

STATE OF RELIGION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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1. Introduction

Our globalized world is saddled with deepening poverty, environmental destruction and social disintegration. In the face of this multifaceted global crisis, has religion anything worthwhile to offer? Put differently, what constitutes an appropriate religious response to globalization? Samuel Huntington has already pointed out that our future will be characterized by a *clash of civilizations* which is stamped by religions, i.e., Islamic or Confucian-Asian civilizations versus the West. We may not however, agree with such a gloomy depiction of the future. The encounter among civilizations can be an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation.¹ By citing Huntington, we want to raise here the question of the perceived significance of religion for the future. Religion will play a crucial role in the future. This is contrary to the belief that religion has died out in the process of secularization. It is, in fact, a recalcitrant phenomenon which refuses to go away.² Religion has come back, in our globalized world,

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¹Huntington, himself, in the last page of his book admits that cooperation among civilizations is a key issue of the future. The future of peace and the civilizations depend on understanding and cooperation among them. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, 321.

²In our globalized world, religion has three responses: fundamentalism, syncretism and ecumenism. A fundamentalist religious response can generally be seen in the reactionary moves of politicized religion to gain public influence and to reassert traditional values in the face of globalization. A syncretic response, meanwhile, implies drawing from, and reintegrating, different elements of diverse religious traditions which are made largely available by the globalization process. An ecumenical response draws on religion for an interfaith collaborative effort to combat the global crisis brought about by globalization. See Berma Klein Goldelwijk and Bas De Gaay Fortman, "Globalization and Civilizational Change," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 8 no. 1 (1998): 42-48.

although perhaps not so much in its institutionalized version. This article will further reflect on the significance of religions in our globalized world by drawing on the works of two respected sociologists of religion namely, Roland Robertson and Peter Beyer. I will commence with a brief description of the multifaceted reality of the globalization process and the challenges it poses for religions, after which I will discuss the ideas of the two above mentioned authors.

2. Globalization

David Held identifies four-spatio-temporal elements in analyzing the globalization process: (1) the extensity of global networks; (2) the intensity of global interconnectedness; (3) the velocity of global flows; (4) and the impact propensity of global interconnectedness.³ These four elements allow a more systematic assessment of globalization by providing “insights into the changing historical forms of globalization; sharper identification and comparison of the key attributes of, and the major disjunctures between, distinctive forms of globalization in different epochs.”⁴ Held holds that the enormous trans-regional interconnections that the globalization process creates lead to the *stretching of* social, political and economic activities across frontiers (extensiveness of networks of relations and connections). Consequently, events, decisions as well as activities in one region can no longer be contained or limited within its boundaries; rather their impact overflows to individuals and communities in distant regions of the globe. Such global interconnectedness rather than being the exception become the regular conduct of things in a globalized world. These “regularized” or patterned interactions generate a deepening and growing intensification of patterns of interactions and interconnectedness (the intensity of flows and levels of activity within these networks). As worldwide systems of transport and communication innovate and increase, the swiftness of global interactions and rapidity of transmission and movements of ideas, goods, information, capital and people accelerate too (the velocity or speed of interchanges). For that reason boundaries between the personal, local and the global become fluid and blurred. A global event can have a reverberating effect on local development while even the most local can have profound global

³David Held, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 15.

⁴Held, *Global Transformations*, 17.

consequences (the impact of these phenomena on particular communities). Held then defines globalization in the following way:

A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions- assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact-generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.⁵

Held’s definition brings to light the multidimensional character of globalization that involves the careful interplay of the economic, political and the cultural dimensions of it. It might be instructive to examine briefly the different aspects of globalization and the changes, as well as, dangers and opportunities each aspect brings to religions.

2.1. Economic Globalization

Economically, globalization is the “process of growing and intensifying interaction of all levels of society in world trade, foreign investment and capital markets. It is abetted by technological advances in transport and communications, and by a rapid liberalization and deregulation of trade and capital flows, both nationally and internationally, leading to one global market.”⁶ Susan Strange, a political economist, identifies three major changes that have led to economic globalization:⁷ 1 the accelerated internationalization of production measured by the rise of production and sales of goods and services by enterprises outside the nation-state, 2 the sharp increase in the mobility of capital as expressed in the preponderance of the international financial market (e.g., foreign exchange, bonds, shares, etc.), and 3 the importance of the mobile character of knowledge and information brought about by communication technologies. Some would see economic globalization as the eventual triumph of capitalism, leading to the inexorable advance of a singular global market patterned after the American (consumerist) free market.⁸

⁵Held, *Global Transformations*, 16.

