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The Changing Map of World Religions

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Abstrakt

Zmieniająca się mapa religijna świata

Zmiany w wierzeniach religijnych, praktykach i światopoglądach pojawiają się równoległe z rozwojem gospodarczym, rosnącą mobilnością ludzi i zmianami demograficznymi oraz otwarciem granic politycznych, wzrostem urbanizacji, postępowaniem w technologiach komunikacyjnych i świadomością problemów związanych z kondycją rodzaju ludzkiego. W swoim artykule dyskutuję siedem głównych cech współczesnych, i wciąż pojawiających się, globalnych krajobrazów religii. Są to następujące zjawiska: (1) azjatyzyzacja Europy, (2) Chrystianizacja Trzeciego Świata, (3) znaczenie geo-religii w życiu codziennym, (4) globalizacja i lokalizacja jako równoległe lub przecinające się byty, (5) marketing religijny w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy (Hollywood lub Holy Word /Święty Świat/), (6) cyber-religia i wpływ ICT (technologii informatyczno-komunikacyjnych) i (7) prawne kontrowersje w relacjach religia – państwo. Konsekwencją rozwoju tych zjawisk są widoczne w myśli religijnej, praktykach i miejscach w skali lokalnej i globalnej w wielu częściach świata. Prezentuję mapę opisującą wybrane z pojawiających się układów i konkluduję wskazując dalsze tematy badań geograficznych.

Introduction

Let me begin with three stories. During the past three months I had these conversations with friends about the changing face of religion in the world. One young woman from Central Asia could not understand why young people go to mosque as it made no difference in the way they behaved towards others. This observation from a country where religion is a mix that includes the Soviet legacy of atheism, little support for fundamentalist Islam, and a strong tradition of animistic belief systems. The second is from a Korean who at an early age became a Christian in spite of strong objections from his loving parents. This man is now faced with trying to explain his son's divorce to his religious friends, who blame him and his wife for his son's behavior. The third is an elderly man in Britain who stated candidly: "I was brought up to think that Christianity was the one and only religion that was best for the world, that is, all should be brought to Christ. Now I am not so sure." Each story illustrates a common underlying theme, viz. persons agonizing about religion in their lives and those around them that the religious face of society is changing. Youth and elderly are questioning what they were told as children or brought up to believe; their uneasiness is reflected in their uncertainty and sometimes confusion about trying to make sense out of what is going on around them and in a wider world. In short, their spiritual worlds are experiencing expanding cores and fluid boundaries.

In this presentation, I want to share with you some emerging threads and developments I see occurring on the religious map of the world. These threads are just as important to strong adherents of a belief system, who are certain about spiritual answers, as to those who question their beliefs and search for meaningful answers. Any changes identified are important to those who examine human and human/environmental dimensions of world religions, be they geographers, sociologists, theologians, anthropologists, or philosophers. I address this topic as someone with longstanding interests in geographical futures at local and global scales. Also I have conducted research and offered seminars on peace and conflict resolution, humane geographies, and globalization and religion. And I have been active in various interfaith, social justice, and voluntary initiatives in my own church, community, and internationally.

Below I identify eight major themes that characterize religious geographies of the future. Some of the futures are beginning to emerge in North America and Europe, others are certain to become more salient within the next two decades. I maintain that as scholars coming together from various backgrounds we need to begin discussing a host of significant issues in various arenas, whether in universities and seminaries or in interdisciplinary and international conferences such as this.

The themes presented below are offered as topics for discussion and debate. Many issues do not have quick and easy interpretations. Rather they call for us to individually and collectively reflect and observe what changes are going on around us. They will likely require us to take notice of some changes we may not have seen, to listen to some voices

we may not have heard, and to study some topics we wanted to avoid. The themes are not listed in any order of importance. Because of the short time permitted for this presentation, I will only highlight some major points. The published paper will be much longer.

