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Religious diversity and pluralism. Inter-religious relations in globalization

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Abstract. When we talk about society, we cannot fail to notice the existence in public life of what we define as religious pluralism. Can it be said that today's society cannot be fully defined outside religious pluralism? Can modern man belong to a society without consciously or unconsciously taking part in the implications of inter-religious relations in a world of constant globalization? These are open questions that can be answered from many fields such as sociological, theological, political and others. Understanding this phenomenon gives rise to factors that determine the values of a society that can bring harmony between people to the fore.

Keywords. religious diversity, religious pluralism, globalization, society, anthropological analysis

Introduction

In order to understand the religious situation today, it is imperative that theology accepts certain concepts that have proven their effectiveness over time in explaining the complexity of a society. It is evident that society today is on the rise in terms of culture and religious identities. Sociologists of religion have elaborated three fundamental aspects of religion through which it is present in public life, aspects generally defined by pluralism. "First, societies differ in the extent of their religious diversity. Second, the degree to which different religious groups enjoy acceptance or recognition in the public sphere varies from country to country. Third, support for the moral or political value of widening public acceptance of religions is also variable. This third sense of the term is an ideological or normative commitment that I will call pluralism"¹.

I. Forms of religious diversity

Although religious diversity can take many forms, however, religious pluralism is reflected only through some of them. When we talk about religious diversity, it is necessary to highlight the first indicator of this diversity, namely: the large number of religious organizations in a certain geographical space. This is the meaning of what we define as pluralism. "To the extent that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be highly pluralistic ... Pluralism

¹ P. Beyer & M.E. Larivière, „Globalizations of a common discourse: The United Kingdom and Quebec compared in the context of four national commissions on diversity”, in S. Lefebvre & P. Brodeur (Eds.), *Public Commissions on cultural and religious diversity: Analysis, reception and challenges*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 182–202.

refers to the number of firms active in the economy; the more firms with significant market shares, the greater the degree of pluralism"².

Another indicator of religious diversity is the number of faiths or religions represented in each country. This indicator shows its usefulness in highlighting cultural and ideological differences. "Any country in which two or more faith traditions have large communities could be described as religiously diverse. In this sense, internal differences within each major tradition would not necessarily indicate diversity"³.

Another category of religious diversity is characterized by a form of diversity defined as the official or formal dominance of a single religious tradition. "Many Filipinos and Italians, for example, manage without difficulty to reconcile their personal interest in various religious and spiritual interests with the idea that their countries remain overwhelmingly Catholic"⁴.

Finally, it is possible to conceive of religious diversity as a process by which a previously unitary religious tradition undergoes a process of internal differentiation into separate sects or denominations. The divisions between the major currents of Islam in a country like Turkey illustrate this point. There is clearly diversity, competition and occasional conflict between different expressions of Islam, as well as in Christianity, but the range of different positions is relatively limited. For some purposes, then, it would be misleading to ignore the internal, factional diversity of faith traditions that approach monopolies, especially if the intensity or extent of such diversity has increased"⁵.

From the highlights, it follows that what we define as religious diversity is not exactly a simple issue. From the above analysis diversity indicators vary according to numerous factors such as political, scientific and others. Moreover, religious diversity cannot be expressed in a single, objective way, it can be conceptualized in many ways with numerous implications that define the extent to which a religion is publicly accepted.

II. Pluralism and multiculturalism

When we speak of pluralism, it is imperative to refer to the sociology of religion. This term, which is used quite often in this field and elsewhere, according to researchers such as Hamnett, I⁶. and O Riis⁷, needs to be explained in more detail so that its meaning can be better understood. In today's society, this term implies an ideological task with a strong positive structure⁸. The term also has an ethical and political force, a force which gains strength as the terminological meaning is correctly understood.

II.1. The meanings of religious pluralism and the connection with multiculturalism

This connection expresses its importance especially in areas where the religious morphology is defined by several different identities, as is the case of Great Britain. To properly understand this connection, it is necessary to analyze pluralism through the lens of its

² Stark, R. and Finke, R. 2000, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 98.

³ Harold A. Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity: Clarifying Christian Commitments in a Globalizing Age*, Baker Academic, 2015, p. 21.

⁴ Enzo Pace, „Increasing Religious Diversity in a Society Monopolized by Catholicism”, in *Religious Pluralism: Framing Religious Diversity in the Contemporary World*, Giuseppe Giordan, Enzo Pace (Eds.), Springer, 2014, pp. 93-115.

⁵ James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 73.

⁶ Hamnett, I., (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*, London: Routledge, 1999.

⁷ O Riis, „Modes of religious pluralism under conditions of globalization”, *MOST Journal on Cultural Pluralism* 1, 1, 1990, pp. 1–14.

⁸ Baumann, G., *The Multicultural Riddle. Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 76.

descriptive and normative uses. So, religious pluralism represents the coexistence of religious diversity in each space. Harmonious relations can result from this coexistence, as K. Flanagan points out: "Pluralism is part of the Enlightenment heritage, representing a motivated demand for tolerance in the face of the diversity of cultural, ethnic and political forms. The term contains an ideological imperative, a conviction that the rationality of its proclamation will lead to a harmonization of difference and an end to conflict and intolerance"⁹.

Other analyzes of pluralism show that religious monopolies are bad, and competition between religious cults, if they respect ethical norms, have a beneficial character. Analyzed from this perspective, pluralism "has become a tradition in countries where varieties of Christian faith have managed to coexist, but the meaning has been expanded more recently to include cases where different faith communities live in proximity. At the same time, moral and theological opposition to the positive embrace of pluralism has not abated"¹⁰.

