Influence of the Family
on How Youth Relate to God:
A Systematic Review of Psychology Literature

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Introduction

God-image is the mental schema that an individual possesses of whatever they believe to be God. This God-image, which can often be an anthropomorphic representation that is based on human experiences, is said to influence the way individuals relate to God.[2] On an extended level, God-image could also have an impact on the way individuals relate to others in their social milieu. For instance, Greeley[3] found that people who hold more warm images of God (as a Lover, Spouse or Friend) tend to show more interest on social issues and programmes. They are more likely to support equality of women and the rights of minority groups, and to disapprove of capital punishment. In other words, one can argue that individuals' God-image originates from their social experiences and flows back to it.

Literature on psychological correlates of individual's God-image is abundant. They range from Freud's conceptual claim that the image of God is an inherited parental image of the murdered primeval father (a concept borrowed from the Greek myth of Oedipus), which can be activated by the individual's experience of their own father, to a

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[2] Bernard Spilka and Michael Mullin, "Personal Religion and Psychological Schemata: A Research Approach to a Theological Psychology of Religion," *Character Potential: A Record of Research* 8 (1977) 2: 57-66.

[3] Andrew M. Greeley, *The Young Catholic Family: Religious Images and Marriage Fulfilment* (Chicago: The Thomas Moore Press, 1980).

more contemporary examination of God-image drawn from the relationship between a child and the caregiver. Underpinning these claims is the undeniable role of the family in the formation of God-image and how that influences the way individuals relate to God and others in their lives. The aim of the present chapter is to explore the role of the family, and particularly the relationship with one's parents, in the origin and development of God-image[4] that young people carry, which impacts the way they relate to God and others.

The chapter goes on to discuss the background to the problem, which will end by stating the specific objectives of the present review. The method adopted for the study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of scholarly works published in academic journals on the theme of family and God. SLR is an orderly process of framing a research question or objectives, searching and selecting literature based on some criteria, and thoroughly examining the literature in order to state the emerging insights. Based on the emerging themes, it will be possible to discuss the role of family in individual's relationship with God, in the light of the findings of religious studies and social sciences. The discussion will explore the role of family in the spirituality of young people in India today.

1. Background to the Problem under Study

God-image in the Light of Psychoanalytical Traditions

As mentioned earlier, Sigmund Freud had suggested that the image of God was an inherited parental image of the murdered primeval father, which can be activated by the individual's experience of their father.[5] Working on the Freudian model, we can say that the influence of family set up on the individual's image of God is very minimal. Freud begins his intellectual exploration into the origin of human collective image of God at a mythological level and ends by proposing some psychological conjectures pertaining to individuals' image of God. There is an obvious jump in his argument. Another reason why Freudian concept of God-image may not be much meaningful to the present study in the Indian context is a criticism voiced by Ana-Maria Rizzuto. According to her, Freud's unshakable conviction of the oedipal origin of God is purely a Western image: "Nowhere in Freud's work does he show any inclination to test his hypothesis in the material provided by Eastern religions."[6] For Carl Jung, on the other hand, God-image is an archetype that is inherited. So far he agrees with Freud, but differs sharply in

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[4] In the present study, the terms 'God-image' and 'Image of God' are used interchangeably. Elsewhere in literature terms such as 'God-representation' and 'God-concept' are used; however, for the sake of consistency, these terms are not used in the present review paper. The paper examines the construct of God-image within the context of the spirituality of young people.

[5] Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion* (London: Hogarth, 1928).

[6] Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 85.

further explaining it: "The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms."[7] The implication of the Jungian claim is that God-image as an archetype is inherited but its specificities can be affected by one's own experience of the parent figure.

Following this conceptual claim made by the psychoanalytic tradition, several empirical studies were carried out particularly in the 1970's. These studies, often undertaken by Catholic professors of psychology, basically examined the relationship between Children's image of God and their relationship with their parents. The findings can be summarised as follows:[8] Despite wide variations, most studies indicate that the concept of God is sometimes significantly correlated with the mother image.[9] Other times, the image of God is also found to be more closely related to the preferred parent of the child, and having some reliance on the image of the parent of the opposite sex.[10] Louvain series of studies, headed by Antoine Vergote, suggest that there is a greater propensity for maternal characteristics of God, especially among males, and thus questioning Freud's concept of God being related to the primeval father.[11] However, data from Zaire in Africa, among other countries showed "divine image is closer to the father image."[12] It seems that the components of the parental figure attributed to God are often determined by culture, and not individual psychology.[13]

The inconsistent results in these research findings may indicate one thing for sure: God-image is not a universal unconscious constant as Freud claimed. There seems to be an interplay of many variables: like a propensity for an anthropomorphic representation of God,[14] the influence of religious instructions, preferred parent, and gender of the individual.

