong indicator of group (religious or national) identity⁷, but also as a soft indicator of personal religiousness. Among Orthodox students there are about 10% of those who are indifferent to religion, almost 6% who claim not to be religious, almost 4% of those who claim to be agnostics, and there are even convinced atheists among the Orthodox, 1.3% of them. Of course, there are 65% of Orthodox students who identify their personal religiousness with membership in a traditional (Orthodox) religious community. Muslim students are much more consistent: 94% declare themselves religious and that they belong to a traditional (Islamic) religious community. We cannot say anything about students of other denominations because their population is negligible.

Subjects' gender used to determine the professed religious affiliation. According to available data, this could not be said of general or student population today. If we take into account religious affiliation and gender, we will see that although female students are more likely to declare themselves religious (38.4% to 32.9% of religious male students), that difference is much smaller when compared to results of previous surveys, particularly in the case of general population. There are

⁷ Only 3% of the respondents of the survey (N=1058) did not state their ethnic affiliation. 88.2% of the respondents declared themselves as Serbian.

no differences between male and female students in cases of indifference to religion, because about 5% of both sexes share this attitude, while, unexpectedly, there is 1% more irreligious female students than males. In this population there is a small difference in percentage of female students who are subjectively religious without belonging to a particular denomination, whereas male students declare themselves as convinced atheists slightly more than female students, but the difference is too small to say that it is a typically male view. Anyway, according to this indicator of religiousness, we cannot say that there is a single position which is typical of a particular gender. It used to be possible in the case of general population: a typical religious person was a woman, and a typical convinced atheist was a man.

Information about student's religiousness at each university are also important. They can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Self-assessment of students' religiousness (in %)

Universities/Self-assessment of religiousness	Religious	Undecided	Not religious
University of Belgrade	68.7	10.9	20.4
University of Novi Sad	77.1	9.7	13.1
University of Priština seated in Kosovska Mitrovica	97.1	0.0	2.6
University of Novi Pazar	96.9	0.0	3.1
University of Niš	59.8	14.4	25.8
University of Kragujevac	86.3	6.8	6.8
Private universities	63.2	10.3	26.5

Just as the surveys conducted in the late 1980s, this one also shows that religiousness is higher in geographical and neuralgic religious/denominational areas in which the entire religious-ecclesiastical complex appears as a resource for homogenizing collective identity, a resource of resistance or guarantor of preservation of the real or merely perceived danger to culture and national community: thus, students who live and study in Kosovska Mitrovica (primarily Christians) and in Novi Pazar (Muslims) express their religiousness far above the average, and it is just a few percent short of a 100% religious self-declaration. The number of students who declare themselves as not religious is highest at private universities and at the universities of Niš and Belgrade.

B) Indicators of (un)conventional beliefs of students

In terms of denominations, religious beliefs can be dogmatic or non-dogmatic. Christian religious beliefs are diffuse, codified and expected in this group. Dogmatic core of Christianity (Orthodoxy) involves many beliefs, such as the core belief in God as Holy Trinity, in Jesus Christ as Son of God, in resurrection, in afterlife, in Heaven and Hell, in rewards and punishments on the other world. However, people also believe in certain truths as integral parts of other, non-Christian, pagan or post-modern movements and religions (e.g. in transmigration of the soul), they can be superstitious or act in that way: e.g. they believe in magic, in astrology, that 13 is an unlucky number etc. In case of religious dogmatics, acceptance of some dogmas and rejecting others from a unique code of dogmatic beliefs is called dissolution of dogmatic content of faith, and it is common among believers in modern secular societies and culture. Accepting beliefs from other religious traditions along with the core beliefs of one's denomination is called religious eclecticism. This phenomenon is typical of both traditional religious beliefs

and post-modern religiousness. In Christianity, dogmatic belief in God presumes belief in triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, some respondents, although declared Christians (Orthodox), imagine God as some kind of energy, life-force or spirit, contrary to the dogma (“There is something, there is a power”). This belief was a tough competitor to the dogmatic idea of God. The situation has changed in recent surveys in the sense that now more than half of the respondents think of God in dogmatic terms, whereas about one fifth of them see him as some kind of energy or force. Even this survey of religiousness among student population confirms this trend.

