

GLOBALIZATION AND RELIGION. AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT. The present paper is founded on the premise that the society in which we live is the result of globalization, which has generated several transformations in all spheres of life today, together with a new manifestation of the phenomenon of religion. Our key purpose in this study revolves around the assertion that there is an inter-dependency between globalization, religion and politics. It puts forth the hypothesis that this situation cannot be effectively managed and governed without a thorough knowledge and understanding of the paradigms, influences and factors that generate actions and movement in the world, as well as the background and context of diverse situations. This paper is an introductory and reflective study of the new challenges of a global society from not just an economic, but also a spiritual and paradigmatic point of view.

KEY WORDS: politics, religion, globalization, society, resurgence

Introduction

The phenomenon of religion has for a long time been perhaps one of the most controverted subjects of analysis. From being considered the glue that holds communities together, to the catalyzing source of conflicts and acts of terrorism, religion has been present, more or less directly or visibly, in every stage of the history of human societies as a contributing factor to the development of socio-political strategies of various nations. Being blamed and appreciated alike, the phenomenon of religion has nevertheless remained a constant of social life in every moment of history as well as, in most cases, a constant in the political domain.¹

Humanity is presently in the midst of a controversial historical moment precisely for the reason that it should have followed the sure path of secularization, of the disappearance of religion from the public sphere, whereas events that have recently taken place not only have disconfirmed this prediction but have also surprised many as a result of the explosive manifestation of religious movements throughout the globe. The renaissance

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of the phenomenon of religion is no longer merely a novelty but has also become a preoccupation of analysts.

The Context of Globalization

Globalization is a phenomenon that is impossible to understand outside of the context of modernity which produces it (see Jones 2011: 50). Modernity is a dynamic and transformative mode of social life which appeared in seventeenth century Europe and which gained more or less global influence. It can be distinguished from prior societies through the rhythm of social changes, the purpose of these changes and the proliferation and development of modern institutions being the most significant of all its roles in the transformation of time and space (Jones 2011: 50).

For some time now, the term “globalization” no longer represents a new and uncharted territory. According to Zigmunt Bauman, “the word globalization is on everyone’s lips, an obsession that became a slogan, a magical incantation, a master key capable of opening the gates of all present and future mysteries” (Bauman 2005: 5). Globalization has become so well known that few people ask themselves what it actually means or why it is important (see Jones 2011: 7). Beyond the controversies which have taken place with respect to globalization, there is the accepted idea according to which globalization determines a great variety of changes in the actual context of nation-states, as well as the need for modification of the role of the state in the twenty-first century. The state remains an important agent in the development of interglobal connection (Jones 2011: 20-21).

There have been multiple approaches to the definition of globalization, and this happened because globalization is itself neither simple nor without ambiguity. The term covers a large range of diverse phenomena (see Ritzer 2010: 19). According to George Ritzer, a well-known sociologist and economist, the notion of globalization refers to a transplanetary processes of global reach. The aspects which he considers essential for the study of globalization are the economy, politics, civil society, the cosmopolis and technology, to which he adds certain domains which derive from the interrelations mentioned earlier (Ritzer 2010: 20). Other subjects of interest in the study of globalization include the relation between globalization and religion, sport and music as well as the relation between globalization and a set of social problems. Ritzer defines globalization as the worldwide spread of certain practices, the extension of relations beyond continental limits, the organization of social life at a global scale and the increase of a global common consciousness (Ritzer 2010: 19).

The most general definition of globalization is that it is considered the growing interconnection and interrelation of all aspects of society (Jones 2010: 10). For most of it, the definition given by Giddens seems acceptable,

because according to him globalization represents the intensification of social relations at a global level, a process in which distant places are bonded together (Jones 2011: 286). The interconnection and influencing of relations as well as of social life are the essential aspects clarified by Giddens, so that each place is no longer a closed space, isolated from the rest of the world, but rather is put in interrelations of reciprocal influence with the whole through different means. For Manfred Steger, the term “globalization” is used to describe a process, a condition, a system, a force and an era. Globalization means a social condition characterized by the existence of certain interconnections of an economic, political and cultural nature, as well as of a global context and of certain changes which make many of the barriers and frontiers which have existed until now to be irrelevant (Steger 2003: 7). A defining characteristic of this process is that it represents a development toward greater interdependence and integration (Steger 2003: 5).