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[7] Carl G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. Collected Works*, vol.9. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954) 79.

[8] For a good review, see Kenneth E. Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence: A Comprehensive Review of the Research* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1990) 83-97.

[9] Alvaro Tamayo and A. Dugas, "Conceptual Representation of Mother, Father, and God according to Sex and Field of Study," *Journal of Psychology* 97 (1977) 1: 79-84.

[10] Alvaro Tamayo and Leandré Desjardins, "Belief Systems and Conceptual Images of Parents and God," *The Journal of Psychology* 92 (1976) 1: 131-140; A. Godin and M. Hallez, *Parental Images and Divine Paternity: From Religious Experience to Religious Attitude* (Brussels: Lumen Vitae, 1964).

[11] Antoine Vergote and C. Aubert, "Parental Images and Representation of God," *Social Compass* 19 (1972) 431-444;
Antoine Vergote and Alvaro Tamayo, *Parental Figures and the Representation of God* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981).

[12] Tamayo and Desjardins, "Belief Systems and Conceptual Images of Parents and God," 133.

[13] Hyde, *Religion in Childhood and* Adolescence, 12.

[14] Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God.*

As for data from the Indian subcontinent in these studies, there is an abysmal lacuna. Noteworthy, however, is the contribution of Sudhir Kakar to the analysis of Indian mystical tradition from the psychoanalytic perspective. His *Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* conceptually explores the interrelation between mythical and cultural traditions of India and their influence on the psyche of the Indian child. In any case, its focus is not on children's image of God, and hence not of significance to the present study.

God-image in the Light of Attachment Theory

Since the 1990's the influence of parents on children's image of God has largely been explored within the theoretical framework of attachment theory. Lee Kirkpatrick and Philip Shaver[15] have argued that attachment theory offers a meaningful framework for the psychological exploration of religious schema and behaviour of people. Originally proposed by Bowlby,[16] attachment theory attempts to explain and predict social interaction between adults in terms of patterns in the childhood relationship with caregivers. After repeated experiments, Mary Ainsworth and others[17] have proposed three possible patterns of attachment: secure attachment, insecure-avoidant attachment, and insecure-ambivalent attachment. The secure attachment is whereby the child uses the caregiver as a "secure-base" to explore the world, and is pained by separation from the caregiver, but easily gets reattached at the return of the caregiver. A child exhibiting avoidant style of attachment, on the contrary, is pained inconsolably by separation; shows anger at the return of the caregiver and subsequently might avoid the caregiver. In the ambivalent attachment pattern the child does not exhibit a consistency in the three aspects of attachment, viz., the ability to explore the world using the caregiver as the secure-base, expressing moderate pain at separation, and being open to attachment at reunion.

Kirkpatrick and others extend this theory to one's relationship with God and religion. God (or other deities/saints) may act as an attachment figure to a believer either as an extension of, or as a substitute for, relationship with parent figures. It is within the framework of attachment theory that the present study aims to explore the influence of the family on the way youth relate with God. While there is a plethora of literature on the topic, not any known systematic literature review has been published, except for a

[15] Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Philip R. Shaver, "Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood Attachments, Religious Beliefs, and Conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990) 315-334; Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "God as a Substitute Attachment Figure: A Longitudinal Study of Adult Attachment Style and Religious Change in College Students," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24 (1998) 961-973.

[16] John Bowlby, "The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39 (1958) 5: 350–73.

[17] Mary D. Ainsworth, M.C. Blehar, E. Waters and S. Walls, *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978).

quantitative meta-analysis of 11 cross-national questionnaire based studies that have investigated links between religious conversions and perceived childhood attachment history with parents (the contents of which will be reported later in this work).[18] The present study intends to fill this gap by carrying out qualitative systematic literature review of peer-reviewed academic articles on the theme of parents/family and God.

The specific objectives of the present study are:

a) To search and select a set of available peer-reviewed empirical research reports from a digital database of literature on the theme of God and family and/or parents;

b) To systematically identify and report the emerging themes pertaining to God and family in the selected literature; and,

c) To attempt a discussion on the implication of the emerging themes for youth and family in India.

