

## Original text:

### International conference explores religion

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#### **NOVI SAD -- Even though most Serbian citizens call themselves religious, they rarely go to church, pray and read the Bible.**

Speaking at an international conference held as part of the Divided God project, Sociologist Zorica Kuburić said that “eighteen percent of those who declared themselves as atheists or agnostics, actually behaved as religious persons, conforming to the socially acceptable types of behavior.”

Philosopher Tomislav Žigmanov said on the same occasion that “the abuse of the church and religion for political ends was still frequent in the region.”

The conference has gathered fifty young people from Bosnia, Slovenia, Turkey, Germany and Serbia, experts in the fields of humanitarian and intercultural studies.

The aim of the Divided God project is to establish an intercultural dialogue on the role of religion and religious communities in generating and solving problems and conflicts in the post-communist era.

Novi Sad movie director Želimir Žilnik, one of the project’s coordinator, explained that the main idea was to address issues of religious and cultural difference in Europe at present through discussion and debate, raising the awareness of interethnic and inter-religious social contexts and issues.

## Translated comments B92:

1. Religiousness in Serbia? Seventy percent of Serbs have not even been baptized before the war. (Darko, 21 July 2007 10:58)
2. In the West of Europe, the role of the religion is not as great as in the East or South. In my opinion, strong religious feelings cannot contribute to friendship, reconciliation and understanding in the future. Until the religious leaders, in the Balkans as well as the Middle East, change their ‘rhetoric’, there won’t be peace that would last. I support young people who won’t let themselves be manipulated. (igor pangaric, 21 July 2007 11:10)
3. “Eighteen percent of those who declared themselves as atheists or agnostics actually behaved as religious persons, conforming to the socially acceptable types of behavior.” This is a wonderful example of mental molesting of those who do not share their opinion and who, thus, feel forced to conform to this type of social behaviour. Although I cannot fully understand how someone who sticks to their own beliefs and opinions can cross themselves when amongst believers while at home, they wash their hands of that. Perhaps many people would dare to acknowledge and demonstrate their attitudes and opinions more clearly if we would stop disqualifying the nonbelievers or throwing stones on the members of other religions etc., perhaps one day, when this country has become a democratic country. (Rude, 21 July 2007 11:11)

4. It is one thing to be a truly religious, and a completely different thing is to praise God because your neighbour does the same, who, again, does it because of the others...because it is the custom-'it should be done' as the wise Serbs would say. (Duša, 21 July 2007 11:38)
5. Today, it is a greater sin to go to church and pray, in front of the immoral priests and members of the clergy. Sin is not easily forgiven. It is much more useful to stay at home, than to stand together with the immoral. (Rade, 21 July 2007 11:48)
6. Everyone experiences their own religion in a different way. One does not have to go to church and kiss the hand of a priest in order for oneself to feel as a believer. It is a much greater virtue to respect ones neighbours, not to steal, not to kill, to help the poor as much as one can, than to be a donor for a church. I am an Orthodox Christian and I belong to the group of moderate believers if I can call us so, because I am against many pagan customs in the Orthodox religion which I think have to be exterminated ( for example, taking the food to the cemeteries etc.). You should respect your faith and tradition but do not look down on other religions and traditions, and there's the recipe for a good life on the planet. Even those who belong to various pseudo Christian churches or sects should not be denied the right to do the same. Let us remember the fact that Christianity was considered a sect in the ancient times of the Roman Empire, and has become the most widespread religion. (Djuradj, 21 July 2007 11:58)
7. You have replaced the communist ideology with Orthodox religion and the highest commander with God. The religion has become your new ideology and it is being used by the state as means of retaining and nourishing hatred towards everything that comes from the West, just like in the times of communism. The problem in Serbia is the reversed system of moral values. So, until the moment this problem has been solved, every predominating ideology will be in purpose of resisting everything that is moral or civilized. Shortly, the problem of Serbia is the problem of the morality its citizens. (V, 21 July 2007 12:03)
8. It seems that the aim of the project is to show the way how religion is being used for the political goals in this region. Thus, the goal of the project is political by nature. (kometator, 21 July 2007 12:23)
9. If the Slovenian co organizers of this project respect religion (their own or some other), and they have named this project 'Divided God', why don't we/you start writing the word God with the initial capital-which is so according to our languages well as other European languages (Dieu-French, Gott-German, Dio-Italian, Dios-Spanish, etc.)? **(In the original comments on the website, most people have spelled the word God without the capitalized first letter of the word i.e. 'bog' instead of 'Bog' (note by the translator))** (Kontra, 21 July 2007 13:09)
10. The thing is that religious practice here is identified with formal behaviour connected to certain customs and holidays. Few people are trying to understand the message of Christianity. In my opinion, Serbian Orthodox Church does not contribute enough to change that, although its essential mission is to spread and pass on the content of the Gospels. (Deki, 21 July 2007 13:15)
11. It is unbelievable how Serbs are illiterate and uneducated people, especially when it comes to religion. They do not even try to learn anything. They are probably waiting for the president or the government to provide them with some kind of education that does not include learning as they are used to waiting for everything else.

