RELIGION AND PHASES OF GLOBALIZATION

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Since about 1980, “globalization”, Roland Robertson says, has “rapidly became one of the most employed and debated concepts of our time. But it has also acquired buzzword status, invoked in a broad range of contexts and for a large number of purposes” (Robertson, 2003: 1). In this chapter I will define globalization, examine models of the phases of globalization and then propose my own model. Having established the phases of globalization and their characteristics, I will turn to describing religion in each phase.

Defining Globalization

Conceptions of globalization vary widely. Skeptics maintain that globalization is a myth (Held et al., 1999: 5–7). Others maintain that although globalization is not a myth, much that is discussed under the topic is ‘globaloney’ (Veseth, 2005). One popular introduction to the subject even says “globalization is everything and its opposite” (Friedman, 2000: 406). We must begin, therefore, by defining the term.

Globalization is often defined monolithically, as being synonymous, for example, with the worldwide expansion of western capitalism, or as a kind of western cultural imperialism (Robertson, 2003: 15–19). While there is some truth in such conceptions, globalization is far broader. Robertson defines it as a concept that “refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a

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To be fair, Friedman actually defines globalization this way: “it is the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before. . . .” (Friedman, 2000, 9).

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whole” (Robertson, 1992: 8). He further states, “the world has become increasingly characterized by (1) extensive connectivity, or interrelatedness and (2) extensive global consciousness, a consciousness which continues to become more and more reflexive” (Robertson, 2003: 6). Drawing from Robertson, I define globalization as increasing extensity of world interdependence and increasing intensity of world consciousness. The term “increasing” highlights that globalization is an ongoing process, not a static state of affairs, and that its tendency is to increase over time, although the process has been uneven and has involved reversals.

Key in my definition is the focus on consciousness. Changes in thinking that occur as a result of global interdependence are every bit as important as other factors affected by it, such as political or economic ones. Globalization profoundly influences norms, values, religion, and other ideas and beliefs. I also assume that globalization involves political, economic, social and cultural dimensions (Robertson, 2003: 3; Robertson and White, 2005), although it is neither adequately nor predominantly defined as any particular one of these.

Existing Models of the Phases of Globalization

I now turn to the historical trajectory of globalization. How long has globalization been occurring, and through what phases of development has it passed? I will survey three models of the phases of globalization and then propose my own. I must acknowledge, as Jan Aart Scholte does, that “any periodization is artificially neat. In practice socio-historical developments cannot be divided into wholly discrete phases…. Nevertheless, the historical shorthand of periods provides helpful general bearings” (2005: 86).

Types of Models

Conceptions of the chronology of globalization come in three basic types (Scholte, 2005, 19–20): cyclical models, linear models, which give

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5 Consciousness of the globe is not highlighted in Scholte’s definition of globalization, although he discusses it repeatedly (e.g., Scholte, 2005, 73, 89–90, 99–101, 116). Held et. al., do not include it in their otherwise useful definition (Held et al., 1999, 16).

6 I have developed a theory of one such effect on consciousness, the relativizing of tradition, in Campell, 2005.