In the first place, globalization presupposes the creation of the new and the multiplication of social networks which increasingly exceed political, economic and cultural borders. A second aspect of globalization is reflected in the extending and stretching of social relations. In the third place, Steger maintains that globalization implies the intensification and acceleration of social changes and activities. In the fourth place, the creation, extension and intensification of social interconnections and interdependencies do not merely take place objectively, but rather globalization also involves the subject plane of human consciousness. Globalization also refers to the fact that people become more and more conscious of the growing interdependence of society (Steger 2003: 11). Globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes which create and intensify social interdependencies and changes at a global level while at the same time promoting an ever greater and profounder awareness in people of the ties between the local and the distant (Steger 2003: 11).

The Phenomenon of Globalization and the Causality of Present Religion

As a process with many dimensions, involving many (if not all) dimensions of society, globalization must also be analyzed from the point of view of its relation with the phenomenon of religion. In his *Religions/Globalization* (2001: 4), Hopkins maintains that we cannot speak about globalization without also speaking of religion, as well as that we cannot speak of religion without keeping in mind the way in which religion laid down the foundations for the beginnings and ultimate launch of globalization. Religion and globalization are interconnected. The author notes that for the greater part of the cultures of the world, religion completely and decisively intervenes and influences everyday life, affecting not only practices aimed at survival but also the very hopes of the human person.

Thus, religious norms are an integrated part of human life. The global dynamic of religion accompanied economic and political events in contemporaneity, for example the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. People formed in a period of Marxism-Leninism sought to fill the void left by a transforming state through religion (Hopkins 2001: 1). One of the manifestations of globalization — the rupture of familiar boundaries and of the balance of power — permitted religion to develop, helping in the reformation of the new communities. Moreover, situations encountered in the global arena, for example the appearance of new religious groups, accompanied by a certain decentralized effort to combat them, encourage an analysis of the role of religion in the problems people have in daily life. In the contemporary period are encountered not fewer but more religious movements, which motivates the exploration of religion in the context of globalization (Hopkins 2001: 1).

Hopkins gathers that there is a very close relationship between religion and globalization, in that if religion is one of the fundamental means for organizing human life, then the very seeds of globalization can be found in religion itself (see Hopkins 2001: 4). In much the same manner, Thomas Scott debates in his article “A Globalized God: Religion’s Growing Influence in International Politics and Culture” published in *Foreign Affairs* (2005: 26) on the same topic, namely the relationship between religion and globalization, highlighting the return of religion into social life. Everywhere in the world, he states, from the South of the United States to the Middle East, religion is ascending (in a process of revival, of renaissance). This religious renaissance is not plainly and simply characterized by the growth of fundamentalism — the rigid adherence to a certain set of rituals and doctrines — but rather by the fact that it manifests itself through a variety of renewed rituals and practices, public as well as private (Scott 2005: 26).

On the basis of the transformations produced by globalization, religion participates in a renewed way in the processes that take place as consequences of the phenomenon of globalization. A variety of tendencies, from demographic changes and urbanization to the global transformation of religion, indicate the fact that religion will contribute to the way in which will take shape the dynamics of major extant powers, as well as of new and developing ones, influencing the attempt of the United States to promote liberty, civil society, democracy, social cohesion, as well as the development of the global economy. The transformative effect of globalization on religion will also play a key role in the prevalence of global terrorism, religious conflict and other threats to international security (Scott 2005: 41).

The phenomenon of religious resurgence has many causes, a fact which makes clear the role of religion at the social level. A first cause would be the fact that some people react against the failure of the process of secularization

to respond to their religious needs. This is a familiar pattern in the history of religions. A second source of the religious renaissance is found in the continual failures in matters of justice, the incapacity of realizing an equitable distribution of goods and services, including foodstuffs and healthcare. Some people react to the failure of the secular humanist paradigm in bringing peace and prosperity in a proper way, as well as in offering satisfactory explanations for inequality, evil and suffering (Breyer and Beaman 2007: 188).

Peter Berger, in his *Desecularization of the World*, emphasizes that today's world, with some exceptions, is just as powerfully religious as it always was and in some places even more than ever (Berger 1999: 2). Even if modernity led to the effectuation of a certain secularization of life, it also determined powerful movements of counter-secularization. Of course, religious institutions lost some of their power and influence in many societies, but both older and newer faiths and practices continued. On the other hand, religious institutions can play a social and political role even when very few people believe in or practice the religions they represent (Berger 1999: 3). Berger underlines how modernity caused this phenomenon through its tendency to undermine axiomatic certainties on the basis of which people have lived during most of history. This brings about an uncomfortable situation, while religious movements claiming to offer certainties become attractive as an alternative to the state of discomfort (Berger 1999: 3).