Table 5. Belief in God at three points in time: students and general population (in %)

Belief in God/Year of survey	2013 students CReS	1985 students Đorđević	2010 general population CCC, Konrad Adenauer
I believe that God exists	53.1	1.8	63.2
There is some kind of spirit or life force, but I don't know if it is God.	24.0	–	22.2
I am not sure whether God exists	10.4	–	5.8
I don't think there is God, spirit, or life-force	9.0	–	5.9

Table 6. Dissolution of content of students' dogmatic beliefs and religious eclecticism (in%)

Belief.../Year of survey	2013. students CReS	2010. general population, CCC, Konrad Adenauer
in God	53.1	63.2
in Jesus Christ, Son of God (or Muhammad, Messenger of God)	67.6	–
in resurrection	47.9	46.6
in Heaven and Hell	43.5	41.6
in transmigration of the soul	34.6	–
in astrology	19.0	
in magic	14.1	16.0

Unlike general population, students express more doubts about the existence of God, and are open-minded so as not to believe in the existence of God or some power which is above man. This survey, and the one conducted in 2010 among general population, also document that more than half of the students believe in the existence of some force or energy which created the world, which is virtually equal to the number of respondents from general population who view God in this way. Both among general population and among students there is a strictly defined core which views God undogmatically, but this view is noticeably less represented than before when compared to dogmatic views of God. This is the second survey that shows a trend of prevailing viewing of God in a dogmatic way. Reasons for this are interesting, since we already know that in previous surveys there were more subjects who thought of God as some kind of diffused, powerful and undefined force which manages the world and which man depends on (God as absolute and mystical power, as defined by Đuro Šušnjić). There have been no

special investigations into this question, but it is reasonable to assume that it is a result of presence of religion in everyday life, in the media and in public, and people find it easier to get information about theological truths than before. In case of a number of young people, we must not disregard the fact that they had religious instruction at school, in which the central place belongs to “correct” views of God in the framework of Christian dogmata. For easy reference, students who declared themselves as religious followers of traditional religions, modern spiritual movements and unconventionally religious, we placed them among religious students, whereas those who are indifferent to religion and church will be taken as undecided, and agnostics, irreligious students and convinced atheists will be placed among irreligious respondents. When we cross these respondents with the variable of belief in God, we will get the following findings: substantial majority of religious students (74.2%) believe in God in dogmatic way, about 20% of religious students see God as a life force, whereas a negligible number of religious students denies the existence of God or some life force. It is interesting to note that as many as 40% of students who are indifferent to religion and church (undecided) believe in God as some kind of life force, and the number of students who declared as not religious is the same. Therefore, this non-dogmatic belief in God is primarily present among irreligious and undecided students.

The difference between sexes in dogmatic belief in God is just one percent in favor of female students (55.3% to 54.3); seeing God as a life force is also more popular among female students (27.4% to 22.2%), and denial of existence of God or some life force is more represented among male students (11.5% to 7.4%). When it comes to this dogma, the situation at each university in Serbia is similar to religious self-identity:

Table 7. (Not)believing in God (in %)

Universities/Self-assessment of religiousness	I believe that God exists	I believe there is some kind of spirit or life force	I don't believe that God or some force exist
University of Belgrade	51.6	25.3	10.3
University of Novi Sad	59.3	22.0	7.3
University of Priština seated in Kosovska Mitrovica	92.3	7.7	0.0
University of Novi Pazar	93.8	6.3	0.0
University of Niš	43.3	32.0	8.2
University of Kragujevac	67.1	17.0	6.8
Private universities	45.7	32.6	14.1

There is not a single student at the universities of Kosovska Mitrovica and Novi Pazar who does not believe in God or some power above man. Of course, at these universities, most students believe in God in a dogmatic way, and the fewest of them can be found at the University of Niš and private universities, i.e. less than a half. University of Belgrade is a borderline case concerning this belief. Belief in some sort of power or spirit is most often found among students of private universities and at the universities of Niš and Belgrade. Not believing in God or some kind of life force is most frequent at private universities.