2. Method of the Present Literature Review

Systematic literature reviews are common in medical sciences and psychology. The procedure of meta-analysis, as it is also referred to, attempts to statistically analyse quantitative data to identify, appraise and synthesise available evidence, and on that basis propose hypotheses. Usually it is a quantitative procedure. However, qualitative systematic literature reviews are also increasingly being published in peer-reviewed journals.[19] While quantitative systematic review helps to evaluate the strength of available evidence in terms of numbers, the qualitative procedure helps in systematically schematising the emerging themes within the selected studies in relation to the problem under study. Three steps are said to be important in a systematic literature review: search and selection of the available literature, analysis of the sources, and reporting the emerging patterns. The following sections report this process for the systematic literature review examining the influence of the parents on the way young people relate to God.

Literature Search and Selection

In June 2014, two separate searches were run on Academic Search Premier, a digital database of literature and a component of the EBSCOHost Services. Academic Search

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[18] Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14 (2004) 4: 223-250.

[19] See for instance, Irene J. Higginson and G. Sen-Gupta, "Place of Care in Advanced Cancer: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review of Patient Preferences," *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 3 (2000) 3: 287-300.

Premier is a multi-disciplinary database that provides full text for nearly 3,900 peer-reviewed journals, and over one hundred of them date back further than 1975. Studies were considered eligible for inclusion in the present review if they were empirical research reports – quantitative or qualitative – published in peer-reviewed journal, in English, since 1990. For the first search, the search term "parents God" was used, and this yielded a total of 32 entries; the second round of research using the term "family God" yielded 98 entries. There were many repetitions between the two search outcomes, some of the entries were book reviews, and others were not psychological sources; these were not included for the literature selection. Finally, 31full-texts were downloaded in pdf format for analysis.
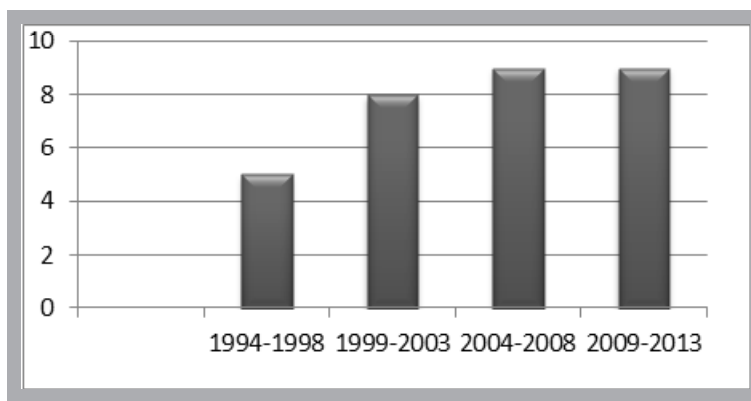

Fig.1: Distribution of selected literature according to year of publication

The year of publication of the selected literature ranged from 1994 to 2013. Grouping them in five year blocks as shown in Fig.1, suggested a slow but steady increase of interest in this topic as an area of research.

Another interesting characteristic of the selected studies is that, besides being quantitative in approach, they all involved participants who were children, adolescents or young adults, even though this was not one of the envisaged criteria for literature selection.

Literature Analysis: Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The selected articles were meticulously read to identify patterns following the method of Thematic Analysis, which Selvam has explained and employed elsewhere.[20] "Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data."[21] Often this approach goes beyond identifying and analysing to interpreting

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[20] Sahaya G. Selvam and Joanna Collicutt, "The Ubiquity of the Character Strengths in African Traditional Religion: A Thematic Analysis," in Hans Knoop and Antonella Delle Fave (eds.), *Well-Being and Cultures: A Positive Psychology Perspective* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013) 83-102.

[21] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative*

various aspects of the data based on the research topic.[22] In simple words, thematic analysis consists of coding the data systematically and finally reporting patterns that emerge from the data. In the present study, the selected articles were considered the data for analysis, albeit a set of secondary sources. The following section reports the emerging themes from this analysis, under six subthemes avoiding additional comments on them. The Discussion section will point out the implication of the findings for family and youth in the Indian context.

3. Findings: The Influence of Parents on Children's Relationship with God

Studies carried out between 1950's and 1980's, as summarised in the Background to the Study, focussed on the following research questions: which parent (father or mother) most influences the God-image of the child; does the gender of the child play a moderating role in the influence of the parent on the child's God-image; do children acquire God-image in correspondence to the preferred parent of the child? However, the analysis of the literature selected for the present review suggests that since the 1990's the focus of research related to the influence of family and parents on children's God-image has extended to a variety of themes. These themes form the outline for the following presentation of the findings.