(Stoj, 21 July 2007 14:00)

12. For centuries here, religion has had the role to provide akin of psychological recuperation for the impure conscience of the people. You have sinned, then you go to liturgy (in Orthodox Church it is a ceremony that corresponds to Catholic mass) which provokes a change of your feelings, but not the change of your motives or character. You leave no longer carrying the burden of the sin, but carrying the same principals as before. When the feeling of guilt reappears because of the stupid things you do, you go to liturgy again. Even without the ceremony you feel privileged when it comes to sin, because you belong to the heavenly people, so God will forgive you before he forgives somebody else. Therefore research reveals that religious people are generally much worse than atheists. The research by the Institute of Psychology of The Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade reveals that 'the lowest scores of readiness to reconcile are achieved by those who declare themselves as 'convinced believers who accept all the teachings of the religion they belong to and behave according to them'', The next are the believers who do not accept literally all the demands of the religion. They also score lower than the indecisive, uninterested and not religious others. " (ref. Dr Nebojša Petrović, Psihološke osnove pomirenja(Psychological Basis of Reconciliation), 265, 2005).  
(Misha, 21 July 2007 14:02)
13. My neighbour, who before these wars had never thought of going to church, to pray or read the Bible, asked me the other day: 'Do you know how one should behave in church, I'm going for the first time?' I should note that she is approaching fifty years of age.  
(Djole, 21 July 2007 14:03)
14. Much more worrying than not going to church or praying to God is the fact that people do not respect any of the Ten Commandments. Every day, we see people who put the material values before everything else. It would not be so scary if they did not acquire the material things in a severe and inhuman way. Greed and covetousness have become common sight in our everyday lives. Lobbyists and monopolists are being created in order to keep a huge capital which they do not actually need, because even with a small part of the capital they would have enough for a good and happy life. I often have a feeling that the man in Serbia has become a beast who considers nothing precious or sacred except for money. I do not know what to think about people who wear crosses around their necks as symbols of their religion, while in their past they have committed cold-blooded murders – and it was only and exclusively for money. All in all, I think that Serbs are generally dishonest believers and that in their believing there is much hypocrisy, in addition to what I have mentioned above. Here, unfortunately, faith and religion is still identified with patriotism, but mostly with the false patriotism, where chauvinism is expressed much more than nationalism. Unfortunately, the church does not criticize such situation enough, because even amongst the clergy there are a lot who would send biblical messages to people rather than apply them themselves. (B.Mikic, 21 July 2007 14:05)
15. I don't know how they conducted the survey or the size of the sample they used. I went to church in the communist times as much as I do now. Nowadays much greater number of people go to church. This is positive since it shows that the people are returning to the true values.  
(Marko, Beograd, 21 July 2007 14:29)
16. The church was not ready (here I mean the leading and prevailing Serbian Orthodox Church which has taken the place of the Yugoslav Communist Party), or maybe it did not want to offer the people something better, purer, more honorable. Yesterday I was riding on an overheated tram where a few young people were sitting, while older people overloaded by age and groceries bought at the market were standing. When we went past the church of St. Aleksandar Nevski, several young people stood up a little and