The distribution of students' answers about their beliefs in other religious dogmas was similar to answers given by the general population, which was slightly less than half, which further confirms that there is a trend of maintaining these beliefs at a high level, twice as much than shown in the surveys from the

first decade of this century. This is the second important finding of this survey in the section about religious beliefs, apart from the increasingly widespread dogmatic view of God. Apart from the fact that almost 95% of religious students believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (or that Muhammad is the Messenger of God), even 45% of undecided students believe in this dogma. A smaller number of religious students believe in resurrection (about 75%), just about 18% of those who are undecided and finally, slightly more than 6% of irreligious students, which makes their self-declared irreligiousness doubtful, since resurrection is the essence of Christian faith. It is similar with the belief in Heaven and Hell, which can be seen from the following table:

Table 8. Incidence of religious beliefs and personal self-declared religiousness among Serbian students

Beliefs from the dogmatic core of faith		Personal religious self-declaration					
		Religious		Undecided		Not religious	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
In Jesus Christ as the Son of God (or Muhammad as the Messenger of God)	Yes	651	94.2	38	48.1	23	16.2
	No	40	5.8	41	51.9	119	83.8
In resurrection	Yes	481	75.2	14	18.4	9	6.3
	No	159	24.8	62	81.6	133	93.7
In Heaven and Hell	Yes	431	67.7	16	21.3	10	7.0
	No	206	32.3	59	78.7	132	93.0
In transmigration of the soul	Yes	310	49.4	14	18.2	39	26.9
	No	317	50.6	63	81.8	106	73.1
In magic	Yes	116	18.7	13	16.5	19	13.3
	No	505	81.3	66	83.5	124	86.7
In astrology	Yes	147	23.6	16	20.8	36	24.8

It is interesting to note that almost half of the religious students believe in the non-dogmatic truth of transmigration of the soul (reincarnation), which is far more than those who are undecided or irreligious. There are two assumptions that might explain this phenomenon: students either perfectly know this religious truth which does not belong to the denomination they proclaim and believe in it in a conscious and eclectic way, or they are not well aware of its origin and meaning and take it as part of the core of the dogmata the of self-proclaimed religion. It is our opinion that part of the problem is also the imprecise formulation of the question, which has to be less ambiguous in future surveys. There are no such dilemmas about the question concerning their belief in astrology, since students are well-aware of what it is: more than one fifth of religious students, one fifth of undecided and one quarter of irreligious students believe in astrology. While there is not a single convinced atheist who believes in conventional religious truths (primarily those from Christianity), there are 'incidental' cases of self-declared atheists who believe in transmigration of the soul, in magic or astrology. This is more prominent among agnostics: almost half of them believe in transmigration of the soul and in astrology.

About 80% of female students and approximately 75% of male students believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; 60% of students of both sexes believe in resurrection, whereas more than 50% of all students believe in Heaven and Hell. In case of non-dogmatic beliefs, there is no significant difference between sexes, with the exception of astrology: there are almost twice as many female students who believe in astrology (29.8% to 16.7%). The situation with dogmatic beliefs at each university can be seen in the table:

Table 9. Students' religious beliefs (in %)

Universities/beliefs	In Jesus Christ, Muhammad	In resurrection	In Heaven and Hell	In transmigration of the soul	In magic	In astrology
University of Belgrade	74.7	61.6	55.0	45.2	16.1	22.6
University of Novi Sad	73.8	64.6	52.8	38.8	19.0	21.3
University of Priština seated in Kosovska Mitrovica	100.0	83.9	73.3	40.7	28.6	14.3
University of Novi Pazar	96.6	21.1	90.0	90.5	0.0	0.0
University of Niš	79.3	44.9	46.0	27.6	11.4	22.7
University of Kragujevac	89.9	63.1	50.0	38.1	19.0	31.7
Private universities	66.9	53.2	48.7	45.5	23.2	30.5