⁶Rob Van Drimmelen, *Faith in a Global Economy: A Primer for Christians*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998, 7-8.

⁷Susan Strange, “An International Political Economy Perspective,” in John H. Dunning, ed., *Governments, Globalization and International Business*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 137.

⁸John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusion of Global Capitalism*, London: Granta Books, 1999, 3. See also Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. He argues that the cultural-ideological project of global

2.2. Political Globalization

Politically, globalization implies a “reshaping of political practices and institutional structures in order to adjust and adapt to the growing deficiencies of nation-states vis-à-vis the forces of globalization.”⁹ The continuous flow of ideas across borders, the collaborative management of communications and defense systems among nation-states, the nation-state’s membership into larger political/economic units (EU, ASEAN) and integration into international organizations (UN, WTO), as well as, the joint global response it has to globally shared social problems facing humanity, such as human rights issues, environmental advocacy, and diseases of global impact (e.g., influenza AH1N1, AIDS, etc.), have all resulted into a reorganization of the nation-state’s functions. Hence, globalization has both expanded, as well as, limited the state’s capacities “allowing it to continue to perform a range of functions which cannot be sustained any longer in isolation from global or regional relations and processes.”¹⁰

2.3. Cultural Globalization

Culturally, globalization is evoked in expressions like Americanization, Western Imperialism, Coca-colonization or McDonalization.¹¹ However,

capitalism is to persuade people to consume above their own perceived needs in order to perpetuate the accumulation of capital for private profit, in other words, to ensure that the global capitalist system goes on forever. In short, the ideology of the transnationalist capitalists is consumerism.

⁹Philip G. Cerny, “Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalization,” *Government and Opposition* 32 no. 2 (Spring 1997): 253.

¹⁰David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, 208. On pages 91-92 of the same book, he asserts that the traditional functions and responsibilities of the state have been limited as well as, widened by the intense process of connectivity or globalization. As a consequence, for the state to continue to operate well in the context of globalization, it has to collaborate with different political actors on different levels (national, regional, global, etc.). The institutions, organizations and regimes that have been created to serve as “a basis for the orderly management of global affairs, that is global governance.” Global governance does not refer to a supranational state with its monopoly of coercive and legislative power. Rather it is a new form of global politics “where the possibility of political cooperation and order” are deepened and enforced. Examples of these institutions are the EU, Greenpeace, IMF, etc.

¹¹George Ritzer argues that our societies and hence our world are more and more following the principles applied by fast-food restaurants especially that of McDonalds. Principles such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control of

this is only one side of the story. The other side of the process is captured in terminologies like inculturation, hybridity, indigenization, creolization, etc. The latter terms indicate the need not only to take into account the global prevalence of Western goods, but also to focus on the consumers or the cultural agents as active participants in the process of cultural exchanges.¹² Put differently, cultural globalization is always about a global-local dialectic. Hence, it is not only an “out-there” phenomenon but also an “in-here” event, i.e., referring to specific locals, places and identities. Roland Robertson refers to this relationship as glocalization or the universal-particular connection. Where the particularization of universalism involves providing human concreteness to universal ideas while the universalization of particularism entails a celebration of particularity, uniqueness and otherness.¹³ In Jonathan Friedman’s view, the ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization-constitute two trends of global reality.¹⁴

From our brief survey, one can already surmise the extent of dramatic transformations that the process of globalization has produced in our present world. Will a religious discourse find a fertile ground to grow in this new situation? Or as Peter Beyer would put it: “Can religion assert public influence in global society as societal system or only as a cultural resource for other systems?”¹⁵ To this important question I now turn.

3. Roland Robertson: Place of Religion in a “Compressed” World

Roland Robertson’s view on globalization is specifically cast in a *sociology of religion framework*, though not limited by it. His interest in religion lies in its being “a site of expression of issues.” This view goes

human beings through material technology are, in a sense, constituent parts of the “rationality” that drives the world towards the direction of greater conformity. George Ritzer, *McDonalidation of Society*, Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 1993.

¹²See John Tomlinson, “Cultural Globalization and Cultural Imperialism,” in Ali Mohammadi, ed., *International Communication and Globalization*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1997, 170-190, 180.

