

Book Review: Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics Edited

by *Thomas Banchoff*

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Today, in addressing the global policy challenges in our post-September 11 world, religious actors interacting with global politics are playing more and more constructive role in world affairs. This fact evokes increasing research on interface of the religious pluralism, globalization, and world politics from a wide range of disciplinary and perspectives. Thomas Banchoff's *Religious Pluralism*, an edited book, successfully invited 12 scholars to investigate the relationship between the religious and secular in state and society, and explored practical issues. This volume discusses issues about religious pluralism in world affairs and its relationship with globalization. It defines religious pluralism as "patterns of peaceful interaction among diverse religious actors" (p.5). The globalization driven by the development of communication of technology, on one hand, causes the quest for recognition and competition among religious groups. On the other hand, a global human rights regime emerges and supports democracy. According to the editor (p.5), this book explores related issues and challenges through six dimensions: fragile identity politics, strong ethical commitments, international-national-local linkages, interfaith and interfaith dynamics, religious-secular interaction, and the centrality of the United States. The contributors, however, seem not to follow this given framework consistently. This volume is primarily divided into two parts. Following the introductory chapter of Banchoff, from the second chapter to the 5th chapter, it mainly outlines the challenges of religious pluralism, while in the second part, the other 7 chapters focus on the interaction of religious actors in world politics.

One major issue throughout this volume is how to reconcile multiple religious identities with interaction of transnational politics. In the second chapter, Kwame Anthony Appiah (p.43) examines the challenges from transnational moral and political conflict with interfaith encounters given the example of Denmark cartoon riots with Islam. He outlines the functions of religious identities, and investigates why they are the main source of political conflict in the contemporary world. At the end of the chapter, he points out that for peace building purposes, it is essential to promote cooperation by applying cosmopolitanism. One solution is to contact indirectly with anti-cosmopolitans by dialogue with "their more cosmopolitan brethren". It also implies that the root cause for religious conflict is the failure of religious education to cultivate followers from being self-centered to be "kind and concerned for others and away from cruelty" (p.59). Pratap Bhanu Mehta (p.66), in the 3rd chapter, suggests the challenge for modern democracies is to be reconciling pluralism with a common political identity, and globalization makes the challenge prominent as the religious

identity turns out to be more complex. The case study of Hindu-Muslim Politics in India addresses the complexity of the relation between religion and politics and the impacts on one another. With the inevitable politicization of religion in which state power regulates the religious definition and operation, Mehta (p.87) argues “although the religion need to be self-validating politically, religion requires politics to shore up its authority”. Apart from the political regulation for religious pluralism reconciliation, R. Scott Appleby (p.143) in his chapter reminds the reader that in each major religion the prophets, theologians, sages, scholars traditionally support peacemaking not only by their practices but also by their ethical teachings. For instance, according to Said Nursi (p.233), Qur’an is a superior model of behavior, an alternative to the use of force to resolve conflicts centered on negotiation, compromise, and uprightness. However, the legal scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl argues that the Qur’an’s teachings on tolerance which should be further pursued and developed, were inadequately theorized by later scholars. This problem should not be the only case for Islam, and should also exist in other major religions. In responding to these concerns, Appleby notes that many of the religious reformers engage in establishing and broadening the historic foundations to promote traditional teaching and the practice of peacebuilding.

There is another interesting topic discussed in this volume several times about the definition of religion by comparing the concept of religion with superstition and natural science. By quoting and comparing Cicero and Lactantius’s concise definitions of religion and superstition, Bhanu Mehta concludes that how does one worship (Cicero’s view)? and to whom does one worship (Lactantius’s view)? are the core questions about the distinction between religion and superstition. He (p.68) points out: “Whereas for Lactantius, those boundaries of toleration between beliefs are clearly marked theologically, for Cicero they were more political.” Although Bhanu Mehta tries to illustrate the boundaries of beliefs by applying these two points of view respectively, it could possibly build a bridge between different religions by combining these two aspects together. Furthermore, not only a “true belief” should depend on whom to worship and how to worship, but also the form and the value of the answers are equally important and should not be divided. Consequently, through the realization of the similarity of core value of different religions, people of different faiths could easily understand and tolerate the different forms between one another. In comparing religion with science, Said Nursi believed that the natural sciences would lead inevitably to egoism, violence, and both destructive and self-destructive behavior in the absence of moral guidance. Thomas Michel S.J cites Said Nursi’s statement: “Conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences, and the mind is illuminated by the sciences of civilization. Wisdom occurs through the inter action of these” (p.232). This genius idea implies that the reconciliation of religion and science with transnational politic has paramount importance and should be realized based on the harmony of conscience and mind at the individual level.