The incidence of these beliefs is most similarly distributed among students of Belgrade and Novi Sad universities, and in case of certain beliefs the same can be said about students of universities in Priština (Kosovska Mitrovica) and Novi Sad. For example, 100% of students in Kosovska Mitrovica believe in Jesus Christ, and the number of students of Novi Pazar University who believe in Muhammad is almost the same. Smallest percentage of students who believe in Jesus Christ is among students attending private universities. In case of belief in the core Christian dogma of resurrection, highest percentage of students who believe in it can be found at Kosovska Mitrovica University and lowest can be found at Niš University. Highest percentage of students who believe in Heaven and Hell can be found in

Novi Pazar, and lowest in Niš. It is the same with the belief in transmigration of the soul. Highest percentage of students who believe in magic can be found at Kosovska Mitrovica University, whereas there was not a single student in Novi Pazar who believed in magic. Most students who believe in astrology are from Kragujevac university and private universities.

C) Students' conventional religious and ritual practice

Religious and ritual practices are an integral part of conventional religiousness. At the same time, until the late 1980s they used to be the most neglected forms of commitment to institutionalized religion and church in Serbia. That was the case with the general population, and regular attendance at church rituals was purely incidental among university students. Although religiousness was in deep crisis in the territory of the present-day Serbia and it had some impact on all structural elements of religiousness, the crisis was obvious in the evident drop in total religious ritual practice, demise of some important religious rituals and atrophy of some other rituals in a way which was unseen in experiential research on religiousness and commitment to religion and church. With regard to this situation in dominantly Orthodox areas, arguments in favor of religious change, or in a narrow perspective, of change in religiousness of the population, would be strongest possible if they could be expressed through indicators of revived religious behavior and association in the past twenty years, particularly among what used to be the most atheistic part of society – young people and students.

Ritual church practice is a narrower and core form of believers' ecclesiasticism and it shows the intensity and the degree of their commitment to a number of church rituals, their adherence and fulfillment of religious duties and acts of devotion, which is crucial for salvation in Christianity. The phenomenon of religion can be approached structurally when we break

the unique phenomenon of religiousness into constituent parts, while some indicators which are often used to illustrate general religiousness will become prominent. Their factor saturation is such that they belong to “hard” indicators of religiousness, like attending liturgies or personal prayer to God. Of course, apart from these, there are also other indicators of religious behavior, which can be further classified into several ways: e.g. into indicators (rituals) of traditional and contemporary character. However, there is no deep chasm between these two types of indicators. Contemporary religious rituals are focused on what is essentially religious the performance of rituals, while traditional rituals, apart for being used to express the evidently religious character, assumed special social connotations in the course of history and it is thus more difficult to discern between what is authentically religious in the sense of motivation and social aspects: for example, in celebrating major feasts, apart from the reminiscence of some personalities, like a certain saint, martyrs of faith, ascetics, social elements are also integral parts of a particular religious ritual, and can be seen in meetings of relatives, friends, laying foundations and expressions of togetherness, unity, solidarity among believers, identity of a particular denomination etc. In these circumstances it is far more difficult to determine the evident religious motivation in maintaining religious rituals than, say, fulfilling non-religious needs, conformity, religious mimicry and the like. Still, one has to be objective: not only religious rituals are torn between sincerity and conformity. Human behavior taken as a whole can be placed within these limits. That is why traditional ritual conduct must take into account the revival of religion and church, since religious-ecclesiastical complex is not merely transcendence or mystical/absolute power, but also a worldly phenomenon led by the church, which contains and is surrounded by social political power and weakness; it is a community of believers with everything that is typical of

believers both in social and psychological terms. That is why indicators of participation in traditional rituals (baptism, church wedding, church burial, blessing of feasts and family saint's day (Slava), celebration of major feasts and saint's day, possession of religious symbols, refraining from work during major feasts, religious instruction), are equally relevant as evidence about religious changes like the indicators of current attitude toward religion and church (attending the liturgy, going to church, taking Holy Communion, confession, attendance of religious classes, prayer, fasting, reading religious books and magazines, giving contributions to the church, activity in church life). When it comes to rituals and religious behavior, these rituals are not an emphatically custom norm of society like traditional ones, and conformity of society has a much weaker impact on their practice. They are un-profane religious actions, and changes in attitude of modern believers toward these rituals is a firm evidence of a certain degree of revival of authentic religious needs, which are satisfied in ways more or less sanctioned by the church and at a larger scale than before.