¹³Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London & New Delhi, Sage, 1992, 102.

¹⁴Jonathan Friedman, “Being in the World: Globalization and Localization,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 no. 2-3 (June 1990): 311.

¹⁵Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London: Sage Publication, 1994, 74.

back to classical sociologists like Durkheim and Weber especially when they dealt with issues raised by modernity.¹⁶ Robertson contends:

... my analyses of various topics and phenomena within the purview of the sociology of religion have almost invariably dealt with the relationships between religion and other aspects of human societies and between the study of religion and other interdisciplinary and subdisciplinary foci, as well as the underpinnings and ramifications of change in the sphere of religion. At the same time I have tended to treat religion comparatively and along lines raised in general debates among social theorists. Generally speaking, I have followed the implications of Durkheim's claim that religion has to do with 'the serious life.'¹⁷

Suffice it to say at this juncture that Robertson situates the study of religion (sociology of religion) within a wider perspective of relationships and not just treats it as an isolated phenomenon that deals with the purely spiritual aspects of social life. In short, religion is understood in its broadest sense. In Robertson's view the significance of religion lies in its ability to order a "serious" life.

3.1. Religion: A Critical Ingredient of Globalization

Robertson describes his globalization approach in the following way: "Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."¹⁸ Robertson's description of globalization is two-fold. Firstly, he speaks of the empirical reality of global interdependence and secondly, he refers to the felt realization (idea) that the world, indeed, is ordered into a single

¹⁶"Thus the two major leaders [Durkheim and Weber] ...in the emergence of a specialized study of religion were not interested in religion intrinsically. Rather their interest was a product of their diagnoses of the major trends of and predicaments of Western societies in a period when it was widely believed that an era was passing away and a new, 'modern' was beginning. Neither believed that religion in the traditional Western sense of revealed, supernaturally oriented faith and attendant ritual had a significant future in the West...unlike the vast majority...they did directly concern themselves with questions concerning, *inter re*, emergent forms of solidarity, ethics, morality, and meaning." Roland Robertson, "Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion," [1-17]in Eileen Barker, James A. Beckford and Karel Dobbelaere, eds., *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism: Essays in Honor of Bryan R. Wilson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 7.

¹⁷Robertson, *Globalization*, 1-2.

¹⁸Robertson, "Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion," 8.

place. In a globalized condition, he accords a special place to religion as a “critical ingredient of globalization.”

As a form of discourse about “the serious life,” religion, addresses the most existential questions that concern humanity (e.g. ultimate meaning, ultimate end). So, Robertson notes that the “idea of religion has been involved in interactions between societies – and accordingly has constituted an aspect of recent processes of globalization.”¹⁹ Robertson, hence, calls for recognition of the value of “religious” ideas. He maintains,

Far from wanting to reduce religion to something else, I seek to dereify *the idea* of religion: to expose the way in which it has become a procedure for the ordering of life in the twentieth-century societies and the global human circumstance generally.²⁰

Robertson demonstrates his point by dealing with the formation of modern societies. Apparently, in their formation, the idea of a “religion as a purely private preference” is seen as an ideal for a good society. Starting the 16th century in countries like France and the U.S.A., there was a wide diffusion of the idea of the relatively sequestered status of religion. This, claims Robertson, has effectively help in the rise of nation-states. The “rise of the nationally constituted society was accompanied in many places by the notion that religion was to be regarded as separate from the systemic domains of state and economy”²¹ (Church and State Separation). There is, however, an irony that is present here. On the one hand, for a modern society to develop, it has to differentiate itself from the sacred sphere. On the other hand, to do that, it needs to “produce” the sacred sphere itself – as its own separate sphere – in order to show what it is leaving behind. As Robertson puts it “... the constraint on modern states to be essentially secular has been complemented by the globally diffused ideas concerning the category of religion.”²² Moreover, to accept the ideas espoused by the religious sphere constitutes a rejection of modernity itself. The ideas of freedom of religion, and the idea of religions’ non-political involvement also played a similar role in the process of societal creation. Thus, Robertson argues: “While ‘societalization’ has been regarded as the primary enemy of religion ... I

¹⁹Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 3.

²⁰Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 2.

²¹Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 4.

