Adventists in Montenegro—From the Atheistic Psychosis of Socialism to the Post-Socialist Individuation of Adventism

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Abstract: The process of converting individuals to a particular religious community is one of the issues addressed by the Sociology of Religion. In the post-socialist Montenegrin society, there have been research works related to dominant religious communities, the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the Islamic, while science has shown no interest in small religious groups. The Adventist movement in Montenegro, although present for a long period of time, has failed to mobilise individuals for conversion to a greater extent. Therefore, this research aims to find out when, under what conditions and in what way the individuals in Montenegro, as a post-socialist state, chose Adventism as religious affiliation, what affected this process the most, and were there any specificities in that regard. This paper is a result of a survey conducted via an in-depth interview with 17 believers of the Adventist Church. The obtained results indicate several valuable data: most respondents accepted the Adventist movement in Montenegro in the early 1990s; they got first-hand knowledge of this religion from their friends or wider family members and relatives, a consistent interpretation of the Holy Bible is the main reason for conversion. A significant factor in the process of conversion to Adventism is early religious socialisation within a family.

Keywords: the Seventh-day Adventists; conversion; post-socialism; Montenegro; the Adventist Church

1. Introduction

Since the paper deals with a few aspects of the Seventh-day Adventists’ conversion in Montenegro, we consider it useful to refer the reader to a short history of this religious organisation. It is very difficult, almost impossible, to make a brief historical review related to the centuries-old Adventist Church that would correspond to the circumstances of a scientific paper. The beginning of the nineteenth century meant the imminent coming of Jesus for Bible interpreters (Dudley et al. 1992). Therefore, it is considered that Daniel’s prophecies and what is stated in the Book of Revelations are slowly coming to an end, and the Adventists—those who await the second coming of Jesus and believe in Christ, believe that this will eventually happen. It should be noted that the first Adventists date from the apostolic times. Namely, it is believed that the Apostle Paul awaited the great return of Jesus (1 Thess 4:16), and there are similar predictions in the Gospel of John (John 14:3).

The founder of the Adventist movement in America was William Miller, between 1833 and 1844. Although Miller was said to be the forerunner of Adventism and many people from that movement later became Adventists, it cannot be said that the Adventists existed at that time. It was a movement, called the Millerite movement, and the members called themselves the Millerites, it is clear why. The Adventists as a movement with that name (the Seventh-day Adventists—the name indicates two key
beliefs: awaiting for the return of Jesus Christ and celebrating the Sabbath as the seventh, the Lord’s holy day) have existed since October 1856, but officially since 1860. The Adventist Church starts from the view that Saturday, not Sunday, is a day for celebration (Bull 1989). Referring to the Old Testament scriptures (Genesis 2: 1–3), we read that God commanded to observe the Sabbath day, not Sunday. With the introductory section about the short history of the Church, we want to introduce the reader to the Adventists but also to emphasise the significance that the Adventist Church was not created by Miller’s missionary activity but by the work of Ellen White, who is most responsible for what the Adventist Church is today (Dudley et al. 1992; Maxwell 1992; Vyhmeister 2005).

Adventism has been discussed in Montenegro since 1909. This was the period when the first missionaries of the Adventist Church came to the territories of the former Yugoslav republics, and when the first administration of the territories of Croatia, Slovenia, central Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed. According to the testimony of Radovan Aćimić, one of the oldest believers of the Church, the first Adventists on the territory of present-day Montenegro began with missionary work in 1916. The Adventist pastor, Milan Šarčanski, came to Montenegro to preach the gospel. However, in that historical period, Montenegro was not a country where religious freedom was enjoyed. Montenegro at that time had an understanding for three traditional religious communities: the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the Islamic religious community. However, other religious communities did not have this kind of understanding, so Milan Šarčanski was banished from Montenegro. Milan Šarčanski returned to Montenegro in 1921, and he was allowed to perform his missionary work. Šarčanski was allowed to stay in Montenegro for only three months, after which he had to leave the country. However, during that short period, Šarčanski managed to establish the Adventist movement in this republic: Boka Kotorska, Zelenika, Herceg Novi and Podgorica. Hence, we can consider Milan Šarčanski the founder of the Adventist movement in Montenegro. In the same year, the first Adventist preacher Radun Radivojević came to Montenegro. While performing his missionary work and expanding the Adventist mission, he purchased land in Bjelopavlići. His continuous work was interrupted briefly, but he returned to Montenegro in the 1930s. This was the period when the first converts to the Christian Adventist Church appeared. (Klačmer 2008).

