

Religion and Globalization

IN THINKING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION and globalization these days, one of two views immediately comes to mind. First, there is the way in which globalization flattens out cultural differences, erodes local customs and beliefs, and spreads a secular, capitalist way of life that is at odds with religions of all sorts. At the same time, there is the way in which religion serves as the source of globalization's greatest resistance and as a haven for those standing in opposition to its ubiquitous yet often subtle power. In both of these views, the relationship between religion and globalization is antagonistic—one of struggle and conflict.

While opposition is an important aspect of the relationship between religion and globalization, to see them only as foes misses some of the complexities of their interaction, not only in the past but in the postmodern world as well.

Religion and globalization can also be seen as partners in historical change. In times past, religion, in various manifestations, has been a carrier of globalizing tendencies in the world. The history of Christianity, of course, can be understood in part as an early effort to create a global network of believers. Its extraordinary growth and influence as a world religion was a result of a link between its own global ambitions and the expansion of various political and economic regimes. It succeeded as a globalizing force long before there was a phenomenon called "globalization." Elements of this historical pattern can be found in Buddhism, Islam, and other faiths as well.

Religion is hardly epi-phenomenal to the processes of globalization in our own day. It continues to be a player in intricate and even contradictory ways. To be sure, it was once thought that secularization was the inevitable outcome of the processes we call "modernity." Clearly this has not been the case. Religious faith persists in a complex interaction with the structures and processes of the modern world and that complexity has only intensified under the conditions of contemporary globalization.

Constant through it all is the capacity of religious faith to generate commitments in ways of seeing and being in the world of extraordinary depth and passion and irreducible difference. Needless to say, these differences are among the most contentious and volatile of all differences. The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, called everyone's attention to these specific problems and to the larger puzzle posed by the relationship between religion and globalization.

But they did more: they also presented an urgent need to make some sense of it. That humans are becoming more and more closely connected on this earth and that this connection breeds tensions, misunderstandings, and violence suggests that we need to think hard about the ways we can live with our differences in peace. Agreement may not be an achievable or desirable goal, but finding possibilities for coexistence in the midst of disagreement must be.

It is with all of this in mind that this issue of *The Hedgehog Review* takes on the task of exploring the complex, difficult, interesting, and important relationship of religion within the new global order.

— T. H. R.