Active Role or Passive Presence of Religions Specially Islam in Globalization

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Abstract:

The process of globalization, which has influenced many dimensions of human life, is an obligatory process that the contemporary human destiny is passively transformed by it. This does not mean that there can not be any active influence of some men on it. Those who are following the project of globalism (or Westernism or even Americanism) know well that although we have passion in his huge change we may play an active role in this process. In recent years, there are serious attention of many thinkers from the economic, industrial, and political dimensions of globalization to the cultural aspects of this process. Meanwhile, contemporary researchers of religion in different cultures are enquiring about the influence of religion on this process and vice versa.

I will study, in this paper, the impression of globalization on religion and the influence of religion on globalization. Then, it will be pointed out the specific position of Islam among other religions in these changes.

In recent years, attention to the cultural dimension of globalization has been focused on by researchers and academic groups. The huge importance of cultural aspects of globalization has been widely accepted by thinkers all over the world. Although globalization emerged in economic, industrial, and communicational forms and then in political views, the deep influence of those dimensions on cultural aspects of human life –and vice versa- has brought culture to the core of the attention of globalization doctrines.

UNESCO for its part started by implementing the World Commission's recommendation by preparing and publishing, in 1998 and 2000 respectively, two editions of a *World Culture Report* that focused on the topics "Culture, creativity and markets" and "Cultural diversity, conflict, and pluralism." This enterprise, however, was subsequently abandoned by UNESCO. This has left a vacuum that needs to be filled. At the intellectual juncture, the cultural disciplines encounter the rich and growing body of globalization literature. However, this literature has been focused largely on economic globalization and the spread of international rule of law, including security issues. Only secondarily has it dealt with social aspects, although the *Global Civil Society Yearbook 2001* and UNDP's *Human Development Report* (2004), and other publications are beginning to address this imbalance. Cultural aspects have been even less acknowledged, and both cultural globalization and the relationship between globalization and culture remain topics that are relatively unexplored and underdeveloped.

Nevertheless, culture has been brought into the international debate on globalization through a series of major policy publications and the political messages they contained. The process was initiated by Our Creative Diversity (1996), the report of the *World Commission on Culture and Development* (UNESCO), which introduced a strong policy

link between culture and development. It called for a 'commitment to Pluralism' as middle course between universalism and radical cultural relativism. The notion of a 'constructive pluralism' developed subsequently by UNESCO suggests the active and dynamic coexistence of groups, and incorporates the conditions for a public domain that allows creative contact and transformation. American scholars confess that the *2004 Human Development Report* was written in the context of concerns about the increasing cultural dominance of the West, in particular the United States, and a strengthening of identity politics.

This brief report of attempts in introducing and organizing cultural aspects of globalization shows the large open houses that must be explored in this arena. Moreover, the religious dimension of cultural globalization has been little considered and there must be a long way to exploration in this matter, hoping to be done in the future.

Religion and Globalization

Globalization, as an inevitable process of accelerated changes in human life, will influence all dimensions of human culture, especially on religion. On the contrary, because it is a universal process that can not have its frame without all of the other dimensions of human life, therefore all of those dimensions have their role in growing up of globalization; hence religion must have its crucial role in constructing the big building of globalization. It is not possible to understand globalization by neglecting the important role of religion. It is because the essence of globalization is as a "net".

Passive Role or Active Presence in a Globalized World

Globalization is an inevitable process of human life and it is a necessary result of a lot of developments in science, technology, easier

communications and etc. It brings a lot of new values and cultures, which must be examined. But Globalism as an ideology is going to impose all of its values and thoughts by a few Western people on the other peoples in the world. They want to change all other people so that they think like them and accept all of their discipline of values by destroying other cultures for benefiting from them. They think in this respect as a war or clash that they must defeat others. All other people must have a passive role in this situation without any active participation.

Globalism, as a covering term, hides Westernism and Americanism (Spybey, 1996; Taylor, 2000). Its attempts are in the direction to change all other parts of the world according to the interests of Western peoples. In these attempts, there is another challenge also between Western men. The USA, in its imperialistic view, seeks to be the leader of this imperialism. It wants to be alone in imposing itself on other peoples and make the other Western countries take aside from its domination.

However, we do not concern in this study with this kind of Globalism or Westernism, or Americanism. It is a case of a clash. It must be examined as a war against humanity. We are going to study globalization, which also differs from Westernization and Americanization. All new developments in human life that brought global thought may influence religion and be influenced by it. It is our task to examine these reactions.

It is usually understood that because globalization is an inevitable process in the world today that the situations of new developments in technology, economics, and politics have brought it, therefore we are passive in front of it. It is the destination of human beings. We only may study it; and sit and regard all that will happen as a viewer, not as a player.

I think it is not the case with globalization. Although there are a lot of situations around us that force us to act in the direction of global position, the free will of human being and their ability to go beyond boundaries

and choose the best choices and in some cases to change powerfully all of one direction for a batter one, all of these potentialities are hopes for him to play an active role in this huge process. We, who try to find our responsibility in a global world, should know the results of globalization and its threats and opportunities to play the best role in this position and perhaps to change some worse consequences of globalization.