Considering the abovementioned, this paper aims to analyse the conversion processes to Adventism of the interviewed respondents, during the period after the collapse of the socialist socio-economic and political order. The phenomenon of conversion is complex and multidimensional, and can be discussed from a perspective of different scientific disciplines, primarily sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Accordingly, the issue of determining and defining this term is very complex: from a classic definition by which conversion refers to a very large, dramatic, and often sudden change, to a definition that refers to conversion as a process that can take a long period of time and result in gradual and partial changes (Rambo 2003, p. 213). Even though it is a process that occurs at an individual level, nevertheless, it occurs not in a blank space but in a particular socio-economic and political context, which greatly affects the way the conversion process takes place and which factors in that process will be of greatest influence. Since Orthodoxy is the dominant religion in Montenegro, we assume that a large number of interviewed respondents have converted from that religion to the Seventh-day Adventists. Thus, the aim of our research is to find out the following: What are the specificities of the converting process of individuals to Adventism in post-communist Montenegro? In what historical period did an increased conversion occur and why did they decide to become Seventh-day Adventists? Since this is the first research on Seventh-day Adventists in Montenegro, the aim of this paper is to establish a scientific and research base that would, in later studies, serve as a basis for future qualitative research, providing them with an opportunity for comparative analysis.

2. Dynamics of Atheist Indoctrination in Montenegro

The process of conversion to Adventism as well as the mere conveying of the Adventist truth in Montenegro was made difficult by the coming to power of real socialism. In such a socio-political climate, religion was suppressed and treated as a form of a person’s alienation. Such orientation
represented a desire of the official socialist establishment to constitute, according to its views on religion, a social environment that would remind of, but also maintain, an atmosphere of memories of the former Marxist thought on religion. The relationship between religion and a state should not only be viewed through the prism of two antagonistic systems but also in the domain of politics and a few of its goals. These goals would primarily relate to negative historical memories that would result in neutralisation of inter-confessional intolerance and the desire of the socialist establishment to take control of the entire society. Therefore, the historical background in former Yugoslavia, and thus Montenegro, was marked by the weakening and marginalisation of religion and Church, driven by systematically conducted and imposed atheism, guided by atheist education and upbringing, leading to the process of separating people from religion. The whole system was ideologically shaped and adapted to the current political model. Such an attitude of the state towards religion is explicable from several aspects. Considering the negative historical memories, and the belief of the socialist regime that by neutralising religion, it would subvert inter-confessional and inter-ethnic hostility, there was also a strong desire of the communist authorities to establish absolute power of control over the entire society. Demographic migrations of the population should not be neglected either. After the war, a large part of the population migrated from vilages to towns, leading to a reduction in the rural population, which, according to empirical records, has always been more religious. Eventually, political leadership succeeded in handicapping the church by physical destruction, the prohibition of public religious practice, persecution of the clergy, the election of religious leaders by the state, etc. To compare, religion in Montenegro was not the only one that was treated in such a way, because religion in other former socialist countries had an almost identical destiny (Wanner 2007). According to empirical evidence from that period (Pantić 1974; Đorđević 1990), the tendency of the population towards atheism during the 1960s was evident. This was manifested by the death of beliefs and religious practice. At that time, the Adventists also shared the difficult destiny that the traditional religions had in this country. The Adventists were suspected of being a foreign service, which was constantly under the watchful eye of the authorities at that time. This was, of course, the period when freedom of religion bore the brunt of the socialist establishment.