One effect of pluralism, considered positive by some scholars, refers to the possibility of individual choice of a religious community. This analysis brings to the fore the beneficial role of the opportunity to choose religious affiliation, or to change it, when necessary, this freedom being in fact the key to pluralism.

There is also research that points to a harder meaning of pluralism, whereby individuals compile important elements from different religious traditions, resulting in a religious pluralism with a rich flow of ideas, symbols and practices. This state of hybridity characterizes mobile social systems¹¹ or postmodern conditions¹².

Between the three meanings of religious pluralism there is a form of compatibility at the theoretical level, but in practice this is difficult to achieve, especially in the case of the first two meanings. "According to a long tradition of theorizing pluralism in political philosophy, the order and stability of pluralistic societies depend on the stable identification of citizens with voluntary communities, categories, or associations. The cross-links between these intermediate associations would assume the strength and flexibility of the social fabric"¹³.

Countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium that have experimented with this form of pluralism have demonstrated that the social fabric suffers. From the freedom to choose different forms of religion, with different traditions, and implicitly from the mixing of their fundamental notions, naturally results the possibility of social destruction, as everything would turn into a network of qualitatively weak affiliations.

Sociological analysis of what we define as religious pluralism shows that it is managed and affirmed in certain political and social circumstances. Thus, throughout history, pluralism has the capacity to take various forms and to emerge as an ideological position. So, if we recall the British ideologies of pluralism¹⁴, we see that they are based on discourses of religious tolerance, and if we recall some French ideologies or even American ideologies, we see that they are disturbed, in their discourses promoting individual rights¹⁵. These differences bring to the fore the danger that can arise in certain religious communities, namely the imbalance of power exercised by certain religious organizations. The example of Ireland, where Catholics

⁹ K. Flanagan, „Theological pluralism. A sociological critique”, in Hamnett, I. (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 83.

¹⁰ P. R. Eddy, *John Hick's Pluralist Philosophy of World Religions*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, p. 98.

¹¹ J. Urry, „Mobile sociology”, *British Journal of Sociology* 51, 1, 2000, pp. 185–203.

¹² D. Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland. Religion in Postmodern Times*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, p. 201.

¹³ Peter L. Berger and Neuhaus, R. M., *To Empower People*, Boston: American Enterprise Institute, 1977, p. 56.

¹⁴ B. R. Wilson, „Secularization: the inherited model”, in Hammond, P. E. (ed.), *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 9–20.

¹⁵ F. Champion, „The diversity of religious pluralism”, *MOST Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 2.

and Protestants co-exist by not renouncing pluralism, can be given here. Another example can be found in Sri Lanka, where Buddhist and Hindu communities do not respect the basic rules of relationship.

III. Inter-connectivity of religions in a global world

The term globalization can be defined as a complex phenomenon that involves religions in new forms of relationship. The historical analysis of globalization shows that between this phenomenon and the religions of the world, there has always been a form of interdependence. From this analysis we understand that religious diversity has existed since ancient times, forming, along with commercial exchanges, the strong structures of globalism.

Globalism is a planetary phenomenon by which the world can be defined as having: a) a high level of interconnectivity, in which information, goods and services circulate more and more freely; b) a planetary-scale interdependence, with few independent locations that disappear rapidly; c) a contraction of social space, so that the whole planet becomes a new locality, and its cosmopolitan individuals uprooted from identity spaces¹⁶; d) an acceleration of time, with technological and cultural innovations that follow each other at an accelerated pace and that push secular traditions out of existence¹⁷; e) a widespread consciousness of the world as a whole; we are acutely aware of our oneness, but we take for granted a plurality of cultures, religions, ethnic groups, races and the like¹⁸.

Apart from these five elements there are a number of deep tensions as follows:

a) Hierarchies and divisions are reduced and increasingly less relevant (the flat world), and global interconnectedness is structured in ways that give some people a head start and leave others scrambling just to get to the starting line¹⁹;

b) Unprecedented economic growth is overshadowed by a widening wealth gap, with opulent and powerful elites living alongside an underclass of millions and millions of poor, overworked, disenfranchised and hopeless people²⁰;

c) The spread of the rule of law, stability and peace is faced with the strengthening of global criminal networks and outbreaks of violent conflicts at the local level²¹;

d) Particular ways of life are lost as a result of cultural homogenization, as well as a rebirth of local cultural forms in new structural dimensions²²;

e) The robust reappropriation of tradition is accompanied by the inability to transmit it in an accelerated and increasingly individualistic world²³;

f) Individuals are absorbed in their own personal pleasures and pains, as well as involved in the suffering of people half a world away²⁴;

¹⁶ Marshall McLuhan & Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 84.

¹⁷ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p. 19.

¹⁸ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage, London, 1992, p. 7.

¹⁹ David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 112.

²⁰ Nicholas Crafts, „Globalization and Economic Growth: A Historical Perspective”, in *World Economy* 27, no. 1 (2004), pp. 45–58.

²¹ Jan Art Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 279–315

²² Luke Martell, *The Sociology of Globalization*, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 89–104; Robert Holton, „Globalization’s Cultural Consequences,” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 570, 2000, pp. 140–152.

²³ James K. Boyce, „Green and Brown? Globalization and the Environment,” in *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 20 (2004), pp. 105–128.

²⁴ Anthony Elliott & Charles Lemert, *The New Individualism: The Emotional Costs of Globalization*, Routledge, 2009, p. 6-7.

g) Lifesaving and life-enhancing technological innovations appear together with possible trajectories towards technological self-destruction²⁵.

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²⁵ Daniele Archibugi and Simona Iammarino, „The Globalization of Technological Innovation: Definition and Evidence,” in *Review of International Political Economy* 9 (2002), pp. 98–122.

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