For a better understanding of religion as social agent, we should clarify certain defining aspects of the phenomenon of religion. The study of religion is also accomplished through the lens of a certain social independence. It is clear enough, for example, that individuals can believe and practice whatever they actually believe, but this fact is not sufficient of itself to constitute a religion at the social level. Likewise, religion can persist as a social reality without everyone or even a majority of people being themselves faithful practitioners of the religion in question. This does not mean that individual faith and practice are unimportant for the constitution of religion. Normally, these are essential. But they are not of themselves religion; they do not function implicitly at the social level. At most, they are recognized (respected) as religion (see Beyer 2006: 9). Religion is a social phenomenon, though it does not reduce to this insofar as it has to do with a broad expanse of existence. To the extent that religion is a social phenomenon, it is constructed as a type of communication and not as a fact of experience or of consciousness (Beyer 2006: 9). Scientists have adopted a social definition of religion perceived through the lens of the way in which people understand their own religious, moral and social lives at a certain time. Thus, religion in early modern Europe has to be interpreted as a community of the faithful rather than a body of faiths or doctrines as might be encountered in liberal

modernity. Consequently, what was protected and defended in the religious wars was a sacred notion of community defined through religion, that every community fought in order to define, redefine or defend the social borders between sacred and profane as a whole (Scott 2005: 42).

In a globalized society, religion is perceived as a specific global religious system, characterized by certain qualities and containing a series of defining elements. This fact is of consequence at the level of the understanding of its role in this context. The observation of religion as a specific global religious system involves more than just a simple global extension of a certain mode of forming and practicing religion. A very essential part of the argument is that this religious system, together with other diverse systems, is a socio-structural component of what is now a global society. The appearance in history of the religious system is an aspect of the historical development of the global society (Beyer 2006: 14). Religion is defined also by ways in which it manifests itself in society. Religion takes shape in contemporary society in four ways: (1) as organized religion (including denominations, churches and sects); (2) as social movement; (3) as thematized in social systems, as much in its function, as well, of course, the religious system itself; and (4) as a social network (network of interaction). This final category includes what might be called religious *community*, whereas the third comprises the utilization of social systems alongside religious ones for sustaining religious authority (Beyer 2006: 14).

Religion is not just a social system that exists more or less in every society and in every period of human history, but it also takes different forms in different circumstances. Its form and content are not easily separated. On the other hand, religion has also taken a modern form, social differentiation taken precisely as religion, which makes it seem (to us as observers almost obvious) that it has always and everywhere been there in a certain form (Beyer 2006: 299).

The Interrelation of Globalization and Religion

The phenomenon of globalization has also been analyzed from the point of view of the impact it has had over the individual and society. The sociologist Anthony Giddens is among the first analysts who from the beginning of the 90s advanced a series of comprehensive arguments with respect to the implications of the contemporary processes of globalization for the people of our planet. This includes specific arguments about the implications for individuals, organizations, nations, firms, governments, politicians and policies in general (Jones 2011: 57-58).

The arguments brought forth by Giddens center on four dimensions touched by the implications of globalization. The first dimension and the first argument have to do with the way of life in its entirety: we are passing

through a major period of historical transformation; globalization restructures not only the way in which we live in a profound manner, affecting daily life, but also economies and states. The major implication of contemporary globalization is the fact that it constitutes an unavoidable reality (Jones 2011: 57-58). Globalization represents not only an opportunity but also a threat. Traditional societies have already fallen apart, and traditional values are next. A consequence of globalization is the fact that other traditions, such as religion, also pass through a major transformation.

The implicit consequence of this, which itself constitutes a third argument, is that people have to react in the face of such a juncture. It is not possible for us to remain inert in the contemporary world, while these processes of transformation demand a reaction. Contemporary globalization sooner gives birth to an acute need to be proactive and to keep up with the transformations (Jones 2011: 58). The fourth and final implication has to do with institutions. Globalization also determines the continual need to reconstitute institutions in order for these to be able to approach the new challenges of globalization. Among these are included the national and international institutions of government, as well as the family, work, tradition and even nature. Globalization undermined and transformed the circumstances in which they (the old institutions) exist, so that these are correspondingly inadequate for their tasks (Jones 2011: 58). In much the same way as other aspects of modern life, and in spite of some apparent evidences of tendencies toward greater secularization, religion constitutes a vital part of the processes of globalization, a significant factor in the effecting of change, of plurality and of transformation. At the same time, religion interacts both positively and negatively with other social processes and institutions, especially with politics, education and the economy (Beyer 2006: 253).