3. Post-socialism as a Stage of Introspective Confessional Integrity

Since the 1990s, the collapse of real socialism resulted in desecularisation and the return of religion to the social life (Berger 1999). In such social circumstances of post-socialist countries, the whole social context changes, and, accordingly, the church and religion change their social position. Religion and the Church emerge from the social margin and gain a significant role in the delegitimisation of the old and the legitimisation of a new social order (Tomka 2005). When it comes to Montenegro, the desecularisation and return of religion were determined by the revival of religious identity, which was suppressed during the time of “scientific socialism”. The collapse of the socialist system was accompanied by a national and political revitalisation of religion. All this caused confessional homogenisation, and mobilisation of religious and national groups, which led to public support for religious communities, and thus, to a greater connection with religion and the Church. (Blagojević 2004). In this regard, the return of religion to the social scene in the early 1990s and its awakening in Montenegro were followed by the return of a few functions to the hands of religion, whereby religion confirmed once again its reversible essence. Confessional identity became a marker that drew a boundary between other ethnic groups. This resulted in the rise of ethnonationalism, ethnophyletism, and clero-nationalism. Empirical evidence detects the process of desecularisation and religious renewal in all post-socialist countries (Tomka 1995), and even in Montenegro, which is reflected in the returning of the citizens to faith and religious practice (Vratuša-Žunić 1996; Vukadinović 2001). Describing the return of religion, the theologian Radovan Bigović emphasises that after the collapse of the communist (real socialist) regimes in Europe and the Balkans, religion is renewed and revitalised. He considers that it is difficult to specify what caused the renewal: social crisis, the war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, weakness of other social entities, personal mission, and modern neo-patristic theology which is the same as fresh air for a house that is not ventilated or it is a gift and miracle of God. (Bigović 2011, p. 43).
The collapse of socialism and religious restrictions led to the flourishing of religious activities, i.e., religious practice, which was also a suitable socio-political frame of reference for the awakening of smaller religious communities that did not form the dominant religious majority in this republic, including the Seventh-day Adventists, who in the early 1990s, came out of the communist regime with several dozen believers. A more active religious life comes out of a period of inactivity, shaped by a lack of religious knowledge, state control, and discrimination (Engelhardt 2009, p. 89). The communist regime indeed spent less energy on controlling the smaller religious communities because of the insignificant number of their members. (Szigeti 1994). Therefore, the new climate enabled the religious homogenisation and mobilisation of religious groups, so there was a tendency towards public support for religious communities and connecting with the Church, which encouraged the small religious communities to expand their missionary activity and strengthen their homogenisation. For Adventist believers, this meant conversion on two levels: the first one is described as the transition from a godless past to a religious future that entails a more active life in faith, and the second one concerns the transition from Orthodoxy, the religion of their ancestors, to Adventism. Accordingly, the Adventist Church in Montenegro began to attract new believers, who were baptised in that Church mainly since the early 1990s, about which our research unambiguously testifies. One of the very significant factors in the restoration of religious identity at the level of personal identities in the territory of the former SFRY after its breakup, are the major, traumatic and transforming socio-economic and political events. The war is destruction, the huge number of refugees and political instability, have all intensified the sense of fear and insecurity in people, even in countries that were not that affected by wars, such as Montenegro (Tomka 2005; Bakrač 2013). This one of a kind identity crisis, caused by both political and socio-economic circumstances, also meant a return to traditional identities such as ethnic, national and especially religious. Indeed, one can accept Zagorka Golubović’s observation that the identity crisis is mostly related to insecurity, which causes confusion and concern (Golubović 1999, p. 53). Apart from the collapse of political order based on communist ideology, a very important circumstance that exacerbated this crisis and increased a level of insecurity to the maximum in Montenegro was the economic crisis personified in the unheard-of degree of inflation. Absolute economic uncertainty in the form of a complete economic collapse and the inability of ordinary people to satisfy their basic needs heightened the sense of fear and it further motivated people to search for meaning and security more deeply. Such circumstances are a suitable environment for the development of small religious communities. According to Wilson, small religious communities emerge as a result of “turmoil and conflicts experienced in different ways within the entire society” (Wilson 1970, p. 31). Immediate factors that encourage the development of small religious communities are related to social and economic changes and their influence on certain social groups. In other words, Wilson believes that insecurity and uncertainty result in the creation of small religious communities, and that sudden changes represent a suitable environment for conversion. We find interesting the fact that in the period of religious awakening after the collapse of communism, Montenegro was not an interesting environment for missionary activities of Protestant religious groups. In Ukraine, for example, there were 3600 registered protestant churches in the 1990s, while in a decade that number increased to 5000. The main reason for it seems to be the fact that the USA has been financially supporting the missionary activities in Ukraine (Wanner 2007, p. 138).

Historical movements were followed by the sociological studies on religiosity, mainly among Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers. These studies detect a return to religious beliefs and religious practice, especially when it comes to belief in God, prayer, baptism, and so on (Tomka 2005; Bakrač 2013). However, sociological studies on small religious communities are lacking. Having in mind the abovementioned, the population of believers of the Adventist Church is selected for the reason that, though not numerous, it represents the fourth largest religion in Montenegro.

It should be emphasised that the social environment in Montenegro does not look with favour on small religious communities, and such circumstances are not favourable for the spread of non-traditional religious communities, which explains the small number of believers of the Adventist Church. Scientific research practice has almost completely neglected this religious group, so this was
the primary reason for the research of the Seventh-day Adventists. There are five Adventist churches in Montenegro (Podgorica, Sutomore, Kotor, Bijela, Berane), as well as a web platform (https://www.adventisti-podgorica.org/). Today, according to the Annual Statistical Report for 2018, the number of believers of the Adventist Church in Montenegro is 235. Montenegro belongs to the Southern Region, which was established in 1931 with headquarters in Niš, and which appointed Elvis Niculović as a pastor in this country.¹ The Christian Adventist Church in Montenegro is registered in the Register of Churches and Religious Communities, with the headquarters of the religious organisation in the United States, 12,501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland (Kuburić 2010, p. 146).