However, relatively modest fulfillment of religious duties, not only in Serbia, but also in some other (post-socialist) countries, can be substantiated primarily by the rare occurrence that declared believers adhere to the sanctioned, regular attendance of liturgy, frequency of church attendance, regular fasting and prayers, confessions and taking Holy Communion. From the point of view of conventional religion and the institution of church, regular fulfillment of religious duties is a matter of course, but in reality, religious activities of people, declared believers included, are not regular. According to some authors, without this regularity there is no real revitalization, but merely an eclectic mixture of religion and ideas, superficiality and sheer traditionalism (Каарийнен, Фурман, 1997; Đorđević, 2009).

Let us provide some data about the current religious practice and church attendance among students and general population:

Table 10. Frequency of church attendance and prayers in Serbia in 1985, 2010 and 2013

Frequency of church attendance (%)	1985	2010	2013	Prayer (%)	1985	2010	2013
More than once a week	0.1	4.1	2.8	Every day	–	27.4	Regularly 23.3
Once a week	–	8.7	9.7	More than once a week	0.5	11.9	Sometimes 39.4
At least once a month	–	16.2	18.8	Once a week		5.9	
Several times a year	–	50.9	41.9	At least once a month		9.1	
Almost never	–	14.3	–	Several times a year		12.2	
Never	–	5.7	22.4	Less than once a year		12.6	
				Never		16.1	Never 33.2

These data are not interpreted unambiguously in the context of desecularization of Serbian society. Ambivalence about the interpretation of data refers to religiousness (ecclesiasticity) criterion: how high should we set the standards for

subjects (believers) to fulfill? If churches themselves say that a believer must regularly frequent a place of worship, then there are few real believers, according to previous surveys and to this survey, if we take into account that a high percentage of subjects claim to be religious, that they belong to religious communities or that they believe in God. This could be another proof of inconsistent behavior of conventional believers. Only 2.8% of all students claim they go to church every day. However, if this piece of information is interpreted within the framework of time depth, the perspective of interpretation is somewhat different: we can see that there is no trace of regular church attendance among the students. This can be generalized and raised to the level of incidentally regular church attendance. According to the 2013 survey almost one third of today's students go to church at least once a month, which is evidence of the fact that this religious duty is revived. Of course, this percentage is much smaller than the percentage of those who stated a particular denomination or are pro-religious, but it is also one of the indicators of a different religious situation in Serbia. Students who go to church at least once a month, according to their own assessment, do it a bit more frequently than the general population. More than one fifth of Serbian students pray regularly.

It is interesting to mention the frequency of church attendance of each gender. It is surprising that male students go to church regularly, several times a week, more than female students (4.8% to 1.3%), while on a monthly basis, female students are more regular (once or twice a month). A quarter of male and one fifth of female students never go to church. In case of prayers, there are no significant differences between male and female students. It is also interesting to mention the results about the frequency of church attendance at each university:

Table 11. Frequency of church attendance at each university (& of students who attend a place of worship)

University/frequency of church attendance	At least once a month	Never
University of Belgrade	33.9	23.6
University of Novi Sad	26.9	23.6
University of Priština seated in Kosovska Mitrovica	78.3	5.4
University of Novi Pazar	51.6	25.8
University of Niš	26.8	24.7
University of Kragujevac	34.7	24.7
Private universities	26.9	27.3

Regarding the duties students have to fulfill, we thought that the frequency of at least once a month is good enough as an indicator of their consequent religious behavior. That is why this information was compared with the number of students who never go to church/place of worship within a year. These results show that the number of students who never go to church and those who do it at least once a month is practically the same at private universities. In cases of all other students who attend other state universities, the number of those who go to a place of worship at least once a month is much bigger than the number of those who never do it, as illustrated by the example of students from Kosovska Mitrovica and Novi Pazar, and it is less obvious at other universities. This is another example which shows that students in ethnically or religiously neuralgic areas confirm their commitment to traditional religion and church by more consequent religious behavior when compared to students at other state universities. Let us look at the situation with other rituals which belong to current church rituals:

Table 11. Current religious practice of Serbian students (in %).