²²Roland Robertson, “Globalization, Politics, and Religion,” in James Beckford and Thomas Luckman, eds., *Changing Face of Religion*, London & New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1989, 13.

think, it can be shown more precisely that it is ‘institutionalized societalism’ which has actually installed religion as a global *category*.”²³

In a quite different context, Robertson expounds on this idea using Japan as a case in point. Here, Robertson shows how the Japanese religion is implicated in Japan’s selective involvement with the contemporary world. Robertson cites two features of Japanese religion in accounting for Japan’s ability to accommodate modify and adjust to imported ideas for its own specific agenda. He maintains:

I refer, first, to the particular nature of Japanese *syncretism* and, second, to the resilience of what I call the *infrastructure* of Japanese religion and the *infrastructural significance* of religion itself. I also invoked the significance of pollution/purification rituals throughout Japan’s history, rituals which are central to the ‘native,’ Shinto tradition, marking the boundaries between the inside and the outside of numerous relationships and circumstances.²⁴

Regarding the first, Robertson claims that religious syncretism has become really an ideology. Religious traditions have been used by governments to legitimize each other.²⁵ Furthermore, religious syncretism is evident in the daily lives of Japanese individuals. It is not uncommon for an average Shintoist to go for marriage in a catholic church, and asks for burial in a Buddhist temple. In other words, different religions cater to the different stages or facets of Japanese lives. The basic point is: *syncretism* is encouraged and part of it, is the tolerance to seek one’s identity from different sources (native or foreign). Added to this, and this is the second feature of Japanese religion, is the basic infrastructure of Japanese religion which is highly polytheistic. The “institutionalized polytheism of Japanese religion greatly encourages the view that many different kinds of worldview can, indeed should, be coordinated, reconciled and functionalized.”²⁶ On top of it all, one of the consequences of this polytheistic religious infrastructure concerns the rituals of purification and pollution. These rituals set off not only what is sacred from the profane but also what is inside from what is outside.

²³Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 5.

²⁴Robertson, *Globalization*, 93.

²⁵Robertson’s illustrates this process of interlegitimation: “A much more recent example is to be found in the way in which State Shinto was promoted during the Meije period largely in order to legitimize a basically *Confucian* code of ethics of loyalty, at the apex of which was the Emperor system.” Robertson, *Globalization*, 94.

²⁶Robertson, *Globalization*, 95.

Robertson argues that this is a religio-cultural basis that accounts for Japanese propensity for getting useful ideas from the outside and rejecting what is not useful or profitable for Japanese life.

Having recognized the salience of religious (cultural) ideas or discourses, Robertson advocates the need for a global-comparative genealogy of religion. He delineates this view in the following manner:

Thus I should make it as clear as possible that the global comparative approach which I am advocating involves careful attention to the concreteness of the diffusion of categories and modes of discourse from one civilizational context to another, the relationship between diffused and indigenous patterns of thought, and, not least, the ways in which participation in the global – human circumstance involves, in varying degrees, acceptance of globally structured categories and styles of communication.²⁷

If we have understood Robertson properly, the point he is driving at is this: we should learn to be more conscious of the power of religious categories or ideas to order or disorder reality, i.e., the material construction of reality. Such, for example, is the power of the ideas of the so – called “medieval Christian synthesis” – that gave mandate for the medieval Church’s aggressiveness to claim the whole world into its embrace; or of the Protestant Ethics – that gave impetus to Protestants to get involved more in the world. It is all about religious discourse’s ability “in the institutional ordering of national societies and international societies, as well as a form of discourse ... called ‘the serious life’.”²⁸

3.2. The Religionization of Politics and the Politicization of Religion

Robertson focuses on the striking resurgence of religious and quasi-religious concerns in the contemporary world. Of particular interest for him is the “extensiveness of church-state and/or religion-politics tensions across the globe.”²⁹ We will provide here a bird’s eye view of Robertson’s survey: In Latin American countries, the rise of theologies of liberation, on

²⁷Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 13.

²⁸Robertson, “Community, Society, Globality, and the Category of Religion,” 15.