4. The Interview Questions

According to the research objective, the following research questions were asked:

1. Historically, when did the conversion (baptism) to the Adventist Church happen?
2. In what way did you find out about the Seventh-day Adventists?
3. Have you been a member of a certain religious community before the conversion, if so, what is your opinion on the religion you belonged to before you converted to Adventists?
4. What is your family upbringing when it comes to religion?

5. Research Methodology

The research conversion of the Seventh-day Adventists represents our pioneering venture since there are no studies of a similar format in Montenegro, nor in the wider region. Since there have not been papers with similar themes, comparative analysis is omitted. There are studies in the world periodicals that relate to the attitudes of the Seventh-day Adventists’ believers towards political orientations, and the attitudes towards Republicans, i.e., Democrats in the USA, where it is concluded, with the help of quantitative methodology, that the Adventist believers are more inclined towards the Republican political establishment (Dudley et al. 1992), than the studies on the Adventist religious beliefs and their impact on health (Butler et al. 2008; Charlemagne-Badal and Lee 2016). Our research is based on qualitative methodology. The classics of sociological thought (Durkheim, Weber, and Berger) were dominated by the idea that a method related to religiosity and religious experience could be applied in the sociology of religion. However, under the influence of “the paradigm of social facts” and the view that it is exclusively psychologically determined, this trend in research has been neglected to a certain extent (Poloma 1995). The sociology of religion is utterly dominated by the studies based on what religion does in society, not what religion means to the individual— the content of inner religious experience (Anderson 2003). Therefore, Wilson observes (Wilson 1982, pp. 22–31) that empirical studies do not contribute much to the understanding of human religiosity.

Qualitative research is suitable when we want to perceive the distribution of different religious beliefs and their intensity according to one of the accepted scales for measuring the opinions on religiosity. Such findings enable data generalisation if the research is conducted on some of the sample models selected according to probability (Franzosi 1998; Yamane 2000; Halmi 2005; Seidman 2006). However, the qualitative method is useful, especially when researching small social groups, which are thereby unexplored, and the believers of the Adventist Church in Montenegro represent such a group. Therefore, Grace Davie notes that:

Large-scale surveys of the population [...] will yield little material about minorities apart from their existence. In order to investigate the minority in more detail, it will be necessary to effect a rather different kind of inquiry, frequently combining a more focused survey with qualitative methodology (Davie 2007, p. 13).

¹ http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf.
5.1. Interview Plan

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the study. Semi-structured, but yet open and of a conversational style, the interviews allowed the interviewees to express themselves freely and broadly, as much as they wished, on the topics they considered particularly important within the interview while following the direction of the research (Krueger 2013; LeDrew 2013; Smith 2013). This type of interview also caused a significant difference in the length of some interviews, with the shortest lasting 40 minutes and the longest two hours. Most of the interviews lasted about 80 minutes. Persons who volunteered for the interview were asked for oral consent, and the interviewees were informed of the subject, purpose, and objectives of the research, ways of using the collected data, ways of protecting the anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. All interviews were conducted face-to-face according to a pre-arranged location and time. The interviews were recorded with the oral consent of the interviewees and subsequently transcribed, coded and analysed by a software package NVivo. The whole process was performed by one person, i.e., the lead (first) author of this paper. The transcription was performed verbatim and it was tended to be performed immediately or as soon as possible, after each interview. For the sake of anonymity, the names of the interviewees and other data that might refer to their identity were changed. To protect the confidential information during the implementation of the interview, the interviewees were asked in advance not to comment on the content of the interview. The interviews were conducted in the premises that were most appropriate for the interviewees, i.e., their home, workplace of the researcher and the interviewee or any other place, according to the wishes of the interviewees. The data on the interviewees are stored in an archive available only to the researcher. The interviewees were informed about that in the instructions.

5.2. Research Process

In the overall survey, 17 respondents participated, of which 6 were female and 11 male; 8 respondents finished high school and 9 finished college. The sample included three respondents aged 20–30, ten respondents aged 30–50, and four respondents over 50 years old. The age structure of believers is random, and it should be emphasised that only the believers who were baptised in the Adventist church were interviewed. It should be noted that the majority of baptised persons are aged 30–50 years, which resulted in their dominant representation in the paper. Females were more sceptical and reluctant to agree to the interview, which is the reason for their lack of representation throughout the interview process. The reason for the distrust lies in the fact that the Adventists in the Montenegrin society are still treated as a sect and are not well understood by the population, so it is understandable why they cautiously agreed to the interview. To carry out the interview, we had to publicly address the believers in the church, with the agreement of the pastor, explaining that it was an interview exclusively for scientific purposes and that it would be strictly anonymous. We stayed on 17 interviewees because we noticed that “theoretical saturation” was reached, as a criterion for when to quit the interview about a particular idea (Bryman 2012, p. 419). Namely, when we noticed that the answers of the respondents were repeated, we stopped interviewing the believers. For the most part, all the results obtained during the survey are stated and explained in the concluding observations. The thematic approach was applied in the analysis of the obtained data because it enabled “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 6). The interviews were conducted between May and August 2019. The very process of analysis took several steps. After transcription, the material was coded in such a way that the initial coding was primarily performed line by line. The initial codes were then grouped into categories, and then the categories into themes. Although grouping into themes, i.e., the conceptualisation of the initial codes, came from “bottom” (from the interviewee’s answers), it was nevertheless formed to a certain extent following the thematic structure of the interview.
6. Narrative of Respondents