From a psychological point of view, the consequences of globalization are analyzed in terms of the multiple identities in which people live (Marga 2006: 25). Globalization has the central consequence of producing transformations of identity, thus: most people these days develop a *bicultural identity*, in which a part of their identity is rooted in their local culture, whereas the other part comes from the consciousness of their relatedness with global culture. The confusion of identity could thus grow among the youth of non-Western cultures. Insofar as local cultures change as a response to globalization, some youth no longer feel at home, whether in their local culture or in the global one. In every society there exist people who form cultures they themselves choose, together with people who think the same way and who desire to have an identity untouched by global culture and its values. The explorations of identity in love and labor stretch and grow beyond the years of youth into a postadolescent period of emerging maturity (Marga 2006: 25).

The effects of globalization have also been analyzed by theologians reflecting on the need for a reelaboration of theology and for religious renewal. Hans Küng noticed in his *Projekt Wellethos* that the crisis of leading powers in the West is in the meantime a *moral crisis* of the West in general, including Europe: the destruction of traditions, of a comprehensive meaning of life, of unconditional regressions and the lack of new purposes, together with the psychological effects that follow from this (see Küng in Marga 2006: 28-29). The findings of Hans Küng have to do with the instability of social-moral context produced by globalization. Cultural relativism, whatever its historical reasons might be, encounters a profound historical challenge in the phenomenon of globalization (Marga 2006: 19-21). Küng proposes a moral, ethical solution for this crisis: without morals, without binding general ethical norms, indeed without a global standard, the nations are in danger of being manipulated toward a crisis which ultimately can lead to national collapse, *i.e.*, to economic ruin, to social undoing and political catastrophe, as a result of the accumulation of decades' worth of problems. Otherwise said, we need to reflect on ethos, on the fundamental moral attitudes of mankind; we have need of *ethics*, of philosophical or theological teachings regarding values and norms that ought to direct our decisions and actions. The crisis has to be understood as a chance to discover a response to a challenge (Küng in Marga 2006: 29).

However, globalization considered in itself should not be evaluated according to the categories of good and bad, because it represents a comprehensive historical process, anchored in the structure of civilization, with good or less good consequences depending on the context (Marga 2006: 25). Hans Küng sees in the response of religion in the situation of globalization a pertinent and necessary solution: democracy will not survive without a mutually respectful coalition of the believing and non-believing; there will not be peace among the nations and civilizations without a peace among religions; there will not be a new world order without a global ethos. This global ethos does not entail a single global culture or a single global religion. Positively expressed, the global ethos, an ethos for the whole world, comprises the minimally necessary values, criteria and fundamental human attitudes necessary for the survival of humanity (Marga 2006: 31).

The Romanian theologian Ioan I. Ică, Jr. analyzes the process of globalization through its effects on the human plane. The traditional (anthropological) culture of societies disappears or transforms into a show or product, humanist culture is increasingly eliminated, and all these prepare a place for the absolute mediocrity of mass culture and the consumption vehiculated by contemporary electronic media (Ică, Jr. 2002: 485). In this context, religion and the Church can have the role of supporting humanity and promoting moral values, the place and social role of religion being

definitive in the contemporary social space. Being a provider of meaning and offering an immutable point of reference in a world fully reconsidering all its own points of reference, the religious factor also plays the same role in the individual sphere where it serves for the reinterpretation and structuring of values, priorities, and social conduits of individuals (Pavelescu 2011: 17).

Religion has a social and interpretive function insofar as it responds to the needs of human beings for a transcendent. This offers coherence, correction and a justification for the position that emerges as a result of a multitude of influences, and it has always had an historical and cultural context (Harris quoted in Dark: 2000: 32). The religious factor can have a role that consists both in consolidating and explaining, insofar as it is one of the most commonly invoked explicative resorts for a world which seems to be recovering after traversing the desert of modernity and secularization, including the transcendent in everything, from everyday life to the functioning of society, of the state, of the system of international relations (Capelle-Pogacean, Michel, and Pace 2008: 17). The great challenge for globalization, for humanity itself, is the question of how the sources of fragmentation and of the weakening of social cohesion, the sentiments of frustration of certain groups and communities and *the lack of mutual understanding* between civilizations can be reduced. The phenomenon we call globalization merits a profound examination so that its complexity can be understood and its consequent costs can be reduced (see a thorough analysis of this idea at cerope.ro).