crossed themselves demonstrating their belonging to something which is, regrettably, equally horrible as the salvation in the form of a political party. If it were not true, social differences between the members of the clergy and the citizens with the same level of education wouldn't have become so big, priests wouldn't give blessings to wars, killings, concentration camps; Filaret, Pahomije and alike would stand trail for sins and crimes they committed to their own people, and there would be somebody who would explain that God is one and that he can be the moral law within ourselves which, unfortunately, Serbs have completely lost, that God is everywhere, not only within the unnecessary and expensively furnished temples, but also in the junkyards, hospitals... It can be an indicator how religious communities lake power: the army, police, Berettas, law-breakers (criminals, Milosevic, Legija), and on the other hand, coolly watch or throw away those who beg in front of the temples and all the miserables of Kosovo (which is the most important in the whole world until we think of something else – the same importance we gave to 'Dalmatian Kosovo', Slavonia, Republika Srpska...). For a start, it would be good, after conducting surveys to determine the public opinion, to start a dialogue end see who are the newcomers amongst the believers and why there are no people who used to visit the empty churches in the times when there was less money and a little more compassion and honesty.

((Vlast)a, 21 July 2007 14:30)

17. Why should we go to church when every month there is a priest accused of sexually molesting a boy, and why should we read the Bible when there are so many and each is different; is there anyone who lies more of those writers?...  
(nex, 21 July 2007 14:31)
18. Dear Ladies and gentlemen, you should take into account the fact that we belong to the oldest Christian church in the world (it does not matter when we accepted the religion), Ten Commandments to stick to, God give us peace and so on. Anyway, some say, the church, priests, etc... Jesus said: 'This stone is my Father; this tree is my Father...' We don't have to go to church to pray, we can do it within ourselves, in a room, in a car, anywhere. Unlike Catholics, we can't pay for our sins. And the church was built in order for the man when he enters it to feel small before God, which we are – very, very small. And about the absence of the practice of christening amongst Serbs, were we to grow up christened while our fathers, grandfathers and godfathers were committed to prisons and Goli Otok (= the prison on an island named Goli Otok in former Yugoslavia where prisoners of conscience were sent for opposing the communist regime)? Let's not fool ourselves, we all believe in one God, the Orthodox, Catholics, Moslems; we all believe in Him, it's just that we see Him differently, we are all bricks in the tower of Babylon... Leave behind small conflicts and arguments, because the man is above all that. We can be a lot more than we are now, so, God be with you and wish you well.  
(vanja, 21 July 2007 14:49)
19. Philosophers of religion have defined religion as EVERYTHING according to which the man defines and understands the world around him. If they do not believe in God, they believe in something else. Agnosticism DOES NOT EXIST. In this way, religion (God) can be football, horoscope, Big Brother, Zoran Djindjic, Seka Aleksic, as well as Windows Vista Ultimate Edition.  
(Mirodjub, 21 July 2007 14:54)
20. It is exactly because this type of ignorance, the late Prime Minister brought the subject of religious education to schools. It is not surprising that people know little about it when we take into account the persecution of the Church and the churchgoers during the communist regime. I am not entitled to talk about the number of people in the temples and churches, let alone those who don't even come near a church. I can say that our sanctuaries are full of people, even on Sundays when only 'common' liturgies are taking place. The 'Communist beast' is dying out, and this is why such meetings are being

organized in Serbia. About 50 young people from 5 countries – a number that deserves respect☺. Take a look at the results of the listing, and you'll see the number of atheists there, if you care so much about numbers. Whenever somebody wanted to destroy Serbia, they would start with the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is the same today. (Петар, 21 July 2007 14:55)