It has already been stated that the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was the reference historical framework when religion was revitalised in Montenegro. During this period, the socialist regime collapsed, culminating in war, crisis and inter-confessional intolerance in this region. The collapse of the socialist regime and the crisis in this region led to the revitalisation of religion among citizens, which is obvious in our research on the Seventh-day Adventists, who, in search of a new way to spirituality, reached the Adventist Church. The conversion mostly occurs in times of social distress, when social networks and institutional structures lose strength or fail (Pelkmans 2009). It is interesting to notice that the interviewed believers were baptised in the Adventist Church in the early 1990s and beyond. In other words, after the collapse of communism—real socialism, the attitude of the political establishment towards religion changed, affecting its vitality and frequency in society, which has been discussed in more detail in the first section of this paper. The spiritual devastation, which communism has left behind over decades of rule, has resulted in the desire and need of believers for spirituality. The believers, in search of anything that would satisfy their spiritual needs, have found themselves in the Adventist Church. The respondents described in their interviews that they were seeking for the truth, that is, for the true interpretation of the Bible. Thus, reading the Bible and searching for the truth stand out as crucial motives for conversion to the Adventist Church, while considering this church to be the only and most consistent one in interpreting the Bible. Our respondents accentuate the periods of curiosity about religion, during which they tried to study the religious texts by themselves, in order to understand them and find out themselves if “there is anything there” (Marija). The most striking narrative about the religious search was from Grafika, a businessman in his late 40s, who was baptised in the Adventist Church in the early 1990s.

I didn’t know anything about the Adventists, I have only heard of the Sabbatarians. I knew that there were different Protestant churches in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. When I attended a fair in Sarajevo, I bought the Holy Bible. I wanted to read both the Holy Bible and the Quran, but firstly the Holy Bible, as I was traditionally an Orthodox. It took one summer for me to read the entire Old Testament and a part of the New Testament. Then I had many questions that I could not find the answer to, so I went to a priest to discuss it. I went to Ostrog Monastery, intending to speak with a priest. It happened in 1991, I can’t remember everything we talked about, but he did not give me clear answers to a few questions. How are sins forgiven, how can one be sure of the existence of God, how can one be sure that he has sinned, how can he be forgiven, does salvation exist? I asked him to show it to me in the Bible because if the answer was not in the Bible, it would mean that I always had to go to a priest for an answer. Then I went to Sarajevo and there I spoke with a priest of the Orthodox Church. He gave me a slightly more detailed answer, but I was not satisfied, again. So I went to a few other denominations, first to the Roman Catholic Church, and then to Islam. I went to a mosque and I learned how to bow down, I know their prayers. I spoke with an imam there and asked him a few questions. The answers were based on the Quran and were related to the physical aspect. Simply, those who get to be saved in Islam will have I don’t know how many women, I can’t remember. They are called the houris, and those who are saved will have sexual intercourse with them. Everything is allowed in this life, there are no prohibitions except that one must bow down in prayers, fast, etc. For me, it is a purchase of God and salvation. In Islam, only Allah knows who will be saved, as for Catholic and Orthodox Christians, only baptised will be saved. It spoiled the image of God that I found in the Holy Bible. Then I crossed-off those three denominations. Especially the Roman Catholicism that was catastrophic in medieval times, I stayed there the least. After that, I decided to learn about other denominations, so I went to Baptists. I found a few answers there and then I went to Jehovah’s Witnesses. I only got a headache there too. Then I went to Pentecostals and a few other places. At one point, I met a person who explained to me how the Holy Bible should be read. The Adventists had missionary activities in most post-communist states. In every major city, the missionaries of the Adventist Church from the United States were giving lectures, so persuaded by a friend, I went to the hall where those lectures were held. During that lecture, a lot of my questions were answered, so because of that, I stayed in the Adventist Church. (Grafika)
It came to our knowledge that the interest in religious topics for these interviewed believers mostly began in high school or faculty, which is confirmed by the narratives of Optika, Marija, and Aleksa. Optika, who is a businessman in his late 40s and points out that he was baptised in the Adventist Church in the early 1990s, explains when his interest in religion began.

