

RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION - APPROACHES, INTERPRETATIONS, PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: Religion and Globalization - Approaches, Interpretations, Perspectives.

Generally, discussions of globalization are concerned with its political, economic and military dimensions, and little attention to its religious aspect. Although they claim to share a common concern, believers of different religions, through their concern, tend to deepen existing problems rather than offer solutions, given their different responses to which we classify them in different categories from the point of view of ideological, ambivalent, integrative, exclusive or imitative. The term globalization "refers to the expansion and intensification of social relations and a single human consciousness across the time and space of the world."¹ In theory, it allows people to transcend traditional political, economic and geographical boundaries and at the same time exposes them to a new social order.

Keywords: *religion, globalization, approaches, interpretations, perspectives*

Globalization as a set of dimensions and human manifestations

Economically, people all over the world are no exception in becoming global consumers thanks to the global financial market. Technological innovation, the flow of information, and the development of transportation have intensified and accelerated social exchange and thus created more interdependence between the local and the global. In addition to its objective material impacts, globalization also affects subjective consciousness, giving rise to new individual and collective identities, thus generating the so-called „glob-

¹ Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 15.

al village” where people of different identities and geographies easily meet and share knowledge.

Mass media such as television and the Internet have become the most powerful medium through which globalization extends its cultural invasion by changing the ways and lifestyles of its consumers to a different type of set of values, as it challenges the beliefs and traditional norms. The loss of the hegemony of popular culture among young people, for example, has become such a rapid reality that the attention of parents, authorities or religious leaders to the loss of local identities has gone almost unnoticed.

In terms of the world economy, globalization seems to have created *winners* and *losers*. Therefore, globalization has greatly contributed to reducing the level of poverty but, on the other hand, has been and still is the cause of financial crises, of economically failed states or is the source of military conflicts as a refusal of the world’s major political actors to the change in the areas of dominance caused by globalization. Another important impact of the globalization is the environmental crisis, which endangers people’s lives both locally and globally.

In this context, the relationship between religion and globalization becomes a very important topic of debate. As far as the living conditions of man are concerned, there is no doubt that all religions share the same common goal. But this universally cherished goal must face the overall impact of globalization. At the same time, there is no doubt that globalization offers rich opportunities to achieve such a goal, but at the same time, globalization can also be the cause of increased religious violence and intolerance, especially when it means the exclusion or the neglect of the differences.

The definition of globalization is still debated among scholars from various disciplines. Many of them have proposed definitions whose different emphasis emerges from the many facets of the term from the point of view: economic, political, cultural or ideological. “Like the blind men in the parable, every globalization researcher is partially right by correctly identifying an important dimension of the phenomenon in question. However, their collective mistake lies in their dogmatic attempts to reduce such a complex phenomenon as globalization to a single domain that corresponds to their own expertise.”²

2 *Ibidem*, p.12.

Thus, to define globalization, the concept of *global village* was proposed, through which globalization is presented as the result of the speed of communication that governs a complex range of social interconnections beyond the borders of national, cultural and political spaces. In this globalized world, people in different locations, through media, can experience events simultaneously.³ Another definition sees globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities in such a way that local events are shaped by multiple events occurring miles away and vice versa"⁴. Therefore, globalization is a phenomenon that results from the compression of the world as well as from the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole.

In its concrete sense, globalization is a set of dimensions rather than a single process. Thus, five dimensions of globalization were identified. These include revolution in communication and transportation technology, politics and military, economy, environment, religion and cultures⁵. Inventions in the fields of transportation, cable and satellite television, cell phones, computers, and the Internet since the 1980s and 1990s have truly revolutionized communications and transportation technology. The political and military dimension of globalization began with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, leading to what people think of as US hegemony.

The globalization of the economy began with the rise of transnational corporations and infrastructure such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank established by the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1944. The impact on the global planetary environment as a result of rapid population growth and the development of technologies and industries generated an acute environmental crisis. The final dimension of globalization is religion and culture, which, although largely lived and experienced by most people, has been largely neglected by the academic environment as a dimension of globalization⁶. Thus, although religion is an inherent part

3 Larry Ray, *Globalization: Everyday Life*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p.1.

4 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, CT, 1990, p. 64.