21. In the small town where I live everybody's competing to show who the greatest believer is. A veteran of war correspondence has paid for a seat in the church, but nobody's ever seen him sitting there. At the service for the victims of the 1991-1999 wars, you won't see any members of the so-called 'patriotic' forces. You'll see about 50 sad fathers and mothers...And its these victims that are mostly manipulated with. Whenever politicians boast with their faith in public, they lie. If they were true believers, they would not boast with that..... (Boris, 21 July 2007 14:58)
22. It is sad that no representatives of religious communities, or a theologian, took part in the debate, to provide the perspective of the other, religious side, just for the sake of objectivity. I would really like to know whether anyone like that has been invited, which I doubt. So, for me, this public debate represents a subjective and political attempt to discredit the religiousness by means of different statistics. (Cvijus, 21 July 2007 15:09)
23. What can one say about a nation within which 95% of people declare themselves as believers, and to swear using the name of God is the part of the folklore? What can one say about complete religious illiteracy of the same people? What can one say about the church and the priests who want to keep it that way since that way is easier to keep the people in humility? What can one say about the forced religious formalism in society (Celebrations of the family saint, Easter, Christmas) which has almost become a kind of social obligation? What can one say about the hatred and violence of the declared Orthodox believers who should instead spread ideas of love for those who do not share their beliefs? What can one say about the priests who encourage such attitudes? What can one say about the adultery between the church and the state? (Sedam pitanja, 21 July 2007 15:12)
24. God does not live in churches but in the heart of every human being. To believe in God is inner personal thing and not gathering and kneeling in front of 'icons' created by a human hand. So, what was the religion of Jesus? What religion did Moses belong to? (Ilija, 21 July 2007 15:17)
25. Religion was made up only to manipulate people. I am disappointed with our priests who preach one thing, do the other and think the third. Besides, what's with religious education when there is no empirical evidence for what it teaches? (In Serbian, the word is 'veronauka', derived from 'vera' meaning faith/religion and 'nauka' meaning science) (Misko, 21 July 2007 15:31)
26. The difference between a believer and an atheist is that believers don't know what they believe in and atheists don't know what they are talking about. A mutual characteristic is that neither goes to church. (Amin, 21 July 2007 15:49)
27. There are a lot more atheists than above mentioned 18%. I know a lot of people who declare themselves as believers solely for their own benefit (which is a sort of manipulation), while others declare themselves as such only because 'everybody does that'... 30% of people at the most believe in Christian, biblical God; most 'believers' believe in something unidentified, a divine power.(chill, 21 July 2007 17:15)

28. Agnosticism surely exists, but in order for a man to declare himself as an agnostic, he must have good knowledge of both religion and atheism. After decades of studying (informal, I am neither a philosopher nor a philosopher of religion, nor a believer) of the question of the existence of God, I have come to a conclusion that such question is not relevant in real life. If I tried to explain why, I would have to write an elaborate book reviewing the three major religions, as well as Buddhism, Taoism and a dozen of philosophical orientations.

This is the problem in Serbia – most believers don't know what they believe in, while most non-believers don't know what they don't believe in.  
(Danilo, 21 July 2007 17:20)

29. It was about 33 years ago when an article came out in 'National Geographic' magazine. The heading was 'The Greatest Migration in Europe'. In short, it describes the migration of Albanians over the border into Yugoslavia. The writer noted that American press as well as the government officials of the time paid much attention to the Berlin Wall where somebody climbed over the wall once a month on average. And nobody even mentioned thousands of people who crossed the Yugoslav border. Since then, here in the USA, nobody has mentioned these events which would have decisive influence on the present conditions in Kosovo. There was no political gain in talking about that. Nobody cares for common people. These are the facts.  
(Laza iz Newport Beach-a, 21 July 2007 18:27)

30. Anyone who lives in Serbia knows that Serbs are not very religious. Even the religious 'decorations' for Christmas or Easter is less than their western counterpart.  
(Dejan, 21 July 2007 20:50)

#### **COMMENTS ON THE RADIO 021 WEBSITE:**

Janko: What is it great Serbs (Srki and alike) justice hurts?

k-1: I think that the church manipulates people more than vice versa.

Srki: The Catholic Church that you favour is 'more honest and tolerant', especially those friars with guns who order and conduct the killings of Serbs. You are so miserable with all this campaign against the Serbian Orthodox church on R021.

Ja: bezimeni (anonymous/Nn) what is it? Have you recognized yourself? Ha? Because of people like you I feel ashamed for being Orthodox Christian and reading the Bible (and afterwards the Koran and similar religious books) while those like yourself had no clue that such books even existed.

Ns: It is pathetic that the great number of the 18% of the atheists is afraid to admit that they are atheists. Why is that? Is it in to be a believer? Or is it out to be an atheist? What is this all about?

Heh: Has this bezimeni (anonymous/Nn/No name) recognized himself among these new 'turbo' believers, and thus started protesting? Isn't it a fact? I am an Orthodox Christian and I have never seen a Catholic wearing a bigger cross on his chest than the head of the Catholic Church. And how many have here worn bigger crosses than the Patriarch himself? Is the memory so short? Here's a reminder: Arkan, Kristijan...

