

REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Title of Session: Religion in a Global Context

Name of Session Convener(s): *Roberto Cipriani*, “Roma Tre” University

Chair: *Irena C. Veljanova*, University of Western Sydney, Sydney

Comments: -

I) Religion and Globalization in Orthodox Russia

Nataly S. Erokhova, St. Tikhon Orthodox Humanitarian University, Moscow

II) City, Media and Religion: A Look at Corporate Hinduism in Contemporary India

Surya Prakash Upadhyay, Queen’s University, Belfast

III) Religion and Values in a Globalized Context

Roberto Cipriani, Roma Tre University

IV) The Dutch Reformed Church Surveys: An Evaluation of the Reliability of the Questionnaire Items

S.J. Zaaïman, North-West University / Noordwes-Universiteit

V) Spiritual Healing and Belief in God’s Foreknowledge as an Embodied Health Capital: The Case of Macedonians in Australia

Irena C. Veljanova, University of Western Sydney, Sydney

Session description:

According to Roland Robertson (1989: 8) globalization is “the overall process by which the entire world becomes increasingly interdependent, so as to yield a ‘single place’. We could even go so far as to call the latter a ‘world society’, as long as we do not suggest by that term that nationally constituted societies are disappearing”. The same can be said about religion: it doesn’t disappear notwithstanding the process of globalization.

To complete the above statement Peter Beyer (1994: 222) maintains that “religion is a relatively diffuse mode of human communication that in many respects thrived better in smaller, more clearly bounded societies lacking the potent functional specialization of instrumentally oriented systems. As the contemporary world shows, however, this feature does not mean a crude form of secularization in which religion simply declines, inevitably to disappear”.

Finally the question is: can globalization and religion co-exist?

Abstracts:*I) Religion and Globalization in Orthodox Russia*

Nataly S. Erokhova, St. Tikhon Orthodox Humanitarian University, Moscow

Certainly, globalization and religion can co-exist. According to "The Basis of the Social Concept" of the Russian Orthodox Church relations among nations and states should be directed to peace, mutual aid and co-operation. It is obvious that our world can't avoid conflicts, including religious conflicts or, due to Samuel P. Huntington conflicts between civilizations. According to his scheme ("The Global Politics of Civilizations: Emerging Alignments") Orthodox (Russia) civilization has more difficult relations with Japan and Islam (1996: 245).

It seems that the recent tragedies in Russian modern history (Chechnya conflict, terrorist acts, etc.) are reflecting this theory. But for the other hand these events are consolidating Russian society despite its religious identity. And the Russian Orthodox Church was a real peacemaker in this process.

II) City, Media and Religion: A Look at Corporate Hinduism in Contemporary India

Surya Prakash Upadhyay, Queen’s University, Belfast

Contemporary urban living in India seems to provide fertile ground for the revival of interest in religion in a unique fashion. This can be endorsed with the engagement of urban middle class with new spiritual gurus who are clearly the product of globalization and global media products. The practices, discourses and prophecies of spiritual gurus do contain ontological questions but are approached in a very distinct fashion. This opens up avenues for critical dialogues to look at the course of growth of religion under the conditions of globalization. It not only offers a chance to rethink secularization, religious/secular and private/public divide but also provides necessary

insights how urban conditions of living, global technologies and global aspirations create new interests and new reasons to be religious. The paper looks at the growth of urban, corporate form of Hinduism under the regimes of new spiritual gurus and discusses the spectrum of innovations that has come about with the intertwining of questions of urban living, spirituality, media and globalization in the cultural life of urban middle class in India.

III) Religion and Values in a Globalized Context

Roberto Cipriani, Roma Tre University

The issue of universal values is by no means a secondary matter. The need to spread the values of some organisations and nations throughout the world, depends directly on this issue. One example is that of freedom or democracy. We may well ask ourselves if it is ethically desirable to export such values through war which, in itself, is an implicit denial of freedom and democracy. However, if in a given context other values are considered as fundamental (or simply more important) than human life, in that case it is impossible to consider the “sacredness” of life as a universal value. As we can see, determining which values are universal is no easy matter. Everything we say may be contradicted by empirical results. They are individuals and community structures that decide whether a value is “good” and worth adhering to daily or in the long run. The worldwide spread of universal values, commonly shared by all cultures, is purely hypothetical. This hypothesis may be destined to failure as soon as an empirical survey reveals the opposite to apply.

IV) The Dutch Reformed Church Surveys: An Evaluation of the Reliability of the Questionnaire Items

S.J. Zaaiman, North-West University / Noordwes-Universiteit

The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa conducted eight surveys reflecting the state of the church between 1981 and 2006. This paper evaluates a specific aspect of the methodology of these surveys, namely the items of the questionnaires. Seven different sets of questionnaires were used in these surveys. Within the sets the items of the questionnaires were changed continuously. This created an enormous number of items in the surveys that hindered comparability between surveys but also undermined the development of valid items. This paper attempts to evaluate the reliability of the items and thereby the validity of the questionnaires. For the items of the questionnaire to be valid there must be an agreement on what the questionnaire attempts to measure and the indicators measuring it. This must be reflected in each item of the questionnaire. The items must be indicators of identified concepts. But by itself the items of the questionnaire must also be self-evident in its meaning and understood consistently by different respondents. The study found that many items of the questionnaires were not developed properly and therefore did not satisfy the validity and reliability criteria expected of surveys of such a scope. In view of this the paper concludes that the Dutch Reformed Church will have to ensure a thorough methodological process of developing

questionnaire items to ensure the results of the surveys are trustworthy. Otherwise the surveys will not present a true reflection of the state of the church.

*V) Spiritual Healing and Belief in God's Foreknowledge as an Embodied Health Capital: The Case of Macedonians in Australia**

Irena C. Veljanova, University of Western Sydney, Sydney

A comprehensive exploration of the collective health of a people cannot be ignorant of its history, collective identity and the social environment within which the people's health is explored. As people do not experience their lived reality - and by extension their experiences of health and illness - in social vacuum, explanations of health-related behavior should occur within the milieu of the people's own 'logic, knowledge and beliefs, which are grounded in the context of people's daily lives' and are a product of their individual and collective trajectories and histories (Williams, 1995: 580). Drawing from a wider study of health-related behaviors of Macedonians in Australia in the context of identity, health and health capital (2006-2009), this paper argues that [1] the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body (knowledge, beliefs and practices) which effect individual and collective health by guiding the health related behavior of the individual, at both tacit and conscious levels, are embodied or inscribed in the individual and maybe best understood in Bourdieu's fashion as embodied health capital; and [2] religious and spiritual beliefs and practices (such as spiritual healing and belief in God's foreknowledge) which effect individual and collective health are forms of embodied health capital. A nation wide survey of Macedonians in Australia shows that while the majority of the overall valid survey responses (N=786) regarding Macedonian spiritual healing (knowledge and usage) either strongly disagrees or disagrees that Macedonian spiritual healing improves their health and prolongs their lives, for less than 40% of ethno-Macedonians in Australia, Macedonian spiritual healing is a health capital accumulation practice. As regards to the belief in God's foreknowledge, majority (66.1%) of the overall valid survey responses (N=763) either agreed in moderation or fully agreed with the following statement 'I will not modify my behavior significantly to prevent sickness, as ultimately my health is in God's hands'.

*This paper was initially presented at Australian Association for the Study of Religion (AASR) and the Australian Association of Buddhist Studies (AABS) organized conference on 'Multiple Religious Modernities' at the Parramatta campus of the University of Western Sydney, Australia, 28-30th September 2012.