Emerging Themes

1. The Asianization of Europeanized Worlds

A major visible and global demographic feature is the growing influence or impress of Asians on Europeanized worlds. Residents in North America, Europe, and Australasia observe more numbers of Asians on streets, in work places, schools, sports events, in places of worship, and as workers or shop owners. They include Japanese, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, Koreans, Filipinos, Pakistanis, and former residents of many Arab states. These new Asian diasporas bring with them their religious beliefs. That is, their religious observances, festivals, holidays, and worldviews, but also the ways they dress and foods they eat, and their places and manner of worship. In rural and urban North America, West, North and Central Europe and also East and Southeast Europe, we see temples, mosques, shrines, cemeteries, and social organizations of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others in the human landscape. They are in coastal cities and major airport gateway cities, in large and small university and factory towns, and in countrysides, suburbs and central cities. They represent a “new religious stratum” or layering to the cultural landscapes of European populations. Some of these European religious landscapes had only one or two “layers,” that is, religious and ethnic groups. These new populations in traditional Judeo-Christian communities are testing the

tolerance levels of many lifelong residents and their community organizations, schools, and social welfare programs. They also experience the meanings of multiculturalism in a religious context. While in some communities these newcomers may be unwelcomed and rejected, in other places they are welcomed and the source for interfaith dialogue and community healing.

2. Christianity with a Third World Face

Christianity and the modern state, whether linked or separated, went hand in hand with the rise of the nation-state in Europe, North America, and other neo-Europeanized areas of the world. But Christianity is assuming some new appearances in regions where it has been strong and dominant. With diminishing proportions of the world's population being white and Christian, Christianity's "third world" face" is evident not only in the number of new adherents in the Catholic church and large Protestant denominations, but in the leadership as well. We can expect to see more clergy, religious leaders, and theologians coming from Christians born in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These will include women and men who were converted to Christianity by North America and European missionaries. The First World will receive missionaries from the Third World. We can anticipate that many of these new leaders will have, as part of their religious upbringing, some different views about human suffering, environmental issues, gender relations, church-state relations, human rights, war, and conflict than their North American or European counterparts. They will also bring their own indigenous cultural heritage, including religious practices, to the spiritual worlds outside Africa and Asia. We can already observe changes in religions worship, priorities for social action, and

responsiveness to issues of spiritual growth and caring by these new Third World leaders. In short, Christianity will increasingly assume a less white, European and neo-European face and theology.

3. Geo-religion in Daily Life

I don't think it would be difficult to document that economic livelihood issues have been a paramount topic of writings by those in the social sciences and humanities in recent decades and perhaps much longer. The composition of a labor force, capitalism, the skills essential for earning a living, and consumerism were favorite topics. Neglected was another part of the daily life of many individuals and societies, viz., the spiritual dimension. Matters or concerns of the spirit were left for theologians, some sociologists and psychologists to study and write. These professionals examined personal and cultural issues about human behavior and those social institutions associated with religious values and identity and spiritual consciousness and growth. These two worlds are yet another example of the "two different worlds" or "parallel worlds" of scholarship. What was missing were the overlaps or interfaces of these two worlds, viz., how important one's religious views or spiritual values were in one's daily life, including what one did, where one worked, how one viewed political and social issues, how one interacted with and viewed "others," and how one looked at "larger wholes." I see an increased yearning of many youth, middle aged, and elderly to learn how to live "whole" and integrated lives, not separated or segmented lives, where the worlds of work, family, worship, entertainment, and politics are fused, not separated. Such "holistic thinking" presents a serious challenge not only for those in the social and behavioral sciences and

humanities, who traditionally have looked at the world as one of individual “boxes” of knowledge and subject matter, but also for those in philosophy and religious studies who also have fostered a “box” thinking rather than helping all of us think and enjoy life comfortably “outside the box.”

4. Globalization and Localization: Parallel or Intersecting Universes

Here I am addressing two realms of religious concern and awareness for individuals and for larger societies. At one scale we have individuals whose “spiritual worlds” are most concerned about personal lives and local worlds. Life hereafter may become one’s chief religious concern. At another scale are those who are more concerned about global issues; that is, those whose worldviews are more than local or provincial. The concerns of religious believers in both groups may be strongly spiritual-based or they may have stronger secular than spiritual orientations. It is at the “intersection” of the local and global where I foresee some major changes in religious experiences and religious landscapes. To what extent will traditional, contemporary, and postmodern religious organizations and institutions be able to “satisfy” the believers of both scales? Will these “worlds” of the local and global be more closely fused or will they become more fractured and separated? What are some likely consequences? I envision at least two scenarios. One is where the organized and established religion or belief system becomes more concerned about “you and the here and now,” which may mean forgetting or neglecting the “global spiritual” and “global secular.” The second is where those in a society become increasingly secular and formally less spiritual, and where religious institutions use their social and political influences in the marketplace, media, and

government halls to implement strategies to resolve pressing global human and environmental issues. In the second scenario, there is less concern about “personal salvation,” that is, for the “here and now and one’s place in another world,” but more concern for a larger and more global set of issues. I also can see these larger issues being influenced more by the values, positions, and faces of Third and Fourth World populations as well as more women and youthful radical religious activists.