Theme 1. God-image of the Parents vis-à-vis that of the Children

Almost all the reviewed studies confirm that there is a significant association between parents and their children's God-image. However, the studies differ in the details of this association. Surprisingly, only one of the selected studies focused on the classical question of which parent has a stronger influence on the child's God-image. The study of 100 students, aged from 18 to 21 years, suggested that children's 'God-representation' is close to a composite representation of both parents together rather than one of the parents in isolation.[23] Other studies have focussed on a variety themes as evidenced by summary presented in this section.

Examining the association between parents' and children's image of God in its specific contents, a study[24] by Bradley Hertel and Michael Donahue, involving a large sample of 1220 boys and 1340 girls (all of them were 5th to 9th graders in the U.S.)

Research in Psychology 3 (2006) 79.

[22] Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development* (London: Sage, 1998).

[23] Ian T. Birky and Samuel Ball, "Parental Trait Influence on God as an Object Representation," *Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 122 (1988) 2: 133-137.

[24] Bradley R. Hertel and Michael J. Donahue, "Parental Influences on God Images among Children: Testing Durkheim's Metaphoric Parallelism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (1995) 2: 186-199.

shows that children whose parents had a loving image of God, and children perceived them as loving parents, also had a loving image of God. There is an intricate, but interesting, dimension to this association that is supported by the data, namely, parents who themselves had a loving image of God also tended to be loving parents. The study went on to suggest that the mother's image of God as compared to that of the father had a greater impact on children's image of God. Supporting the same view, but measuring contrasting variables, two experimental studies by Exline and colleagues[25] confirmed that perceiving one's mother or father as cruel was associated with two types of "divine struggle," marked by anger towards God and concern about God's disapproval of the self.

There are two points to note here: first, the focus here is on the perception of the children of their parents, and not necessarily what the parents are; second, it is not only the God-image of parents, but also how parents are perceived to be relating to children that is associated with the God-image of children. This aspect is further explored by several studies summarised in the following theme.

Theme 2. Parent-Child Attachment and God-Youth Relationship

In the selected literature, there were several studies that focussed on the relationship between parents and children and how that acted as a moderating factor in the relationship between children and God. Some of these studies have used the framework of attachment theory. Based on the attachment theory, two possible models are posed to explain attachment to God: correspondence and compensation.[26] Correspondence hypothesis presupposes that the relationship with God will be a continuation of individual's relationship with the caregiver or the parent. Compensation hypothesis presupposes that their relationship with God would be an attempt to compensate for the avoidant caregiver. These two models also feature in the studies reviewed below.

One example of correspondence model is a study by Gnaulati and Heine involving 207 college students of various ethnic backgrounds in the U.S (whose mean age was 20 years): "Results suggest that perceptions of God may be modelled after maternal perceptions: participants who had difficulties accepting maternal imperfections and who reported having overprotective and highly nurturant mothers, tended to perceive God as an omnipotent provider and protector."[27] Another example where compensatory model

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[25] Julie J. Exline, Steffany J. Homolka, and Joshua B. Grubbs, "Negative Views of Parents and Struggles with God: An Exploration of Two Mediators," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 41 (2013) 3: 200-212.

[26] Angie McDonald, P. Beck, S. Allison, and A. Norsworthy, "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypothesis," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 24 (2005) 1: 21-28.

[27] Enrico Gnaulati and Barbara J. Heine, "Parental Bounding and Religiosity in Young Adulthood," *Psychological Reports* 81 (1997) 3: 1174.

was operative was in a study carried out by Eshleman and colleagues: children (aged from 4 to 10) whose parents were less involved in their lives perceived God as closer; when children perceived God as male, boys perceived God as closer; when children perceived God as female, girls perceived God as closer.[28]

However, these effects seem to be levelled as people grow into adulthood. When people enter into young adulthood there is an attempt to evolve a personal spirituality and relationship with God. Though some times this attempt could exhibit exaggerated tendencies as in sudden conversions when childhood God-image has not been healthy, as it will be pointed out later in this section, nonetheless often there is an evolution of individual spirituality with a corrective and reparative role attributed to correspondence and compensatory processes, in such a way that emerging adults with low parental security articulated reciprocal experiences of secure, intimate attachment with God.[29]