²⁹Roland Robertson, “Church-State Relations and the World-System,” in Thomas Robbins and Roland Robertson, eds., *Church-State Relations: Tensions and Transactions*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1987, 39-51, 39. Robertson’s investigation first appeared in 1987 but his survey is still reflective of what is going on in our present time.

the one hand, and the continuing consolidation of church hierarchies in support of the status quo, on the other hand, are evident. There is also a mushrooming of fundamentalist movements (Protestant evangelicals and Pentecostals). In the Middle East, Islamic fundamentalism (e. g., Shiite) is on the rise. Similarly, in Israel, Jewish fundamentalism is also gaining ground. In Eastern Europe, like in the case of Poland, a growing tension between church and state relation, as well as, their conflation were evident, while in Western Europe, there are pockets of “religious revival.” For example, the Green advocacy while not a religious movement in the conventional sense raises crucial existential questions which pose challenges to the modern secular state. In Asia, Islam in its fundamentalist forms (religio-politico) is also becoming visible on the scene. In the Philippines, liberation theology is visible. The status of the Catholic Patriotic Church of China *vis-a-vis* the Vatican is still uncertain. The Japanese State’s relationship with the Papacy has been brought to discussion. In India, the Sikhs’ situation in Punjab has brought into our attention questions regarding the dividing line between political and religious activities. Finally in Africa, aside from the dominance of Islamic religious activities in North Africa, there are considerable political activities among religious groups along liberational themes. Robertson also mention South Africa, when still in its’ Apartheid era, where increased political reaction to racism is mounting.

Besides all these, Robertson indicates, a growing *global* orientation of religious movements. Nothing can best demonstrate this than the case of the late John Paul II and the Catholic Church’s visibility on the worldwide political scene. Some examples may be cited here. One is John Paul II’s bitter relationship with Latin American liberationists leading to their ‘condemnation’ in 1986. Robertson cites the 1984 White House decision to resume full diplomatic ties with the Vatican boasting of the significance of the modern papacy. The South Korean Unification Church is another globally oriented mega (big globalizing) organization. Aside from this, a growing interest in the making of world-theologies is catching up.

3.3. Religion: A Crucial Factor in Shaping the Global Circumstance

All the above mentioned examples taken together, of the extensive worldwide religio-politico related activities, stand for what Robertson calls the processes of “politicization of religion [theology] and religionization

[theologization] of politics or governments.”³⁰ To make sense of all of these developments, Robertson, relates these events in the light of the process of globalization. In his view, we cannot in an *a priori* manner, think that religion has a significant place in the global field. Rather the approach has, first, to probe into the process of globalization and through it (globalization) one can come to realize that indeed, religion has a prominent place in it, i.e., “it enhances religiosity.”³¹ He argues:

We propose that there are two features of the present global circumstance ... which accentuate or at least open-up religious or quasi-religious concerns. On the one hand, globalization involves a “release” from the “security” of *life-in-society*, thus raising problems concerning both the legitimacy of the *world order of societies* and *the meaning of what mankind “really is.”* The first of this pair ... refers to the relativization-of-societies’ dimension; while the second refers to the relativization-of-self’s dimension. On the other hand, we would expect there to be serious implications of the globalization process within societies. In other words, the process of globalization does not occur without strains or discontents occurring within societies; or if you will reaction – indeed – resistance – from *within* social contexts. As globalization proceeds, pressures are exerted on societies and individuals-in-societies to define the *identity* of particular societies.³²

³⁰Roland Robertson, “Church-State Relations and the World-System,” in Thomas Robbins and Roland Robertson, eds., *Church-State Relations: Tensions and Transactions*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1987, 10. By politicization, “I have primarily in mind, first, an increase in concern on the part of ostensibly religious collectivities with governmental issues and, secondly, an inflation of interest among those with declared religious commitments in coordinating the latter with secular-ideological perspectives and programmes.” By religionization, he refers to “first to the way in which modern state has become involved in ‘deep’ issues of human life [e.g., debates about abortion, sexuality, morality etc.,] ... second, to the Durkheimian theme concerning the ways in which the state-organized society has become, in varying degrees, an object of veneration and ‘deep’ identification.” Robertson, “Globalization, Politics, and Religion,” 11 and 14 respectively.

³¹Robertson and Chirico, Jo Ann “Humanity, Globalization Theory and Worldwide Religious Resurgence: a Theoretical Exploration,” *Sociological Analysis* 46 no. 3 (1985), 219-242, 241.

³²Robertson and Chirico, Jo Ann “Humanity, Globalization Theory and Worldwide Religious Resurgence,” 238.