Liturgy (mass, jumu'ah)	Students, 2013	Students, 1985	General population, 2010
At least once a month	9.2	0.3	17.1
Several times a year	35.7		40.9
Never	51.2		42.0
Fasting before major feasts			
Often	26.3	0.3	27.4
Rarely	38.5		45.7
Never	31.5		24.2
Confession			
Often	6.2	0.1	7.3
Rarely	16.5		18.0
Never	73.3		64.7
Holy Communion			
Yes	48.7		36.6
No	42.2		56.8

We will notice first that Niš university students of the 1980s regularly attend church rituals. There are similarities in this respect, but there are also differences between current students and general population. Students attend liturgies significantly less frequently when compared to the total population of Serbia, but if they do, and if the information gathered from students themselves are true, then there is a higher percentage of students who take Holy Communion than among general population. There is not much difference in frequency of regular fasting and confession if we compare students and the entire population of Serbia. Therefore, one tenth of Serbian students attend liturgy at least once a month, one quarter of them fast before major feasts, and the information that 11% of students

take Holy Communion regularly comes as a surprise; about half of them have taken Holy Communion at least once in their lives. A small number of students confess to their priest, i.e. about 6%.

In case of current religious rituals we also come across unexpected results concerning male students: for example, they attend liturgy more frequently than female students (11.9% vs. 6.9%). It is similar with regularity of taking Holy Communion and confession, since 7.6% of male students fulfill this duty, whereas the percentage of female students is 5.2%. Concerning the alma mater, crossing the data will produce the following results: most frequent liturgy (or jumu'ah) goers are students from Novi Pazar, over 56% of them, followed by students from Kosovska Mitrovica, with almost 18%, and students of Belgrade University (somewhat less than 12%). This religious duty is most rarely fulfilled by students of private universities and from Kragujevac. Regularity in taking Holy Communion is not so rare as it used to be: students from Kosovska Mitrovica (over 18%) and Belgrade (almost 16%) do it most often. Fasting before major feasts is even more widespread: about 39% students of Kragujevac university, more than one third of Novi Pazar students (36.7%), followed by students from Kosovska Mitrovica and Belgrade. Out of all these rituals, confession is the most rarely practiced form of current religious practice among students: the most regular ones are those who are studying in Kosovska Mitrovica and Belgrade, while there were no students at Niš University who fast, and there was just one student in Kragujevac who did it regularly.

However, religiosity (ecclesiasticity) is not expressed solely through forms of religious behavior that we have mentioned so far. In Christianity (Orthodoxy) there are some rituals which are much more widespread among general population and traditional believers than rituals of traditional religious

practice. These are the rituals which demonstrate traditional commitment to religion and church, such as rites of passage (baptism, church wedding, church burial) or celebration of major feasts or Slava in Serbian Orthodoxy. As we have already mentioned, apart from their obviously religious character, traditional ecclesiastical rituals also assumed some non-religious, specific social connotations during history, although their original purpose was purely religious. That is why it is difficult to generalize traditional religious behavior, i.e. whether believers' motives for adherence to these rituals are purely religious, or participation in them is actually adherence to customs, or believers simply resort to conformity, mimicry, profanation and the like. Still, an act of integration and communication within a particular group/groups through religion or denomination is sociologically one of the most important roles of religion or religious organizations. Let us see what we can deduce from data concerning traditional commitment of students to religion and church in modern Serbia when compared to previous periods:

Table 12. Traditional religious practice of Serbian university students

Baptism	Students, 2013	Students, 1985	General population, 2010
Yes	79.5	36.6	82.5
No	12.6	49.3	11.0
Celebrating major feasts			
Regularly	76.8	3.7	91.8
Sometimes	13.8		–
Never	5.7		
Church burial			
Yes	80.6		87.3
No	14.8		8.0