Theme 3. Parenting Style and Children's God Image

Under this subtheme, our discussion gets a little more focused on the impact of parenting style on the God-experience of children. Way back in 1967, Diana Baumrind[30] suggested three parenting styles. In the authoritarian style of parenting, the parents demand highly from their children while offering low level of support (also referred to as being responsive). These parents are rigid, harsh and may be abusive. Authoritative style of parenting is characterised by high level of demandingness and equally high level of responsiveness. The authoritative parent is responsive to the child's needs but not indulgent. The permissive or indulgent parent shows low demandingness with high responsiveness towards the child. More recently, Maccoby and Martin have added a fourth style to this list: the neglectful parent who neither demands from, nor shows adequate response to the child.[31] In the context of the present study, what is the impact of parenting style on the relationship of children with God?

A study carried out in Pakistan among a small sample (n=50; aged from 20 to 25 years) of youth, showed varying effects of parenting styles on male and female participants' relationship with God. Perceived paternal authoritative parenting was positively related with friendly perception of God in males and perceived maternal permissive parenting was negatively related with protective perception of God in males. Further, perceived

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[28] Amy K. Eshleman, *et al.*, "Mother God, Father God: Children's Perceptions of God's Distance," *International Journal for The Psychology of Religion* 9 (1999) 2: 139-146.

[29] Cynthia N. Kimball, et al., "Attachment to God: A Qualitative Exploration of Emerging Adults' Spiritual Relationship with God," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 41 (2013) 3: 175-188.

[30] D. Diana Baumrind, "Child Care Practices Anteceding Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior," *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75 (1967) 1: 43-88.

[31] Eleanor E. Maccoby and J.A. Martin, "Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent–child Interaction," in P. Mussen and E.M. Hetherington (eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol. IV. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983), 1-101.

parental neglect by both mother and father was negatively related with benevolent and protective perception of God.[32]

There are other research projects that report the effect of parenting style on children's relationship with God, but these studies have adapted or twisted the model suggested by Baumrind. For instance, Rito Baring[33] reporting a study carried out in the Philippians suggests that when parents exhibit a confrontational style in matters of sin, God is imaged by children as sad but forgiving. In another study,[34] children aged from 4 through 11, who perceived their parents as nurturing and powerful also perceived God as both nurturing and powerful. This finding has been repeated for a young adult population (18 to 22 years) in a study by the same team of researchers.[35] On the other hand, the study by McDonald and colleagues[36] examines the impact of home ambient rather than the parenting style. American young adults (aged from 18 to 27) coming from homes that were emotionally cold or unspiritual exhibited higher levels of avoidance of intimacy in their relationship to God. Similarly, overprotective, rigid, or authoritarian homes were associated with higher levels of both avoidance of intimacy and anxiety over lovability in relationship to God.

Theme 4. Family and Religious Belief and Behaviour of Children

Religiosity and Spirituality are much discussed and differentiated constructs in the study of religion.[37] While spirituality is related to "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential,"[38] religiosity can be understood in terms of religious behaviour that include belonging to a community that shares a common set of religious beliefs, participation in worship, reading the scriptures. In general, God-image and religious behaviour are both significantly associated with the family values among Catholic and protestant population.[39] For instance, a study

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[32] Najma Najam and Sidra Batool, "Relationship between Perceived Parenting Style, Perceived Parental Acceptance-Rejection (PAR) and Perception of God among Young Adults," *Journal of Behavioural Sciences* 22 (2012) 1: 83-99.

[33] Rito Baring, "Children's Image of God and Their Parents: Explorations in Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17 (2012) 4: 277-289.

[34] Jane R. Dickie, *et al*., "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997) 1: 25-43.

[35] Jane R. Dickie, *et al*., "Mother, Father, and Self: Sources of Young Adults' God Concepts," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (2006) 1: 57-71.

[36] Angie McDonald, *et al*., "Attachment to God and Parents: Testing the Correspondence vs. Compensation Hypotheses," *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 24 (2005) 1: 21-28.

[37] Sahaya G. Selvam, "Towards Religious Spirituality: A Multidimensional Matrix of Religion and Spirituality," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12 (2013) 36: 129-152.

[38] Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999) 5.