Put differently, religion or quasi religious activities constitute a response to the relativizing tendencies imposed by the compression of the world into a single place, relativizing tendencies which relate the four reference points in the global field.³³ When, for example, societies are faced with myriad possibilities of societal life on the global scene, there ensue problems of societal identity. “Given the historical significance of religion as the primal source of political legitimation (and delegitimation), it is not at all surprising that it plays a large part in the new circumstance and that, moreover, religious traditions themselves will be constrained to “place themselves and their heritage somehow.”³⁴ Hence, they are fonts of interpretations about the global order (disorder), and sources of ways of defining it, as these reference points (selves, national states, humanity, international system) seek to declare their identities in the global field.³⁵ Moreover, as certain categories of being human or being a society become globalized or universalized, this triggers the process of searching for particular societal or individual identities. Expressed concisely, when one is faced with the global whole, the call is to seek one’s niche in it, but by doing that you have to declare your particular identity. Here religion is a powerful source of “cultural” identity.

4. Peter Beyer: Religion and Globalization

Peter Beyer investigates on the relevance of religion in a globalized world. For him globalization is just an extension of the institutions of modernity. Global society, just like modern society, has for its central structural

³³“All in all, the globalization of the modern world constrains and encourages religious traditions and concrete religious movements to orient themselves to the fourfold contingency of the global human condition (consisting of societies, individuals, the system of societies and mankind) *and* to attend to that condition as a whole (even if that means trying to deny its salience or regarding only one, two, or three of those components as important)” Robertson, “Globalization, Politics, and Religion,” 20.

³⁴Robertson, “Globalization, Politics, and Religion,” 19.

³⁵Fundamentalism is one form of response to globalization. Robertson maintains: “In the absence of a coherent, symbolically meaningful expression of the world in its totality and of a *raison d’être* for the continuation of the human species (even though nascent international communism, earlier, in the century, attempted to provide something along those lines) one would indeed expect the proliferation of fundamentalist movements inside societies, seeking to mould the society along *their* lines relative to the world as a whole, as well as movements oriented more directly at the global circumstance per se ... ” Robertson, “Church-State Relations and the World System,” 47.

feature the functionally differentiated societal subsystems (e.g., polity, law, economy, science, religion, etc.) based on their particular functions. Each of these clusters is considered a form of social communication or action “on the basis of relatively autonomous functional instrumentalities.”³⁶ Religion maybe considered as a mode of social communication which represents a subsystem in society. It is “a type of communication based on the immanent/transcendent polarity, which functions to lend meaning to the root indeterminability of all human communication, and which offers ways of overcoming or at least managing this indeterminability and its consequences.”³⁷ This is a broad definition of religion which sees human reality and the world as sustained by God. The Transcendent God is not absent from his creation. And this world-immanence of the Transcendent God guarantees an ultimate pattern of communication in which earthly entities share only in an imperfect way. The function of religion, then, is to help people come to grips with all sorts of contingencies in life. This function it also fulfills in the modern world, although people are used now to look for private consolation.

4.1. The Privatization of Religion?

Beyer, who relies on Niklas Luhmann’s version of privatization and the place of religion in a secular world, claims that religion and morality have become more and more privatized in a globalized context. This is perhaps due to the fact that modern global society encourages “the rise of pluralistic and voluntary religion among individuals” which is precisely what privatization of religion means.³⁸ Part of this process of privatization in religion is the “relative decline in the public influence of the public representatives of the religious system, the professionals or leaders.”³⁹ In the context of privatized religion and secularization process Beyer focuses on the significance of religion. He still believes that religion can have something to offer in a globalized era. He argues: “The thesis that I explore posits *that the globalization of society, while structurally*

³⁶Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, 75.

³⁷Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, 6.

³⁸Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, 71.

³⁹Peter Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” *Theory Culture & Society* 7, no. 2-3 (June 1990), 373-395, 377. See also Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*.

*favouring privatization in religion, also provides fertile ground for the renewed public influence of religion”.*⁴⁰

4.2. Religion and its Renewed Public Significance

For religion to be relevant it has to have a renewed public influence.⁴¹ To understand what he means by this, one has to distinguish between religious function and religious performance. The former refers to intra-ecclesial matters such as aspect of devotion and worship, e.g., seeking enlightenment or salvation of souls through rituals. The latter is geared towards extra-ecclesial concerns, that is, when religion answers or responds to questions or problems that are coming from other spheres of life,⁴² especially when it sees these problems are not dealt in, in that sphere. He names economic poverty, political oppression, or familial estrangement as examples. “Through performance, religion establishes its importance for the ‘profane’ aspects of life; but in so doing, non-religious concerns impinge upon pure religiousness, expressing the fact that other societal concerns condition the autonomy of religious action.”⁴³ It is in religious performance that religion gains its public influence. For a religion, however, to be a “publicly influential religion” what is required at a minimum is “that religious leaders have control over a service which is clearly indispensable in today’s world, as do, for instance health professionals, political leaders, scientific or business experts.