Religion as Political Agent in the Context of Globalization

In the modern world, it is difficult to ignore the public presence of religion. Mass-media offers cases which demonstrate the fact that the institutions and ideas constituting the religious sphere have importance and relevance in the political (Moyser 1991: 1). Just in a single issue of a daily newspaper one finds a multitude of articles confirming this fact, as Moyser himself proves while browsing an article published in the UK regarding a legal project which passed through a certain legislative stage and was about to become an Act of Parliament: the law of the land. The accent here was placed on the issue of elaborating new rules to limit the access of religious institutions to television stations, and these changes caused great concern among Christians (see "The Times" quoted in Moyser 1991: 1).

Late modernity predicted *an escape from religion*, signifying the fact that religion no longer enjoys a dominant role at the social level but at best at the merely private. A society dominated by a secular mindset in which religion loses any social role. However, the reality in the space outside Europe, indeed even within Europe, contradicts the prediction of the extinction of religion. Specialists these days refer more and more to the vitality of religions, capable

of reacting creatively towards the displacement caused by globalization, and also capable of restoring meaning to individuals and communities which found themselves on the traumatizing path of modernization (Manolescu 2011: 103). The fact of religion and religious manifestations take on a greater amplitude in the contemporary context, comprising diverse sectors of the social. After the collapse of communism and the acceleration of globalization, diverse forms of religiosity have returned to the center stage of political and intellectual debates, while religious participation is growing at the global level (Ungureanu 2011: 5). Researches have noticed how the global resurgence of religion can also be the result of a so-called snow-ball effect in which the renaissance of religion in one country spreads its effects in others as well. The knowledge of social and political events in one nation can unleash comparable occurrences in others (Scott 2005: 26).

The cause of the resurgence of religion has been put in connection with the interior needs of the individual: the renaissance of religion certainly has to do with the global need to search for identity and belonging, for community, for a new net of orientations, which assure purpose and meaning. To the extent that a society is more exposed to modernization, to that extent people yearn for a profounder meaning of life, because modernization cultivates a sentiment of dislocation and disorientation as well as contributing to the destruction of the values of a community, of traditions and of styles of life (Vlas 2008: 136).

In the midst of the alert transformations and provocations of progress and of globalization, what results is an individualization of the religious and spiritual search for meaning, a search which is irreducible to the need for safety as a result of immigration and globalization, so that in Europe new religious communities have arisen. We are witnesses to a relative decline of the traditional churches, but also to a new situating of the sacred of the spiritual in relation to individual and social life (Ungureanu 2011: 7).

The resurgence of religion is global in a geographical sense insofar as it is not limited to a certain area of the world, whereas from the perspective of comparative politics and religion, this phenomenon takes place in nations with different political systems, indeed it takes place in each of the principal religions of the world (Scott 2005: 26).

It is thought that the global resurgence of religion can be seen as part of a search for authenticity and development on the part of developing nations. The global resurgence of religion in developing nations can also be seen as a revolt against the West (Scott 2005: 41-42). The phenomenon of the global renaissance of religion can be defined as a growth of religious persuasion, the greater and greater importance of faiths and of religious discourse in society, as well as the increasingly significant role of non-state groups, political parties, and communities and of organizations in internal politics (Scott 2005:

26). It was underlined that religion enjoys a profoundly political influence in public life and should not be seen merely as a set of theological problems (Barry 1994: 20-34). It should thus be considered that religion is political, even in the absence of a determinate, theologically generated political conflict.

Conclusions

It is very difficult to ignore the presence of religion in public matters in the modern world. Mass-media offers cases which demonstrate that the people, institutions, and ideas which constitute the religious sphere have a continual and important relevance for the political domain. Our society can no longer function in any domain in a *separatist* form or with the pretension of an identitarian exclusivity. As we have shown, globalization is essentially characterized by this aspect of interconnection and interrelation, a fact which directs us to analysis and supplementary reflection with respect to social phenomena. Religion is the position of obliging that it be taken into consideration when we discuss and make proposals regarding socio-political matters. The phenomenon of religion has become extremely important in the context of globalization and of mobility and international migrations insofar as, beyond any economic development, individuals act most often in continuity with their identity. And religion is for very many a form of identity.

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