[39] Cameron Lee and Annmarie Early, "Religiosity and Family Values: Correlates of God-Image in a Protestant Sample," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 28 (2000) 3: 229-240.

conducted among adults (aged from 18 to 84 years) in France has suggested that children who hold the image of God as forgiving, and have also experienced an ambient of forgiveness in the family of origin, show a high level of personal willingness to forgive others.[40] The following paragraphs report more intricate findings.

Respondents who had experienced secure attachment with parents report an increase in importance of their religious beliefs during adulthood. On the other hand, insecure respondents whose parents had expressed low level of religiosity tended to isolate themselves from their parents and compensate their childhood experience by building a close relationship with God, expressed more theistic beliefs, and reported a higher level of religious change during adulthood. However, if parents had been highly religious, secure respondents generally expressed correspondence of higher level religiosity as compared to insecure respondents.[41] A study by Granqvist and Hagekull further adds that people with insecure childhood attachments exhibited emotionally based religiosity, sudden religious conversions, and intense and exaggerated religious changes in early adulthood. In contrast, gradual religious growth was seen among people who had experienced secure attachments.[42]

Moreover, at least two reported studies by Granqvist and colleagues suggest that parental rejection during childhood was highly associated with sudden and intense religious changes particularly during life situations of crises. These individuals were more susceptible to be attracted to New Age spirituality. On the contrary, children who had experienced their parents are loving people were likely to express more socially based religious-spirituality.[43] These conclusions were further confirmed by the findings of a longitudinal study by the same research team.[44]

Theme 5. Parental Marital Discord/Divorce and Spirituality of Children

A very enlightening study by Christopher Ellison involving a large sample of 1500 young adults (aged from 18 to 35) confirmed that persons raised by parents in intact,

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[40] Marianne Akl and Etienne Mullet, "Forgivingness: Relationships with Conceptualizations of Divine Forgiveness and Childhood Memories," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20 (2010) 3: 187-200.

[41] Pehr Granqvist, "Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: On the Question of Compensation or Correspondence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998) 2: 350-368.

[42] Pehr Granqvist and Berit Hagekull, "Religiousness and Perceived Childhood Attachment: Profiling Socialized Correspondence and Emotional Compensation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38 (June 1999) 2: 254-273; See also, Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14 (2004) 4: 223-250.

[43] Pehr Granqvist *et al.*, "Examining Relations among Attachment, Religiosity, and New Age Spirituality Using the Adult Attachment Interview," *Developmental Psychology* 43 (2007) 3: 590-601.

[44] Pehr Granqvist, Mari Fransson, and Berit Hagekull, "Disorganized Attachment, Absorption, and New Age Spirituality: A Mediational Model," *Attachment & Human Development* 11 (2009) 4: 385-403.

happy, low-conflict marriages tend to score higher on most religious and spiritual outcomes such as frequency of attendance in religious prayer, interest in religion as a source of truth and meaning, and report positive experiences of God. However, offspring from divorced families and those from intact high-conflict families young adults raised by parents in unhappy, high-conflict relationships have relatively low scores on most religious and spiritual outcomes.[45] Moreover, even though several studies have suggested that children of divorced parents enjoy better psychological wellbeing as compared to children in families with constant conflicts, according to the study by Ellison, "some children of divorce seem to fare ''worse'' religiously and spiritually than those whose parents endured high-conflict unions."[46] This could be attributed to the phenomenon that children in families with high level of conflicts might turn to God in prayer for the reduction of conflicts, and those of the divorced parents might find the behaviour of parents as being contrary to the religious tradition that they profess, which then forces the children to be sceptical of the religious tradition itself.

Theme 6. Religious Attachment and Individual Wellbeing

In psychological terms, 'wellbeing' could be understood to include a variety of dimensions. For the purposes of the present study, it is understood in terms of the absence of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, and/or the presence of meaning and purpose in life – also referred to as existential wellbeing. The claim of two great psychologists who have examined religious attachment captures the content of this subtheme. Kirkpatrick and Shaver found that individuals with a secure attachment to God reported less anxiety, depression, physical illness and greater life satisfaction, than those with insecure religious attachments.[47] Very similar findings have been reported in a questionnaire based study of a sample of 116 adults from Sydney, Australia. "Greater security of attachment is associated with decreased anxiety and increased wellbeing. Further, religious attachment scores have a small but significant additive effect above parental attachment when predicting wellbeing and anxiety." [48]

In conclusion to this section, attention is drawn to two studies from among the selected literature, both from the U.S., which deal with two distinct psychological issues. First is the one carried out among undergraduates (aged from 18 to 40 years) in the U.S. in which attachment to fathers predicted attachment to God, and attachment to God predicted both religious and existential wellbeing.[49] The second one is a longitudinal study involving

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[45] Christopher G. Ellison *et al.*, "The Effects of Parental Marital Discord and Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults," *Social Science Research* 40 (2011) 2: 538-551.