According to available data from various surveys conducted since 1990s until now incidence of these rituals among Serbian population is close to denominational identity, and is above the percentage of personal self-declaration and belief in God (Blagojević, 1995; Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2002; Religioznost u Srbiji 2010, 2011). Data from the table show that attitudes of students towards traditional religious rituals are very positive, but students claim they participate in them less frequently than general population. Generally, about 80% of students state they were baptized, that church burials are common in their families and that they always celebrate major feasts. If we are to make a general conclusion about the incidence of these rituals among students today, we can say their religious behavior is very similar to that of the general population in the last ten years, and judging by that, we could say that the most frequent and strongest commitment of people with religion and church in Serbian denominational areas lies in their traditional commitment. There are no statistically relevant differences in traditional religious rituals regarding gender: about 80% of students of both sexes state they were baptized, but in the sample there are more male students who will not have their children baptized when they become parents (13.4% to 9.5%); also, there are no major differences about celebrating major feasts and church burials in their families. Concerning particular universities, all students of Kragujevac University state they were baptized, and the results at other universities vary, starting with almost 80%, as in Niš, up to almost 90% in Novi Sad. Understandably, only 19% underwent this crucial Christian ritual in Novi Pazar. Kragujevac university students display highest incidence of celebrating major feasts (97.2%), followed by students from Novi Sad (91.2%) and Kosovska Mitrovica (89.5%). Obligatory church burial is most frequent among students of Kragujevac University (68.1%), followed by those in Novi Sad (66.5%) and Niš (57.3%), less than half of students of Belgrade university,

private universities and the one in Kosovska Mitrovica, and is least incidental among Novi Pazar university students (20.7%).

Importance of religion in students' personal and social life

Regardless of the relatively low incidence of current religious practice rituals, when compared to rituals belonging to traditional commitment to religion and church, the consensus about the importance of religion and God for life in modern Serbian society is not as weak as it used to be thirty years ago. Surveys of public opinion conducted at the beginning of this century and in 2008 show a positive attitude to the importance of God and religion in people's lives, which used to be unthinkable. Here are some statistical data:

Table 12 . Importance of religion in subjects' lives among general population and students (in %).

Importance of religion/Year of survey	EVS (2008)	Students (2013)
Very important	7.6	19.8
Important	47.4	30.3
Not important	24.6	10.5
Not important at all	11.6	13.1

Source: *European Values Study, 2008*.

Data from the first column are from European Values Study, which was conducted in Serbia in 2008. These data show that the perception of the importance of religion and church for people and their lives in society goes beyond 50% of respondents, although it is just slightly above one half, and it is the same as the opinion of students involved in this year's survey. Opinions about the importance of God are similar. For example the

2008 survey tells us that vast majority of respondents think that God is important for one's personal and social life (almost 60%, whereas as many as 22.1% think that God is very important). The current survey offers similar results (Chart 2): now there are almost 24% of students who readily state that God is very important in life, whereas 12.2% of them think that God is not at all important. When explaining this phenomenon one should start from a different political and social climate than the one that was present during socialism, but we should take into account the strong conformity on the part of the respondents who now add the confidence in church to the traditionally high level of confidence in the military. Next set of data provides information on Serbian citizens' and students' confidence in key social institutions:

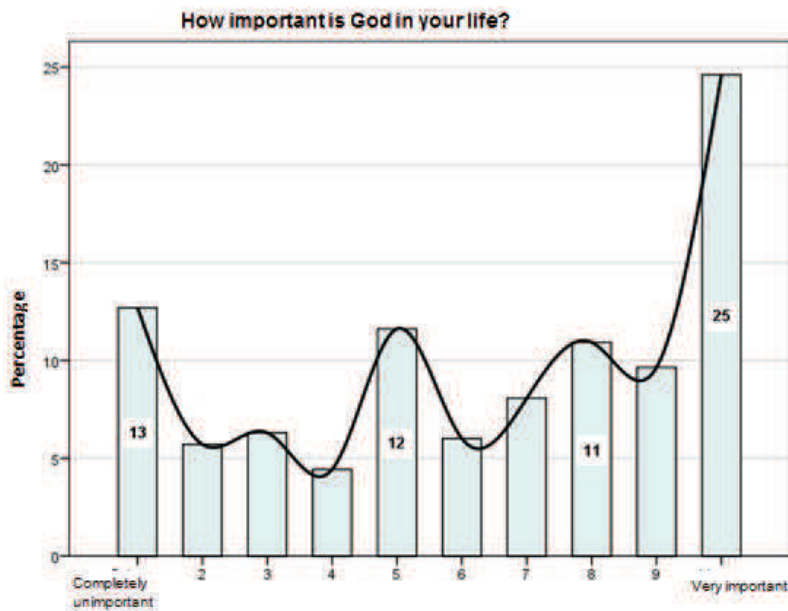
Table 13. Public opinion's confidence in some institutions among Serbian general population and students (in %).