My entire generation used to read various pieces of philosophy and literature at faculty. We used to read Dostoevsky, Hugo, and others. As for myself, the idea of Arthur Clarke, from Odyssey, that we are just an alien experiment was very close to me. I wasn’t keen on the evolution theory. (Optika)

Marija, who is in her mid-forties, revealed that she was baptised in 1993, and she started being interested in religion in high school.

I started searching for answers to the following questions—the meaning of life, whether death was the end, and that was how I came into contact with the Bible during high school. My classmate started reading the Bible, so we read it together, exchanged some experiences, and the Bible began to give answers to these essential questions, especially the answer to the question of whether the death was the end. I have seen that the Adventist Church adheres to the principles the Bible speaks of. (Marija)

Aleksa, an electrical engineer in his late 40s, also said that he was baptised in the Adventist Church in 1991. He pointed out that his interest in religion began in high school.

I took an interest in philosophy in high school, I used to read various spiritual texts, Christian and non-Christian ones. I read about Orthodoxy, Islam, Hinduism, Jewish Mysticism, etc. That’s how I became the Adventist. (Aleksa)

Like Glorija, other interviewed respondents, who converted to the Adventist Church, did so out of contact with society, friends, or relatives.

I found out about Adventists through my best friend, who went to the Adventist Church in fourth grade in high school. We spoke for a long time about her beliefs and Bible texts. Initially, I did not accept it, not until I was a third-year Mechanical Engineering student. The lectures in Thermodynamics were crucial for me to understand that God is the scientifically provable category. The second law of thermodynamics, in my opinion, directly points to the creator, not God, but the creator. (Optika)

Curiosity and a tendency to get closer to religion resulted in his conversion to the Adventist Church. To our question of why they chose the Adventist Church, why it was more special in comparison to others, Optika answered with dogmatic reasons, while Aleksa had more practical ones. Optika, thus, pointed out the dogmatic reasons why the Adventist Church had an advantage over all other Christian fractions. He said the following:

Only the Adventist Church follows all the Ten Commandments of God. The Fourth Commandment speaks about the Sabbath, so the difference is quite evident concerning most churches, because most churches observe Sunday, and the Fourth Commandment speaks about that. I chose the Adventist Church because of the Commandments of God and the fulfilled prophecies, as interpreted by the historical books of the Adventist Church that are factually verifiable. There is one more important thing, I found the spiritual peace in the Adventist Church because it is said in the Book of Revelations that Satan is angry with those who have faith in Jesus and who observe the Commandments of God. Satan would not be angry with those people if they were not godly. (Optika)

On the other hand, Aleksa emphasises the practical reasons, while not denying the dogmatic ones which distinguish the Adventist Church from the others.

I discovered something special about them—the Bible is the only authority and rule of life, as well as criteria of truth. In the Bible, I have found a clear, simple and logical framework, which explains the most important life issues. The Adventists have a special relation to the Bible, everything comes from it, as the Bible provides the historically reliable records, relevant principles for life, health, family, morality, social relations, finances, work, and so forth. Most importantly, the Bible provides the
answers to the so-called big questions, about the origin, the death issue and the meaning of life. The Adventists take the Bible literally, not as an allegory or an instructive story, which is why they are unique. If you take a look at the rest of the Christian world, you won’t find this principle so pronounced anywhere else. The Bible is taken literally as the historical record and the rule of faith and life. (Aleksa)

Therefore, according to the respondents, the advantages of the Adventist Church over other Christians are for dogmatic and practical reasons. The dogmatic reasons being the literal interpretation of the God’s Commandments, particularly observing the Sabbath, not Sunday, while the practical reasons are that only the Adventists, according to the respondents, properly and seriously take the Bible’s texts on morality, family, health, the meaning of life, death and so on.

The respondents testify that their ancestors mostly belonged to the Orthodox Church. We should not be surprised by this, because it is an Orthodox-dominated area. However, it is very interesting that the respondents only traditionally belonged to Orthodoxy, without a feeling of religiosity that attached them to that religion. This rootlessness in the Orthodox tradition could be one of the reasons why they went in search of another religion. Bižuterija, a businessman in his late 30s, explains the opinions of the interviewed respondents on the Orthodox Church in the best way. He distinguishes the main reasons, which we divided into three groups:

(a) Dissatisfaction with the Orthodox interpretation of the Holy Scripture;

Orthodoxy is a Christian denomination that does not respect the Holy Scripture entirely, and that is what bothers me about that story. (Bižuterija)

(b) The existence of saints, which is a kind of idolatry for the Adventist believers;

The Orthodox Church does not respect God’s law—the Ten Commandments of God. Be aware that the Second Commandment says: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.” Why? “You must not have any other god but me.” When you analyse the Bible and the Holy Scripture, you will find that Jesus Christ, who is the founder of Christianity, clearly says: “for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Thus, there is no other name, and it is a very detailed and very precise statement, and you have a model, you have a structure by which you will develop your relationship with God, and therefore you do not need absolutely anyone to reach God, Jesus Christ. (Bižuterija)