[46] Ellison, *et al.*, "The Effects of Parental Marital Discord," 548.

[47] Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Phil R. Shaver, "An Attachment-Theoretical Approach to Romantic Love and Religious Belief," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 18 (1992) 3: 266-275.

[48] Maureen Miner, "The Impact of Child-Parent Attachment, Attachment to God and Religious Orientation on Psychological Adjustment," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 37 (2009) 2: 119.

[49] Alicia Limke and Patrick B. Mayfield, "Attachment to God: Differentiating the Contributions of

75 Roman Catholic seminarians hailing from various ethnic backgrounds (mean age being 22.1). This study revealed that attachment to the mother was a significant variable in predicting seminarians' level of self-esteem as well as the quality of their relationship with God. This study further suggested that a secure relationship with God may moderate the effect of low self-esteem, over time.[50]

4. Implication of the Findings for the Youth in Families in India Today

The implication of most of the findings reported above is obvious enough. The object of this section, therefore, is only to point out to some less obvious implications for the Indian context. The studies reviewed above have been surprisingly drawn from a variety of countries. Taken together, they make a clear suggestion: the future of religious belief and attachment to God are closely tied up with the future of relationship within families. India is no exception to this. The future of religion in India sharply depends on the future of the structure of families there. On the other hand, given the religious history of India and considering the current situation whereby India is still largely religious, without claiming a causal relationship we might hypothetically suggest that the persistent religious sentiments of the Indian society is correlated to the strong ties that exist within Indian families.

Looked at from an alternative perspective, the strong ties that exist within the joint family system of India, [51] which has been studied in depth by sociologists, could have their limitation when it comes to the development of the spirituality of individuals. Most of the reviewed studies here suggest that God-image of children is more affected by the parents' God-image and their relationship with children when the children are still young. As young adults, they tend to develop a deeper or corrected relationship with God – sometimes though by means of exaggerations as seen in sudden conversions and affinity to New Age spirituality. However, the joint-family system in India, which in itself has many positive aspects to it, might not provide the space for individuals to adapt their own spirituality as they grow up, hence basically the religiosity and spirituality that one has imbibed from the family context is likely to be persistent throughout one's life, as long as they are part of the same family system. This conjecture needs further empirical exploration.

Fathers and Mothers Using the Experiences in Parental Relationships Scale," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 39 (2011) 2: 122-129.

[50] Duane F. Reinert, "Spirituality, Self-Representations, and Attachment to Parents: A Longitudinal Study of Roman Catholic College Seminarians," *Counseling & Values* 49 (2005) 3: 226-238; see also, Tick Sim and Amanda Yow, "God Attachment, Mother Attachment, and Father Attachment in Early and Middle Adolescence," *Journal of Religion & Health* 50 (2011) 2: 264-278.

[51] Dinesh Sharma, "Infancy and Childhood in India: A Review," in D. Sharma and U. P. Gielen (eds.), *Childhood, Family, and Sociocultural Change in India: Reinterpreting the Inner World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 13-47.

The impact of parenting styles in India also leaves much to be desired. There are several published studies on parenting styles that have compared prevalent styles in India with Western countries. In one study, for instance, mothers in India reported using authoritarian parenting and corporal punishment more as compared to Indian immigrant mothers in the United States, who were more likely to report authoritative parenting.[52] Diana Baumarind, the psychologist who conceptualised the three parenting styles, herself would see authoritative style as being healthy for the future of the child. It is this style, as reported in the findings above, which was positively related to friendly perception of God. Yet again, in a recent study comparing the perception of college students in India and the United States, the Indian students (mean age being 18.7 years) tend to claim that permissive style is more effective and helpful.[53] While this is only a perception, it shows an unhealthy trend. Perhaps the perception of youth in India desiring a permissive style of parenting could be an overreaction. However, it could be unhelpful even for their spirituality. Hence, Indian parents need to move from authoritarian and permissive styles to a healthier authoritative style of parenting, characterised by high level of demanding and response.