Turbo mandov: A phenomenon that is much more prevailing is the phenomenon of the 'turbo-grease' (turbo-cvarak?!). It is a problem which is achieving serious dimensions and besides religion has its fingers in culture, education, science, leisure... Those who suffer from this type of phenomena tend to be pretentiously modern while hidden leek is still lurking, you know from where... Thus we have the 'turbo' cultivated, 'turbo' educated, 'turbo' modern. These people have in a subtle way become 'synonymous' for the modern, educated and cultured... They are those who 'have knowledge' of the eternal truths and prescriptions which are always helpful... Does anyone recognize themselves?

Nn: I'm getting impression that on Radio 021 the texts about Orthodox Christianity are being written by 'turbo' Catholics. It is a nice example of mutual tolerance... Hello to the censor; at least he will read this.

## 8 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON B92 WEBSITE

31. Basically, there is nothing new to be said, because people have been questioning the existence of God for centuries. So, nowadays, only a replica is being created in the current context, a social-political context in the first place, which I consider a mistake. He has never been seen, but it is said that He can be felt only by a pure heart of a believer, because the heart is the centre of emotionality (e.g. a symbol of love) and a connection with a mysterious and infinite world where the language of rationality is not (often) spoken. It represents a personal experience. My message, mostly to those who are suspicious towards the existence of God, is:

1. To mention God is to acknowledge Him. Let us remember moments of uncertainty.
  2. The development of rationality and civilization is not in accordance with the development of the man and the planet, because rationality is not capable of containing and processing the richness of the being which appears in the pure inner relationship with God.
  3. I think that conclusions about God should not be made only by the head, but rather within the inner synergy of the heart and the head. After that, the view of life as well as of the questions in the text would be completely and surprisingly different.
- (Alfa i Omega, 21 July 2007 22:56)

32. It may be true what is being said here, but I still have not met a religious Serb. The role of the Catholic Church is far more influential in the western world as compared to the role of the Orthodox Church in many of the eastern countries today. The return to the religion as one well-worn ideology in the 21st century resembles to going backwards. The religion in Serbia today can be understood only in the historical sense, as something deeply rooted in our old customs, culture and tradition. However, I beg you to spare us from everything else; we are fed up with newly resurrected Catholics and Moslems. We really don't need this.

(maca, 22 July 2007 00:29)

33. God save our souls. May Day, May Day!  
(kom@, 22 July 2007 01:53)

34. I cannot understand what church-going has to do with believing. I don't have to go to church to be a good Christian.

He is everywhere.

εν τούτω νικά!  
(Konstantin, 22 July 2007 02:37)



35. It is also socially acceptable to be a member of a political party... I give credit only to the minority who stick to their principles – to those who act in accordance to their own systems of value and do not go to church only because everybody does that nor become involved in a political party for the reasons of personal gain. For me, the greatest hypocrites are former communists now converted to Christianity because I do not know what they actually believe in. (Doctor Evil, 22 July 2007 04:04)

36. They are blowing their own 'religious' trumpets and persecute other religions. A primitive community that doesn't understand and shows surprise at why other peoples do not like them and call them names. (Dragana, 22 July 2007 09:01)

37. I believe in God. I go to church. I am neither uneducated nor ignorant. I am neither the follower of the politics of Vojislav Kostunica nor, God forbid, Vojislav Seselj and Slobodan Milosevic. I do not think that every action of every nongovernmental organization is for a good cause. I am worried by the well-organized campaign against the Serbian Orthodox Church. I am sure that it will bring nothing good to our people. ("Na privremenom radu", 22 July 2007 10:59)

38. However, the rule of religious conservative political parties is not something that makes us different from the rest of Europe. Look at Germany or The Netherlands, for example...In the United Kingdom, there is an official religion of the state. The same goes for Greece! The problem of us Serbs is that when it comes to tangible questions, we immediately rush into conflict and make fuss about it. Others live with that and patiently try to do something about it. (I., 22 July 2007 11:27)

## **2 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON RADIO 021 WEBSITE**

9. ced@

Janko come to pick up your sandwich! And for yoghurt, to our old place. ???

10. ja pa ja

The problem is that those who discuss about religion here have no clue what it really is and what it is all about. I would recommend to the participants to try and read The New Testament instead of listening to sociologists. If sociologists had any idea about the faith in Christ, they would be theologians. So, in this way, they are only blabbering about utopian systems. The Orthodox Church is the only one left to pass on the teachings of Christ in the right way for 2000 years now. This is the story of Salvation, but what it is and who we should be saved from is something you obviously do not understand.