5. Marketing Religion in a K- (Knowledge) Economy: Hollywood or Holy Words

Neglected as a serious issue by geographers and others studying religion is the role of marketing. It almost goes without saying that “marketing religion” or the production or promotion of religion in some way has always been a part of the *raison d’être* for any embryonic or enduring religious organization or order. For religious institutions to survive, including their unique worldviews, practices, and impacts on a state and larger society, they needed the power of the marketplace (and money) to construct their schools and worship places, to finance missionary efforts, and to seek legitimacy within the state itself. My thoughts here are not meant to focus on the historical marketing strategies of religious institutions, as fascinating as they are, but rather to consider the impacts of the “K” or “knowledge economies” on contemporary and future organized religion. In “K-economies” what is important in the production, consumption, and transmission of “information,” or, in short, the packaging of religion. And religion, whether we admit it or not, is “information” that can be readily bought, sold, exchanged, manipulated, and transmitted on the marketplace in various forms. What kind of information is important in marketing religion? Images and symbols, especially familiar ones, are very important.

We can all think of religious symbols, words, slogans, faces and icons that are used to market a host of religious goods. Many are as internationally recognized as McDonald's Golden Arches. Religion is promoted on t-shirts, hats, clothing, food, books, music, videos, CDs, tapes, and movies. These are being used both by organized religious groups we might consider as very traditional in their worldviews and values and those that are *avant garde* in their spiritual thinking, practices, and disseminating of messages. That is, the "premodern" and the "postmodern." When and where this high tech marketing occurs, we can envisage some conflicts, for example, between "Hollywood" products (religion packaged for entertainment or fun) and doctrinal "Holy Words." I also foresee "clashes" between old and new religious interpretations and depictions of "holy" events and spiritual leaders, and between the traditional and secular, between old and new converts, whether to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists or Christians. I can also foresee potential clashes in the marketing of sacred images, and in the uses of indigenous knowledge (music, language, ceremonies). Perhaps the World Trade Organization will be asked to adjudicate issues of ownership and the protection of objects and landscapes that are sacred.

6. Cyberreligion and the Impacts of Information and Communications

Technologies

Related to the marketing of religion described above will be the emergence of virtual or "cyber" worlds with spiritual dimensions. These are the worlds of instant communication and acquisition of information; the worlds of visual images, symbols, color, playfulness, gimmicks, and instant satisfaction that are changing the work place and the places of work, where and how we shop, family life, and children's behaviors. Embedded in the

cyberworlds are some basic and spiritual issues about technology that are prudent for scholars in various fields to discuss, including our identity or multiple identities, our ties to place, and our attachments and feelings towards others and towards institutions, whether religions, education, or political. For example, “who are we” really when we face a computer screen and communicate, play a game, and interact with others? Can we be “here, there, and everywhere” at the same time? What is the meaning of the body, the mind, the soul and human spirit? “Electronic religion” suggests we ask about celebrating religious observances in cyberspace. Can we have cybermarriages, cyberdivorces, and cyberfunerals? Can we have cybermissionaries and cyber or virtual pilgrimages? Just as we have cybercafes, we can have cybertemples, cybermosques, and cybercathedrals in which membership is associated by those who “log in,” “belong to a listserv,” or personally interact with others in chatrooms? I can see where the “worlds of the real” and the “worlds of the cyber” become blurred and fluid and also the “worlds of the secular and sacred.” After all, what is “real” in “this world” and “other worlds” or “virtual worlds?” Perhaps in the evolving electronic world “the visual” becomes “the word,” not official written documents of a religious heritage or sacred texts, but standardized, popularized, and commercialized images and icons. These worlds of cyberreligious practice also can, and perhaps will, promote some new, different, and alternative interpretations of important documents and archives. For example, powerful computers can translate familiar texts and ancient documents in many languages (ancient and modern). New computer analyses may provide some new interpretations to familiar statements, doctrines, practices, and events whose authenticities were never questioned. Perhaps the cyberchurch will include adherents from different backgrounds and belief

systems. Can we participate in praying, singing, teaching, learning and celebrating worship experiences at any time of the day or week from anywhere? I can envision cyberworship and cyberdevotions appealing to believers of longstanding religious heritages, to newcomers, and to those seeking interfaith experiences.