The negative impact of marital discord and divorce on children in India could be similar to anywhere in the world. This could be further confounded by the stress caused by persistent poverty in most homes in India.[54] However, the moderating effect of religion on the negative impact of marital discord or the corresponding effect of familial conflict on religious belief in India is yet to be studied. Nevertheless, generally in India, the rates of divorce are still low in comparison to other countries of the world. For every 1,000 marriages that take place in India, there are 11 marriages that fail or end up in a legal separation. That is about 1% of marriages ending up in a divorce in India. In urban areas, the rates of divorce are on the increase. However, the rates are happily still lower than most of the Western world, where in some countries such as U.S.A and Italy it is as high as 50%. While this is a good sign for the future of the Indian society and for religious depth in India, it should be remembered that even young families in India that are in transition,[55] now increasingly living on their own in urban settings, need to be supported in such a way to cushion the negative impact of working parents, financial independence of couples, the stress of caring for children, and the anonymity of urban life itself. Or else, the reported studies could help us predict that the number of divorces

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[52] Jambunathan Saigeetha and Kenneth Counselman, "Parenting Attitudes of Asian Indian Mothers Living in the United States and in India*,*" *Early Child Development and Care* 172 (2002) 657–662.

[53] Caitlin Barnhart *et al*., "Perceptions of Parenting Style among College Students in India and the United States," *Journal of Child & Family Studies* 22 (2013) 5: 684-693.

[54] Jatinder K. Gulati and Jayanti Dutta, "Risk, Conflict between Parents and Child Adjustment in Families Experiencing Persistent Poverty in India," *Journal of Family Studies* 14 (2008) 1: 107-123.

[55] Susan C. Seymour, *Women, Family and Child Care in India: A World in Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

is likely to increase, and this in turn will have its adverse effect on the religiosity and spirituality of youth in India.

One of the limitations of the majority of the reviewed literature in their applicability to the Indian family and religion is that the participants in these studies were largely drawn from the Western model of nuclear families. Hence, the focus has been on the relationship between parents and children in their corresponding or compensatory image of God. In India, particularly in rural settings, where families are still intergenerational (three to four generations living in the same household) or operating under a joint family structure, research cannot purely focus on the impact of parents' image of God on children. This calls for specific studies in the Indian context that will explore the impact of joint family structures on the spirituality of youth. On the other hand, Ainsworth's initial work on attachment[56] that was carried out in the Ugandan context where there are extended family structures had shown that children generally get attached to one parent-figure or caregiver. It is this attachment that influences other relationships for the child. Therefore, still the focus on the parallels between the child and caregiver is valid even in talking about their relationship with God.

Conclusion

The present review began with three objectives. In fulfilling the first objective, the process of search and selection of peer-reviewed empirical research reports has been transparently described. This makes the present review replicable and expandable, making way for further scientific knowledge which is always cumulative. The second objective has been met by reporting six themes identified within the selected literature. Finally, an attempt was made in applying some of the identified themes to the Indian context pertaining to the family and the spirituality of youth.

One of the limitations of the review is that most of the reviewed articles report empirical studies that had Caucasian adolescent or young adults as their participants, except for one study that was carried out in Pakistan and another in the Philippians. There has been no reported study in the Indian context. Therefore, the application of the findings of the review has been attempted in the light of other sociological studies that had been conducted in India. In general, the gap in research also shows that psychology of religion is not a much-researched area in India. This calls for an increase in empirical studies that examine the influence of religion on human behavioural, cognitive, and affective processes. In the light of the present review, it also seems necessary to scientifically examine the influence of the family and parents on God-image of children in the context of India.

In the light of the findings and the discussion above, it might be apt to end the review stating that the best means of evangelisation – aimed at building a strong

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[56] Mary Ainsworth, *Infancy in Uganda* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967).

covenantal relationship between God and human beings particularly the young – is to pay attention to building strong bonds within Christian families. Pope Benedict XVI rightly acknowledged this link between evangelisation and the family, when he said:

> The Synodal Assembly which opens today is dedicated to this new evangelization, to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone who fills existence with deep meaning and peace; and to favour the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life. … The theme of marriage… invites us to be more aware of a reality, already well known but not fully appreciated: that matrimony is a Gospel in itself, a Good News for the world of today, especially the dechristianized world… There is a clear link between the crisis in faith and the crisis in marriage. And, as the Church has said and witnessed for a long time now, marriage is called to be not only an object but a subject of the new evangelization.[57]

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[57] Benedict XVI, "Opening of the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Theme: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith," (7 October 2012).