4.3. The Liberal and Conservative Options for Religion

Globalization has now made it difficult for religion to be publicly influential. In pre-modern societies, religion’s public influence was found

⁴⁰Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 373.

⁴¹“By public influence, I mean that one or more religions can become the source of collective obligation, such that deviation from specific religious norms will bring in its wake negative consequences for adherents and non-adherents alike; and collective action in the name of these norms becomes legitimate.” Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 373.

⁴²Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 386: “To repeat, the Luhmannian view of performance sees it as the attempt by one system to address problems that are generated in other sub-systems but not solved there. As such, the problems addressed by religious performance are not religious problems at all, at least not directly. The solutions, therefore, while religiously inspired, will tend to take on the characteristics of the target systems: economic solutions to economic problems, political solutions to political problems, and so forth.”

⁴³Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 379.

in its close association with morality (moral codes) and group membership. This means that religion played a role in societal cohesion, that is, it set the limits and boundaries between social groups. In a sense, one's religious membership determines one's group affiliation. To illustrate this point Beyer writes:

In more complex older societies divided into stratified status groups, religious membership and social group membership were still, more often than not identical; but the dominant status groups, in an effort to bolster and express their control over a greater social diversity, usually attempted to style their religion as definitive for the society as a whole, often in the form of an overarching cosmology that made the norms and values of the upper strata, that is, their moral code, the presumptive standard for all behavior. Group membership and its defining norms were still intimately related to cosmic order; but now this association claimed to be relevant and binding for a far wider variety of actual life-worlds.⁴⁴

The point here is that, when a particular group senses a rival or its identity being threatened, religion is “used” to demonize the other. The other is now represented as the embodiment of evil or “as the negation of the correct relationship between social order and the transcendent that one's own group represented.”⁴⁵ As a result, “[i]n justifying the conflict, religion promoted the survival or expansion of the group and its culture.”⁴⁶

This role of religion has changed in a globalized world. Because of global communication, everybody seems to be connected. Beyer contends:

The resultant globalizing tendencies of society have radically altered the conditions under which the moralizing solution is still possible *on the level of society as a whole*, because the group now includes everyone. The situation of religion in global society alters correspondingly. S/he who used to be the unequivocal outsider is now often literally my neighbor, whether I approve or not. The outside/inside distinction readily at hand for reinforcing the internal moral codes, and hence territorial societies becomes at least difficult

⁴⁴Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 382.

⁴⁵Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 383.

⁴⁶Beyer, “Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society,” 383.

to maintain over the long run in a world of virtually instant global communication, itself a consequence of institutional specialization.⁴⁷

It is in this context that Beyer discusses two possible ways in which religion can be publicly influential again. One is the liberal option and the other is the conservative option.

The liberal option stresses, openness, ecumenism, pluralism and tolerance of other views and other religions. In a globalized world, the public influence of religion consists in responding to global ills like political oppression, women and gay exploitation, etc. Liberation Theology is a typical example of the liberal option. Beyer maintains that:

Liberation theologians are attempting to establish public influence for religion in the face of privatization. They are doing this through religious performances that concentrate on political involvement although they do not go so far as to advocate the legislation of religious norms. ... Yet, whether this strategy will lead to a re-establishment of the public influence of religious communication in general in our society is still an open question.⁴⁸

Beyer seems to have reservations about this approach because rather than drawing from religious resources, it accommodates itself with elements of modern global society. Thus, religious distinctiveness seems to vanish in the process. Rather than avoiding privatization of religion, in fact, it promotes it because the approach appeals to the private decision-makings of individuals instead of putting forward a more definitive stance to be followed strictly by its adherents.

There is another option, which seems to be Beyer's preference,⁴⁹ and this is the conservative option for religion. This option has recourse to "the

⁴⁷Beyer, "Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society," 384.

⁴⁸Beyer, "Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society," 388.