The next issue discussed in both chapters 4 and 5 is about the problem of religious

rights and concerns around proselytization, within religious pluralism environment. Jean Bethke Elshtain (p.91) discusses the question of whether the proselytization is a challenge to the politics of recognition and a regime of toleration or fully compatible with it. Elshtain (p.102) argues that "To restrict proselytization not only violates a basic human right; it also curtails an open exchange of ideas and a politics of recognition that may challenge existing power relationships. Instead of focusing on the human right aspect of the freedom of proselytization, John Witte Jr. (p.125) raises the question "How does the state balance its need to create national solidarity and peace with its duty to respect minority cultures and their need to dissent?" On one hand, Elshtain advocates real toleration in ensuring freedom of proselytization. On the other hand, in according to Witte Jr., a comprehensive solution of proselytization should also empower and encourage vulnerable minority traditions to seek protection from aggressive and insensitive proselytism.

The second part of this volume identifies different types of religious actors in the contemporary "glocal" dynamics; and explores the opportunities and concerns of collaboration between these actors. R. Scott Appleby (p.126) gives three examples of religious actors as peacemakers: Cambodia Buddhists (agents of national reconciliation), the Catholics of Sant'Egidio (mediators of peace agreements), the transnational network of Muslim peacebuilders (pioneers of internal religious reform). All these specific cases illustrate the interaction between diverse ethnic and religious actors within the new global political sphere, and the trend of forming an ethical alliance by the peacemakers against the rival of counterparts. Appleby argues that the religious leaders play a unique role to build an effective peacemaking relationship within and across ethnic and religious group by not only understanding and enacting potential peacebuilding roles within the local community but also elaborating a transnational strategy to enhance the mobility of specialized expertise and resources across borders. Leslie Vinjamuri and Aaron Boesenecker examine a variety of roles that nonstate religious actors play in transitional justice. They identify five types of religious actors (p.167) (capacity-builders, peace-builders, legalists, pragmatists and traditionalists) and four types of secular actors (truth-seekers, pragmatists, legalists, traditionalists). Furthermore, they explore their critical elements and identify their strategies respectively and suggest the linkage between its beliefs. This discussion sheds light for the potential collaboration among different nonstate actors within the transnational networks. Katherine Marshall focuses on the faith development engagement and partnership in practice through the case study of the partnership between the World Bank and faith communities in fighting poverty. After exploring the benefits and risks of the collaboration, she concludes that "the quality of development work, from basic understanding and honing of objectives through implementation and adaptation to fit local realities, is significantly improved when development and faith institutions engage together." (p.209). In addition, Thomas Michel also gives several concrete examples about how Muslim institutions cooperate with secular states, nongovernment organizations and international organizations. Elizabeth Prodromou, in her chapter about the relationship between American foreign policy and religion

actors, illustrates how American foreign policy is affected by the political leaders in applying the material resources from religious actors.

Due to the space limitations of this essay, however, the issues discussed above are just a part of many contentious issues covered by the 12 contributors. In conclusion, this volume examines the relation between religious pluralism and globalization with world politics and different social and culture background. Any reader who are interested in studying the issues of religion and transnational politic together with the different religious actors should find this book useful. It not only provides us an insight and throughout analysis of the subjects but also give us a road map and general picture of the complex issues with which we can bridge the past, present and the future.