I believe that all religions especially Islam must have an active presence in the world today despite the impact of the global atmosphere that tries to give them a passive attendance in it. For having this active role, they must know their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. With this knowledge, they will intelligently and consciously participate in globalization.

Intensive Involvement of Islam in Globalization

Islam, like Judaism, has religious jurisprudence, while this is not the case with Christianity and Buddhism which emphasize morality. Because of this specification, the religious laws penetrate all aspects of a Muslim believer's life.

Furthermore, the many social religious laws in Islam make this religion more involved in the social activities of the society. Islam does not concern only with the personal relationship between man and God, which change individually the spirituality of human being. A lot of Islamic doctrines focus on the relationship between man and his society. Islam emphasizes the belief that the relation between man and God may not be completed unless the social duties of a believer are fulfilled. The social duties of Muslim believers contain all dimensions of their lives like the economy, politics, culture, and social development. Therefore, if they want to be good believers, they may not ignore their social duties.

Because the social law in Islam is an essential specification for it, every dimension of Globalization must be examined by Islamic laws. Islam has some economical frame with a discipline of values that may not accept every economical frame, which is based on human autonomy apart from God's order. It has also some essential doctrines in politics that are based on its own foundations. Certainly, it rejects some political thoughts (like racism, imperialism, and compulsion in acceptance of a political government, etc.), and accepts some others. Therefore, Islam has more involved in Globalization, especially in its economy, politics, security, environmental position, and culture. Islam will have some challenges with Globalization because of the different and contrary values it imposed on the human being. Therefore, Islam will have more challenges to Globalization than other religions.

Another important difference between Islam and other religions is its attention to mundane matters of human beings besides future life. We have a lot of activities during our life that we think are not religious ones, but in Islam, every human activity is seen as a religious one. For example, Islam thinks of sexual relations between a wife and her husband as worship like other kinds of worship. Although this relation must be done due to divine order that is, in some cases it is forbidden and in some other cases it is permitted, but, besides the prohibition in some cases, Islam does not think of sexual relationships as far from being in a spiritual duty of man. It means that the meaning of worship differs in Islam. The activities for mundane matters are just those spiritual activities. We may not separate endeavors for this world from attempts for the life after death. This matter makes secularism very far from an Islamic society than others.

Therefore, because of at least two above-mentioned specifications of Islam, it has more challenges with Globalization. It has more involvement with Globalization (and more with globalism).

However, it does not mean that we expect a rigid reaction of Islam against Globalization. If it were so, Islam would be omitted by the huge flood of Globalization. The element of *Ijtehaad* in Islam –especially Shiite- makes the presence of Islam in the globalization process possible and safe. *Ijtehaad* seeks to find solutions for making divine law compatible with spatial situations without leaving Islamic foundations. This fluidity not only preserves the religious attitude toward the construction of a better world based on spiritual values but also makes the facts of the world today regarded and the solution compatible with the real problems. Every branch of Islam that uses this element more seriously will remain more permanent with more efficiency.

Islam and Other Religions in a Global Age

Global situations have brought the diversity of religions into consideration. Before global awareness, every religion regarded itself as the only true religion that may result in salvation for human beings. But in Global relations, one question came into consideration seriously. If our religion is the true one and other religions as false, why do we see believers in other religions with strong beliefs that are like or better than we are expected to be a religious man in that activity and spirituality?

There are three main replies to this question: pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Some philosophers of religion, like John Hick and Smith, maintain pluralism; that is, all religions are true and every one of them is a way to the truth. Truth is not limited to a special religion. These thinkers have tried to give a solution to the reality of the diversity of

religions. There are also very few Muslim thinkers that think like those Christian philosophers.

Although the pluralists give this kind of solution to regard the facts of religious diversity, is pluralism may be compatible with their religious doctrines and also their religious tradition and culture? I do not think so. The fact that few Christian and Muslim thinkers accept religious pluralism as a true attitude toward the interpretation of religions shows that this attitude may remain only as a theory of certain thinkers in its speculative form. We can point to Alvin Plantinga, as one who demonstrates against pluralism and defend exclusivism.

According to Islamic doctrines in Quran, it is very difficult to accept epistemological pluralism. But, salvational pluralism or reward pluralism may accept. According to a verse of the Quran (1:62):

> Surely Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.

Therefore salvation is due to belief in the fundamental doctrines of Islam which is not other than toward which the human constitution guide.

Epistemological pluralism may not also be accepted by Islamic tradition and culture. The fact that there is no hope for this pluralism to obtain acceptance among a great amount of Muslims (I think also among Christians) shows that this theory may not be a dominant belief among Muslims.

I think Globalization has brought a good situation for Islam in some areas. Muslim thinkers must benefit from this situation and try to play an active role in the following that is driven by their doctrines:

1. producing interreligious dialogue for mutual understanding among religions;
2. developing religious attitudes;
3. providing mutual respect among religions;
4. creating global hope for the ultimate victory of virtue and religious value by its doctrine of Saviour;
5. uniting with other religions against those threats of Globalization;
6. presence in the economical, political, and cultural process of Globalization toward the sovereignty of eminent human values.