When asked what the Orthodox Church is wrong about, by which we greatly expanded our question to get an answer, Bižuterija continues his narrative:

The Orthodox are wrong because they have included many saints in their belief. A saint cannot be a person, which is clearly and loudly stated in the Bible. According to the Bible, when a person dies, his/her soul goes to God, the body turns into ashes and he/she is no longer alive. That person cannot mediate for anyone because he/she is dead, i.e., he/she is not dead, but he/she sleeps. Why does he sleep? Because, according to biblical belief, Jesus Christ will come again, and then a great awakening will happen. Therefore, to include idols in religion, where they are clearly forbidden, is a violation of God’s law. (Bižuterija)

Dissatisfied with Orthodoxy as a religion, they find their religious expression in the Adventist Church. According to the opinion of the believers, the main reason for this is the truth interpretation of the Bible in the right way, as the main implementation in their lives.

We already stated that a large number of respondents came from an Orthodox family. In that regard, we expected the respondents to have religious education in accordance with Orthodox tradition. However, although most of the respondents only traditionally come from an Orthodox family, the narratives of the interviewees that relate to a family upbringing and the attitude to religion are very interesting. What we observe in these narratives is the attitude of the respondents towards the Orthodox Church and its clergy, which was mostly negative.
My parents come from different families. My mother comes from the sworn communists, the monument bearers, the partisans, and highly educated family, both nowadays and in that time. She was not a believer, but she was more turned to religion than my father. Father used to criticise Orthodox priests occasionally. At a certain event, he was invited to, only my father refused to kiss a hand of a certain high-level dignitary of the Orthodox Church. He was much more critical of the Orthodox Church. He blamed my mother for my conversion to the Adventist Church. It is possible that some subconscious processes from my father’s attitude towards Orthodoxy influenced me to search for something that is not Orthodoxy. (Optika)

I grew up in a traditional family, where the Orthodox tradition hasn’t been respected. In our family, we have never spoken of God or religion. The family sometimes spoke negatively of Orthodoxy, of a few priests’ lives. (Aleksa)

Relations between family and religious life are very complex, so we start from the assumption that believers received the first information about religiosity in the family, which is considered to be a key place for religious socialisation. In other words, considering that family socialisation is one of the basic factors of religiosity in adulthood (Cornwall 1988), it could be assumed that the interviewees would be raised religiously. However, we are informed that the majority of believers of the Adventist Church in Montenegro come from families where the communist ideology was dominant, and accordingly, family education was not fostered, at least when it comes to religion. However, the negative attitude of a family towards the Orthodox Church and the messages sent by family members during the period of primary socialisation in regards to religion might have been the reason why our respondents did not analyse Orthodoxy further before converting to Adventism. Most of them, by their own admission, did not even attempt to become more familiar with the teachings and religious life of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro. Therefore, when it comes to Montenegro and conversion to Adventism, although it was a result of individual search in a way, it was also significantly influenced by the evident collectively (family) negative evaluation of the Orthodox Church.

Marijan, a businessman in his mid-forties, describes his atheistic upbringing in the family, but in school as well, which is understandable, as he was born in the socialist regime period.

My grandfather was a communist. I do not know if they were raised religiously when they were children. My uncle from Germany was perhaps more religious. He always insisted on burning the Yule log during some traditional ceremonies, that we should celebrate Slava, that the family should gather, etc. When you grow up in an atheist system and accept it as a reality of life, and you are taught in school that humans descended from monkeys, the theory of evolution, and so on, you simply accept that this is the case, you are practically an atheist. You do not go to church, and you do not follow the religious rites. Throughout elementary and high school, you read literature about battles, so whether you want or do not want, you start thinking in that direction. (Marijan)

Thus, Marijan believes that his family upbringing was shaped only by a traditional affiliation with Orthodoxy, while he lacked any deeper insight into teaching about the Orthodox faith and religious practice. Most of the respondents point out their atheistic upbringing, denying the existence of any upbringing or education in accordance with the Orthodox Church, its teachings, beliefs and religious practice, thus, they confirm the upbringing in accordance with the communist ideology. Glorija, a medicine student, excludes any form of religious upbringing, that is, any kind of religious socialisation in her family.