7. Religion, State, and the Law

Religion/state issues have long been and will remain a major feature of contemporary and future religious landscapes. But I see that landscape assuming some new features as a result of new issues facing old and new residents and institutions. These include states with a once dominant religious heritage, those which have become more secular, and those that are the homes of new residents. This religious landscape will contain some new institutions and some new “actors” who want to be involved in resolving religion/state issues. Religion-state issues in many old states were of two varieties, one where church and state were separated, the other whether they were fused or integrated. In both cases, changes are occurring. These include not only what or whose religious beliefs or history or histories are taught in the state’s schools, but also what religious holidays and festivals are celebrated. Other educational issues include what is presented in texts (words or visual information) and who writes the official texts, especially for history, geography, earth science, and biology – all controversial subjects? What dress codes are acceptable? What about diets (foods and drinks) for traditional and new groups? Public education issues may extend to discussions about appropriate historical displays in museums and wording used to interpret historical events.

Aside from the educational issues, there are a host of health and medical issues where religion and state interests overlap and conflict. These include the right (or not) for women to seek an abortion, the dissemination of information (and what information) on family planning, and the prevention of AIDS, euthanasia (the right to die with dignity), the availability of contraceptives for women and men, the availability and priorities for those wishing to acquire artificial organs, the uses of genetic counseling, and access to one's physical and psychological records. The subordinated status of women in many traditional societies is questioned in societies that legalize gender equity.

Political questions of a religions nature also will emerge. These include the right of religion political parties to participate in elections, whether a religious code is included on one's national identity card, the official registration of new outside religious groups, and what religious donations are tax deductible? While most state constitutions guarantee religious freedom, they may need to rewrite those portions because of challenges from new inside or outside organizations wishing to proselytize. I can also envision the World Court intervening on state and interstate issues regarding religious genocide, protection, and amnesty.

8. Science and Religion

Just as religion/state issues have always been important within a state, the same could be said for "science-state" issues. For some religious believers, science and religion are seen in conflict; for others they see little conflict, as they relate to two different "worlds" or interpretations. While religion deals with spiritual issues, including "matters of the soul and values," science seeks answers to the "whys," "hows," and "so whats," of life

and the world. Whether one sees these two “worlds” as blended or separated, we can be certain that scientists and religious leaders, and organizations of science and religion, will be facing some truly interesting and novel issues. For example, regarding genetic counseling, should a parent or parents be able to “pick and choose” the sex of their children? Will all human cloning be rejected? Will premiums be placed on developing certain human behaviors and talents? How will we respond to discoveries of new life forms or new communities of “life” or “life” on other universes or even in our own? How do we define life? Only on earth-based systems? What is intelligent life? How will we respond to extraterrestrials communicating with us, some who may be more advanced than we are? When humans create life or life forms, what does this tell us about our views of God, deity or deities, and creation? What does “the image of God” mean? I maintain that social scientists, theologians, philosophers, and politicians have a stake in what science is taught, promoted and funded.

Summary

In summary, I believe that members of the geography community can and should be among those scholars examining closely the changes in religious belief systems and landscapes that are evident at local, regional, and global scales. We have a strong intellectual tradition that includes addressing concepts about place and place meaning, landscapes and landscape changes, environmental awareness and public policy, and new and old ethnic diasporas, communities, and networks. We also examine the interfaces of gender and place, law and society, indigenous rights and intellectual property, localization and globalization, environmental stewardship and global changes, and the

meanings of text, media, and images. To be certain, all of these themes, and others, can be investigated within the context of religious beliefs and institutions, and spiritual places and spaces, whether parochial or ecumenical. I believe that the timing of this conference could not have been better as it provides an opportunity for us to listen, present, and discuss many issues and topics facing our hometowns and home regions, our communities and cities, and our global societies. We are well poised to assume strong intellectual leadership roles because our heritage includes “reaching out” to other disciplines and perspectives and supporting those venturing into new intellectual terrains. I would hope that the participants of this conference will continue to explore common intellectual grounds with those in theology and philosophy schools and departments, those in the biological, environmental, and social sciences, and those in the humanities. Through such explorations, we will discover that we, as geographers, have much to learn from our colleagues in these and other fields *and* that we have much to offer them in understanding the changing faces of religion on the world map.