5 William A. Stahl, *Religious Opposition to Globalization*, in Lori Beaman and Peter Beyer, (eds.), *Religion, Globalization and Culture*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, pp. 336-339.

6 L. Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-348.

of globalization, the general emphasis has been on its economic, financial and military aspects⁷.

Finally, whatever the definition of globalization is, it is closely related to certain values that we have introduced in the definition of the term, which in turn will determine our responses to its effects, especially since it is obvious that globalization has both negative effects, as well as positive ones to which we are called to provide answers.

The Globalism as a feeling of religiosity

It is generally accepted that all the great religions arose in three centers of civilization in the ancient world, namely China, India and the Middle East. Today we meet these religions on all the continents of the world. As a result, it is possible to see in different cities a mosque next to a church or a temple next to a synagogue. The dispersal of religions around the world and their embrace of a religion by more and more people has led to what J. F. Lyotard called *the loss of the center*, by which he refers to a worldwide diffusion of religious ideas and the emergence of a diaspora whose followers consider the places of worship their first homeland⁸. Similarly, sociologists consider the free market fundamentalism to be the new world religion where a religion, like a global market, becomes new, universal, absolute, and exclusive throughout the world⁹.

This is the argument for which the globalization of religion has been believed to be a deliberate activity aimed at reducing the economic gap between developed and developing countries, since most global religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or Hinduism, are present beyond the boundaries of continents and nation states. That is why globalism has generated a sense of religiosity much more present in social reality than nation-states. For example, a person can be of an Arab nation and of French nationality and thus belong to both cultural and national areas through dual citizenship. But it is almost impossible to be half Christian and half Muslim.

7 *Ibidem*, p. 154.

8 John L. Esposito, Fasching Darrel, Lewis Todd, *Religion and Globalization: World Religions in Historical Perspective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 5

9 See: David R. Loy, *The Religion of the Market*, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 65, no. 2, 1997, pp. 275-290.

As such, due to globalization, the world is inevitably becoming smaller, generating more and more intense interactions between peoples of different religions and cultures. This interaction, to some extent, enhances the consciousness of the unique civilization of the people, which in turn revitalizes the differences and animosities of the world deeply rooted in the history, feeling and thinking of each person.

These were the reasons why it was stated that the awareness of humanity's cultural identity worsened the global paradigm, which led to a world-wide clash of civilizations¹⁰. The number of civilizations, represented by nation-states, ethnicities, geographical proximity, linguistic similarities, social groups and, predominantly, religions, bluntly divided the world into major civilizations. The clash of civilization theory suggests that all conflicts today have no ideological or economic foundations, but rather the warlike state of the world today is the result of the polarization of the world between cultural humanity and its religions. In fact, it is the state of the world after the Cold War, which gave rise to the struggle between different cultural and religious identities, such as, for example, Western civilization against Islamic civilization or the whole world. These identities reacted to globalization by further strengthening their positions. Thus people remained in the same civilizational paradigm defining themselves by common and objective attributes, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions and their countless subjective meanings.

The paradox of the global clash of civilizations serves as a good topic for reflection. The reason for this finding emerges from the fact that people are differentiated from each other by their historical experiences, by the language they speak, by their traditions and, most importantly, by their religion. Moreover, within the context of these civilizations there are different views on the relationships between God and man, sacred texts and religious values, the individual and the group, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as those of relative importance, such as rights and responsibilities. These differences are fundamentally more important than ideologies or political regimes. Among all these clashes and confrontations, religious encounters¹¹ are particularly distinguished because they

10 See: Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

11 Cristian-Vasile Petcu, „Cadrul juridic al dialogului ecumenic creștin” (“The legal framework of Christian ecumenical dialogue”), in volumul Simpozionului Internațional

are accompanied by mystical interactions, which are the seeds of new cultures based on a common cosmology. The interaction between Hinduism and Christianity in 19th century in Java resulted, for example, in the representation of Christ in the Ganjuran temple¹².

Migration is another dimension of the globalization. But problems arise as, in our opinion, some of the Muslims believe that being a Muslim is not just a matter of faith, but rather it is also political, legalistic and economic, which is why Islamic empires and states have arisen¹³. For these reasons, global modernity becomes a questionable reality, as it produces inadequate developments, inequalities, a too rapid urbanization; it creates a precarious economic life in the countryside, and erodes and alienates people from local cultures and religions.

