
The four volumes in the series *God and Globalization*, while separately focusing on different aspects of globalization, should preferably be read as one project. Volume 1 investigates the relation between religion and the ‘spheres of the common life’ and volume 2 the possible influence of God’s Spirit on ‘the authorities’ in areas such as education, human rights and ecology. Volume 3 addresses the role which religions play in globalization, especially the future-shaping effect they could have on this seemingly relentless process. This volume is crucial to the overall argument developed by Stackhouse and his contributors. In assessing the impact of globalization most experts focus almost exclusively on the economic, political and socio-cultural effects, thus neglecting the role of religion in bringing about ‘one world’ or countering negative effects of the globalizing process.

The arguments regarding the impact of the world religions on globalization can only be assessed adequately when read against the overall interpretive framework, as summarized in the concluding volume by Stackhouse as the series editor. He warns against both the limitless optimism of the hyper-globalists and the extreme scepticism of sectors of the ecumenical and ecological movements, where globalization seems to be equated with a second ‘Fall’ of humanity. Even though he leaves some room for prophetic critique, it is clear that his vision is driven by a transformative embrace of globalization, in line with Anthony Giddens’ ‘third way’. For Stackhouse, what is needed, and spelled out with the help of various experts, is a positive ‘public theology’ in dialogue with other religions, in which Christian ethics are globalized. Behind such a confident approach lies the conviction that Christianity has been a major factor calling forth the forces that led to the opening up of the world; also that Christianity has at its disposal adequate resources to further ‘guide’ the crucial dialogue between religions in the direction of a global civilization.

In volume 3 impressive building blocks for such an ambitious project are gathered and arranged. Acknowledged experts investigate the viability of various major religious traditions to participate with this ‘enlightened’ brand of Christianity in the process of steering globalization between the extremes of naïve optimism and outright rejection. Diane Obenchain (as co-editor of volume 3) suggests a religious studies approach which could facilitate such a ‘transformation’ of globalization. While acknowledging cultural pluralism as a factor within globalized culture, she stresses a common human ‘faithing’ that relates all religious quests to a transcendent reality, shared by the different faith traditions; a common search for transcendent meaning on the ‘presupposition that a coherent logos stands behind all of existence and history’ (p. 26). This view, which is in line with a positive Christian assessment of the Enlightenment and Hans Küng’s dream of a global ethos, is juxtaposed to Scott Thomas’ more cautious ‘revisionist’ view of international relations and ‘socially embodied pluralism’. Thomas
emphasizes the contemporary reassertion of specific religions as political and cultural forces, each with its own logic, and several of which ‘are sharply critical of everything ‘modern’ and opposed to anything global’ (p. 29).

This ambiguous theoretical framework, developed in chapters one and two, sets a complex task to the different Christian experts on world religions. It is interesting to see how each of them deals with the particular and universal aspects of the different religions in assessing their possible contributions towards a global culture under the auspices of a Christian affirmation of globalization (in chapters 3 to 7). John Mbiti emphasizes how communities of identity, formed in traditional religions all over the world, can survive a ‘conversion of culture’ and can be taken up in ‘a network of world transforming orientation’. Sze-kar Wan describes the identity crisis of Chinese culture which even after Maoism still lives with remnants of the world-ordering ethics of Tao, as embedded in Confucianism, and how the need for a coherent ‘metaphysical-moral system’ may open up the Chinese mind for the Jewish and Christian idea of ‘covenanting’. Thomas Thangaraj deals with the inner tensions between the highly pluralistic hierarchy of castes based on the ‘bio-piety’ of personalized bhakti in Hinduism and the universalistic elements of Vedanta Hinduism. The former drives the ‘geo-piety’ of the re-Hinduization of India, and the latter supports the idea of India as a world partner in globalization. Kosuke Koyama finds it difficult to identify a distinct, positive vision of social organization in Buddhism. On the one hand this religion seeks to overcome greed, desire and attachment, and thus shows affinity with deconstructionist, anti-consumerist tendencies of post-modernity, but on the other hand Buddhism’s lack of social theory allows it to fit into multiple cultures. Lamin Sanneh also has a difficult assignment regarding Islam and globalization. While Islam originated as a universalizing warrior cult of intense discipline that dreamt of unifying the world under a single law, and exactly this agenda drives the militant fight against perceived idolatries, relativisms and immoralities of other religions, it thus emphasizes ‘difference’. Sanneh also deals with other aspects which hinder Muslim consensus on globalization: the divisions between Shi’a and Sunni, and the highly revered role of Mohammed as a role model for all aspects of life, both of which tend towards particularism.

Undoubtedly this volume has opened the agenda for proper dialogue between the world’s religions, but it does not represent such a dialogue. At most it alerts Christian partners of the pitfalls to avoid and possible strategies to follow in convincing the other partners of the possibility of ‘transforming’ globalization. It would also be prudent to identify which important aspects are not covered in this volume: the Jewish and Christian traditions are not investigated, jointly or separately, as to their own severe internal tensions regarding globalization. In the case of Christianity this problem is simply avoided by brushing aside the vibrant opposition to globalization within the ecumenical movement as ‘unrealistic’. The genuine voices of the other religions are not heard at all, neither are the Orthodox or Pentecostal voices within Christianity—important factors in the new political positioning of Russia and Africa vis-à-vis globalization—given significant expression. In spite of these criticisms, the fact that religion as a major