I come from a family that is, if I may say so, ¾ of Orthodox religion. My paternal grandfather was a Roman Catholic and my grandmother was an Orthodox. On the other hand, my maternal grandmother was an Orthodox. However, that is the belief with medals from the communist struggle. (Glorija)

We found out from Glorija’s narrative that atheistic education was prevalent in her family and that it was shaped by the communist ideology. Grafika testified in his narrative that atheistic education was dominant in his family, without the influence of Orthodox religion and religious practice, and they belonged to Orthodoxy only by tradition:
On one hand, I had atheist education in the family, and on the other Christian education at the level of tradition, not at the level of the Orthodox Church’s teaching, and my parents were communist atheists. (Grafika)

My family did not practice religion in any way. It was a mixture of communism and traditional Orthodoxy. Until the 1990s, my father did not celebrate Slava, my grandfather celebrated it, but we never went to church when we were children, nor our parents took us to church. (Alex)

7. Conclusions

This paper, whose “epistemic nature” we recognised as a kind of contribution and a pledge to pioneer research on Adventism in Montenegro, brought together an interdisciplinary encounter of a particular culture of memory that carried the atheistic socialisation dogmas with it. After the collapse of this ideological platform, it mysteriously led to an introspective internalisation of the abovementioned marginalised confession, thus preparing a path for religious individualisation of its believers.

Based on the empirical expertise of the Adventist believers, we can make several conclusions. The research indicates that a large number of our respondents have been baptised in the 1990s and beyond. Judging by this indicator, the revitalisation of religion, that happened among believers of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic confessions and which engulfed Montenegro in the early 1990s, was also evident among believers of this Church. Political circumstances, caused by the collapse of the order based on communist ideology, socio-economic circumstances in the war environment, the unprecedented inflation and the complete collapse of the economy, intensified the sense of fear and insecurity. A need to make sense of one’s life and establish it on a more permanent basis resulted in a great return to religion. During that period, most of the population returned to their traditional religion, mostly Orthodoxy, while few chose to seek a different religious expression, such as the Seventh-day Adventists that certain individuals chose.

It should be emphasised that conversion always means more than simply joining a religious group. It implies a more radical change in one’s world view (Robbins 1988), which is why we chose the believers baptised in the Adventist Church for this research, where “intensive interaction with the religious movement members” happened (Lofland 1981). Based on the obtained data, we conclude that a large number of the interviewed believers were converted, that is, baptised in the Adventist Church, in the early 1990s and beyond. It all coincides with our assumption that the conversion mostly occurred precisely in the period after the collapse of the socialist regime, the religious renewal and the social crisis that marked this historic period.

The spiritual devastation that the socialist regime left behind, led by the former Marxist views on religion, encouraged the awakening of religion among the interviewed believers. According to our respondents, this need for religion emerged in high school or faculty. Additionally, all the respondents stated that the Orthodoxy, from which they converted to Adventists, was an “unsatisfying religion” (Lofland 1981). The main reasons why they abandoned their ancestral religion were allegedly the irreverence of the Holy Bible, the glorification of tradition, teachings of the Holy Fathers and worshiping of the saints. They see themselves as religious seekers of the truth. Many respondents wandered from one religious group to another, while reading various mystical literature. In other words, conversion is not something that simply happens, it is realised by people and their activities (Beckford 1978). In this regard, during their religious search, our respondents came in contact with the Seventh-day Adventists, who were either close friends or family members. According to the narratives of our respondents, such relations mostly occurred before conversion and before they accepted the teachings of the Adventist Church. Our respondents stated a few dogmatic and practical reasons as the main motives for their conversion to Adventists. A few of them refer to the consistent observance of the fourth commandment of God, which emphasises the observance of the Sabbath rather than Sunday; other reasons concern relevant principles for life, health, family, morality, social relations, finances, business, the meaning of life, and so forth. While the respondents agree on the fact that many protestant denominations adhere to the same interpretation of the Bible,
they see the specificity of the Adventist Church in its consistency and severity, without being affected by any allegoric interpretations.

This study has led us to a very interesting revelation, which can be treated as a valuable element in further scientific studies of these believers. Namely, most of the respondents testified in their narratives that they came from atheist families, where communist ideology was dominant, and they belonged to the Orthodox Church only on a traditional basis. Any teachings of Orthodoxy as religion were absent. We also discovered an important piece of information from their narratives that the negative and derogatory comments on the Orthodox Church and its clergy were often made in their families, which could be one of the reasons why they searched for a new and different religious expression. Thus, by deeper analysis, it became clear that they were not familiar with their ancestral religion nor were they baptised in the Orthodox Church. The negative opinion of Orthodoxy has mostly been formed in the primary socialisation period, primarily due to the criticisms by the family members, which were of negative value.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the collected and analysed data, obtained through a qualitative methodology, can contribute to a deeper understanding of the Seventh-day Adventists’ religiosity, and thus, substantially expand future quantitative studies, providing them with an opportunity for comparative analysis. In other words, the qualitative data can add a wider interpretative dimension to statistical data and in some way inductively analyse them and provide a more complete sociological picture.

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