⁴⁹"... religion will have a comparatively difficult time in gaining public influence at the level of global society as a whole; but such influence will be easier to attain if religious leaders apply traditional religious modalities for the purpose of sub-societal, political mobilization *in response to the globalization of society*." Beyer, "Privatization and the Public Influence of Religion in Global Society," 374. In another work, he maintains that on the level of religious performance, a conservative option, in certain circumstances, provides a more direct influence to society because of its attachment to "socio-cultural particularisms that inform so many modern state." Furthermore, "What conservative movements sometimes succeed in doing is making religio-cultural themes the stuff of politics and law. As such they supply religion as a cultural resource for the political and legal systems." Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, 94.

reassertion of the tradition in spite of modernity.” It tries to place the moral values of religion, and be more determinative in the world by imposing its own logic on the political sphere. Its aim is to shape global reality. Therefore, contrary to the view that the conservative option runs against the globalization process, it is reflective of it. Globalization produces homogenizing tendencies as well as differentiating tendencies in the world.

The resistance to, or perhaps better, digestion of globalization in various parts of the contemporary world has given rise to movements informed by the conservative option: political mobilization as the service (performance) of the religious faith. Whether the complaint is ‘Westoxication’ in the Middle East or the difficulty of ‘making America great again’, the problem is similar.⁵⁰

Whether it is the New Religious Right in the United States or the Islamic Middle East and the Sikh Punjab, these are “logical outcomes of a globalization which has generated and continues to generate fundamental conflicts among different regions of the world.”⁵¹ The traditional role of religion has resurfaced “making religion capable of communicating publicly essential information.”⁵² It is capable of doing this because religion has ties to communal group cultures. If political and economic responses fail to address the ills of globalization, religious leaders – who are closely grounded in traditional communally oriented culture – can galvanize its people in the of name religion (demonize the other; pure vs impure, the us vs them) to resist such threats from globalization. “Such a clear religious message can, under the correct conditions, lead to successful mobilization of entire populations.”⁵³

The aim of contemporary religious-political movement on both spectra is first of all to make religious norms and values collectively binding, that is they go beyond individual choices. Secondly, they want to make religion relevant for today – in that it offers something necessary for all something that the other spheres of life (political, economic) cannot provide. For the liberal option, it is by addressing socio-eco-cultural and political malaise brought about by globalization. For the conservative, it is by reasserting the tradition in the face of globalization. It wants its logic to determine the course of globalization.

⁵⁰Beyer, “Privatization and Public,” 390.

⁵¹Beyer, “Privatization and Public,” 391.

⁵²Beyer, “Privatization and Public,” 391.

⁵³Beyer, “Privatization and Public,” 391.

5. Conclusion

Our discussion has led us to the conclusion that religion is an important ingredient of the globalization process both as a cultural resource (Robertson) and as a social system (Beyer). Rather than a mere reactive force, it is actually a constitutive part of it. Through our investigation of Robertson's theory of globalization, we learned that globalization is not only about big structures such as the capitalist world-economy, more importantly, it also involves our "imagination," ideas or discourses on how to structure the world into a single place (globality). As we face the challenges of living in a globalized world, questions like, why are we here, what is the purpose of life, how should we treat our neighbors – in short, questions of ultimate meaning – are once again gaining salience. Here then lies the function of religions as rich reservoir of alternative meanings, discourses and images on how to order or restructure our global village into a more humane way other than the one given by the globalization discourse. In a runaway global world, religion is a familiar ground, providing security, solace and stability for those adversely affected by the novel changes and the hostile forces of the globalization process. It can aid in the mobilization of group identities as well as bring people together to adapt to the changes of time. Peter Beyer is more emphatic than Robertson in saying that, as a social system religions have an indispensable role or competency that they alone can offer in the period of high modernity. What we need to do is to decipher this role and make its influence felt. Let religious moral values be more determinative in the socio-political sphere of life. Let religions reassert their own traditions vis-à-vis the global forces. Let religious distinctiveness generate collective obligation for people of this generation. For him, religions have an anti-systemic vocation whenever a "religious performance," is executed. In religious performance, religions draw from their own spiritual and cultural resources, thus providing a religious/ethical vision that is instrumental in resolving problems arising from the secular (economic or political) realm. What Robertson and Beyer have made us realize is that in an era where our future and destinies overlap, we can still draw on our different religious traditions to help us cultural groups to forge a better world and shield us from the unwelcome consequences of the global era, as well as, resist the "temptations" that it brings about.