

PREFACE

From 23-27 June more than 70 scholars from 20 countries from all over the world gathered in Kruševo at the Third World Conference for Religious Dialogue and Cooperation, where we met to discuss the pressing religious conflicts of this world. Religion is often perceived as a problem. The Conference explored how to make religion a resource for international dialogue and peace. Aware that we cannot solve all problems, as scholars we believe that creating spaces of dialogue between and within religions offers valuable opportunities for promoting peace. Religion today is often misused for political purposes and for supporting wars, while secular ideologies try to exclude religion from the public sphere. Persecution and discrimination of religious minorities continue in different parts of the world. Religions are expected to act as a voice for peace, forgiveness, coexistence, tolerance, and understanding. The essence of religion is to celebrate the creation of the world, not its destruction. However, religions have produced a divided society, with divided identities, divided education, divided loyalties, divided worldviews, which may and often does lead to polarization and conflicts. Instead, religions can promote values that bind and unite, inspire flourishing interreligious relations.

Who we are? We are scholars of religion.

What we want? We want peace among religions, spiritual movements and nonbelievers.

What we do? Since 2019, we held an annual conference in North Macedonia, a multireligious, multicultural, and multiethnic country, where we discuss religions' role in a global and fractious world.

In giving individuals a sense of belonging, religious groups help them to find themselves in modern times. For instance, religious leaders, pointing to modern society's loss of ethical values and increased corruption, preach: the only answer to the current 'decay' is a return to traditional values and religious norms. Hence, religion supplies these individuals with a feeling of being a part of a group that represents their interests and allows them to regain their traditional sense of who they are.

As transnational corporations increasingly take over the role of the state's involvement in the economic sector, the government loses its status as a welfare provider. Moreover, increasing the gaps between those who have benefit from the global market (and those who have been left behind, globalization is seen as imperialism. By responding to individuals' desire for welfare, as well as acting as a cultural protection against globalization, religion plays a social role and gains more recognition from the marginalized, particularly those in Third World countries. For instance, religious organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, and Islamic Relief Worldwide help serve the disadvantaged in areas such as poverty relief, health care and environment problems. In fact, even if only promising prosperity and hope of economic relief, these organizations draw massive followers as, by lacking extensive transnational bureaucracies and chains of command, they provide "the strength of collective identity and the depth of ethical commitments.

Last but not least, globalization causes mental stress. Although globalization allows for crisscrossing borders, it also leaves individuals worrying about losing work, status, or other privileges. Moreover, since globalization favors material prosperity as the aim of life over inner peace, individuals focus on attaining some material possession such as a house, car, game, or simply any object. When they attain such item(s), however, they find themselves empty inside and, therefore, realize that inner peace can never be achieved through material possessions. To these individuals then, religion provides them the way to inner peace and the sense of personal fulfillment. For example, individuals who feel insecure in the globalized world, in business or personal life, will often pray to God for his spiritual support. In addition, these individuals realize that getting involved within their communities and organizing together in social movements for a good cause brings more satisfaction to them than do material possessions. They see themselves as being part of something important and worthwhile. In face of rapid changes in the globalized world, to regain the sense of certainty, many individuals turn to religion for a clear explanation of what is going on in the world. With its strength as a powerful

identity that brings the message of unity and security in times of crisis, religion provides the idea of a “home.” But, as the last section demonstrates, this religious identity becomes a major ingredient that reduces the self and the other to a number of cultural religious characteristics.

The impact of globalization on religious practices is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Globalization has diverse impacts on religion, ranging from the spread of religious ideas and practices to the challenges faced by traditional belief systems. The interplay between globalization and religion is an intriguing area that requires further exploration. The relationship between globalization and religion presents both possibilities and challenges. On one hand, globalization offers opportunities for religious communities to connect with each other across borders and share their beliefs on a global scale. On the other hand, it can also lead to clashes between different religious ideologies and values.

Religions, with their religious values and religious characteristics, can be seen as globalizing systems, shaping cultural and political dynamics worldwide. They have the power to influence societies and individuals in profound ways, especially in an increasingly interconnected world. This influence can be seen in the rise of religious nationalism and the enactment of religious legislation. The cultural and political significance of globalization for religion cannot be underestimated. It brings about changes in religious practices, beliefs, and identities as people are exposed to new ideas, cultures, and perspectives. This can lead to both positive transformations as well as conflicts within religious communities.

Reflecting on the impact of globalization on religious practices highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and understanding among different faith traditions. It is essential to recognize the diverse ways in which globalization affects religions around the world while respecting individual beliefs. In light of globalization, it is crucial for individuals to critically engage with the implications of religion on their own religious practices. This involves actively questioning how their faith interacts with global forces such as technology, media, migration, and economic systems. By fostering open-mindedness, empathy, and respect towards diversity in religious practices, we can navigate the challenges posed by globalization while harnessing its potential for positive change in the realm of religion.

While globalization has brought about positive changes in terms of increased religious diversity and interfaith dialogue, it has also presented challenges for some traditional practices. Globalization's influence on religion can inadvertently lead to the marginalization or dilution of minority religions or indigenous belief systems. The dominance of major religions in a globalized world can overshadow the rich cultural heritage and distinctiveness of these smaller faith communities. Christian movements are affected by globalization, as it impacts their global reach and influence. Furthermore, globalization has intensified religious differences and conflicts in certain regions, impacting world religions and world politics. As people with different religious backgrounds come into contact through globalization processes, tensions may arise due to conflicting beliefs or cultural clashes. It is crucial to address these challenges by promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect among diverse religious communities, including the Christian faith.

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