Confidence in	Very high and high		Very low and no confidence	
	Serbia, 2008	Serbia, 2013 students	Serbia, 2008	Serbia, 2013 students
Church	58.3	43.8	38.5	32.1
System of education	52.2	57.2	46	16.1
Military	40.2	42.4	57.6	23.8
Police	33.9	24.7	64.4	45.9
Parliament	11.9	8.0	85.1	66.1
Political parties	6.1	5.2	90.1	78.5
Government	13.8	8.9	81.7	60.1
EU	27.3	14.4	67.2	55.9
NATO	8.7	5.7	85.4	70.5
Russia	–	26.6	–	37.6

Source: European Values Study, 2008.

Although both general population and students share similar levels of confidence, there are also certain differences: most students have confidence only in the system of education, which is understandable because of their status within this system. Less than half of students have confidence in all other national and international institutions, starting with the church and the military, which enjoy confidence of almost half of respondents, up to political parties and NATO, with confidence which is barely over 5%.

Chart 2. Importance of God in students' lives on a ten-level scale.



When asked what they think about whether religious organizations adequately respond to certain personal, moral and social problems of people and the society, the responses were as follows:

Table 14. Opinion poll on the adequate response of religious communities to personal, moral and social problems (in %)

They respond adequately to:	Yes		No	
	Serbia, EVS 2008	Serbia, 2013	Serbia, EVS 2008	Serbia, 2013
moral problems and needs of the individuals	43.1	23.3	39.9	39.0
family life problems	33.5	22.2	48.3	39.7
spiritual needs of people	62.0	35.1	24.9	27.5
social problems in the country	21.2	11.1	59.1	48.3

Source: *European Values Study*, 2008.

Students are far more skeptical than the rest of the population in case of adequate responses of religion and church to personal and social challenges of the time. There was not a single question about adequacy favored by the majority, and they are very skeptical about whether religious communities can provide adequate responses to current social problems in Serbia.

Conclusion – circles of students committed to religion and church

According to all these indicators of students' commitment to religion and church, we could sketch a certain number of concentric circles representing their commitment to religion and church, primarily to conventional religion and religious organizations. Of course, these circles are of ideal type character and are difficult to find in real life in this form. With reference to the core of this commitment to religion and church, the most distant circle, but not the biggest one, is the narrow circle of students who openly declare their irreligiousness, regardless of whether they declare themselves agnostics, irreligious or convinced atheists. They total 18% of the respondents, and we could

make a rough generalization and say that about one fifth of the students are irreligious. Somewhat closer to the core of strong and essential commitment to religion and church is a very wide group of self-declared members of denominations and both conventionally and unconventionally religious students, who total about 70% of the respondents. Most of these students attach identity and cultural value to religion and church, and their religiousness is often termed as cultural religiousness. Part of the students who accept the core belief in God, believe other dogmas of their religion, and they total somewhat less than the previous group. The beliefs of this group are divided – more than half of them believe in God or Jesus, whereas somewhat less than 50% believe in other important dogmata of eschatological character. Of course, a small number of these students who stated their denomination and religion and who believe in dogmas of their religion and act in accordance with religious/church norms and maintain regular religious practice, belong to the smallest, i.e. central circle, the core of commitment to religion – they are church-goers, active in their diocese, and whose worldview is most closely linked with the worldview of their religion and religious organization they belong to. This narrowest circle is, naturally, very limited and certainly does not exceed more than a few percent of religious students.

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