Thus, so-called solutions appeared as a response to globalization and modernity. Therefore, fundamentalist lines of thought have emerged in opposition to global market systems and its laws. Nationalism is revived and, due to globalization, it identifies humanity with the market itself, with the competitors, consumers, etc. They also perceive human beings as *homo economicus*. The public sphere and discourse are systematically de-theologized. Theology, God and places of worship are replaced by pseudo-religions¹⁴ in which transnational corporations serve as high priests of the global temple.

With the advent of modernity, religion began to be seen as a matter of personal opinion rather than subjective knowledge. Therefore, some Christians have tended to reject modernity, referring to the historical past as to another ideal future, and others have insisted that science and knowledge will bring about a more glorious future. In short, believers are now struggling with the question of the relationship between religious traditions and modernity, with all the developments and problems in science, technology, transportation, nuclear energy, war, and other fields. Therefore

"Itinerario e il contenuto del formare ecumenico-studi ecumenici - Venetia", Instituto di studi ecumenici S. Bernardino, Venezia, 2008, pp. 422 – 450.

12 Merle Ricklefs, *Polarizing Javanese Society, Islamic and Other Visions (c 1830-1930)*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2007, pp. 122-123.

13 Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, Modern Library, New York, 2002, p. 115.

14 Gheorghe Istodor, "Libertate, libertate religioasă în context secular actual. Provocări și strategii misionare", in *Journal for Freedom of Conscience*, Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe; Mușat, Dragoș (eds.), vol 10, no. 1, Les Arsc, France, Editions IARSIC, 2022, p. 35.

religion should be understood in the context of the modern and secular world, where global tensions are intensified and by a sense of rejection generated by globalization.

It can be argued that religion could contribute positively to social life only if its followers properly transform and implement their religious values. But this statement implies the need for, due to global tensions, religious themes to be presented as part of man's confrontation with current problems. An example of a lack of commitment on the part of religion, emerges from the fact that although we see how religious signs and symbols are very present in the world we live in, the behavior of followers does not reveal their religious values. The challenge comes from the way believers view and read their own religious symbols. The believer is called to think of the religion in which he lives in a much more substantial way, rather than in a purely symbolic way.

Globalization not only creates an increasingly consumerist, apathetic, individualistic society, but also erodes and alienates people from local cultures and religions. They refuse globalization by excluding themselves from this phenomenon or even strengthening their own identities. In fact, this trend is found in all religious communities; in our opinion it has become an undeniable fact. In this sense, globalization has emerged as a paradox where it triggers uniformity and homogeneity in terms of communication systems and lifestyles and at the same time reinforces cultural heterogeneity in the form of primordialism, cultural localism and religious fundamentalism. This negative response stems from the belief that religion is only about the spiritual universe and has nothing to do with social responsibility.

Therefore, globalization¹⁵ neglects the fact that religion can give a positive response when its believers are willing to cooperate, to develop a philanthropic attitude that addresses the dimensions and problems of poverty not only as a social problem. Those who think and propose such a global approach blame the fact that globalization along with its tools

15 Cristian-Vasile Petcu, *Relația dintre globalizare și identitatea Bisericii în contextul învățăturii creștine ortodoxe*, în revista „Teologie și Viață – revistă de gândire și spiritualitate creștină”, nr. 1-4/2023, pp. 90-100.

such as the Internet, the pluralism, secularism¹⁶ and liberalism represent a conspiracy theory of Judaism to destroy the world. The Jewish people are proposed as a scapegoat because they have proven to be able to produce supermen, scientists, capitalists¹⁷.

Conclusions

Seen as an integration and unification of time and space, globalization¹⁸ is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided because within it all religions face each other. However, in our opinion, religions should encourage their followers to seek alternatives that make this world better. It is religion that has the duty to become a community of hope for those who need such a thing precisely because of the loss of hope in life.

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16 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Aspecte ale secularizării și ale omului secularizat", in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Theologia Orthodoxa*, (2006), L-LI, nr.1, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, pp. 251-266.

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18 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Globalization and its effect on religion", in *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*, Mihnea Costoiu, Liviu-Bogdan Ciucă, Nelu Burcea (eds.), Les Arcs, France, Iarsic, 2014, pp.532-541.

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