

Religious Rejections of Globalization and Their Directions

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Since it was first staged in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, the World Social Forum has assumed a central role in the growing anti-globalization movement. Designed as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum in Davos, the WSF has amplified the voices of globalization critics. Annually bringing together numerous groups from around the globe, it has served to link their efforts as part of a single movement. For all the differences among the participants, at the sessions held thus far they fervently contributed to the ritual denunciation of the ills of globalization and united behind a grand new vision, summed up in the slogan “another world is possible.” But while the first installments of the forum were held on the campus of a Catholic university and a group representing Brazilian bishops was among the organizers, specifically religious voices were inconspicuous. The “other world” envisioned at the meeting, as reflected in the statement of principles issued at the first forum (WSF 2001) and a subsequent Charter proposed by the organizers, had no transcendent aura. As the WSF has become a key node in and symbolic focus of the opposition to globalization in its various guises, which itself has become one of the most vibrant sectors in global civil society, religion appears to play at best a minor role in this sector. Religious responses to globalization seem to contribute little to the overall globalization critique that is evolving in such venues.

The WSF, one could object, is only one event among many. Since it is dominated by left-leaning activists, its secularist thrust does not convey an accurate picture of this movement sector as a whole. Yet more comprehensive, academic reviews of global civil society confirm the impression left by Porto Alegre. For example, *Global Civil Society 2001* (Anheier, Glasius and

Kaldor 2001), which quite exhaustively catalogues a wide range of nongovernmental activity, reviews overall religious involvement in less than one page. Its analyses of particular movements within civil society rarely refer to religious groups, and when they do, as in the case of groups opposed to financial inequity (Ch. 3), this becomes an exception that proves the rule. If we broaden our perspective still further to encompass advocacy networks that are not directly engaged in critiques of globalization, but still part of the underlying WSF coalition, we again find few traces of religious involvement. Among the leading “activists beyond borders” working on issues such as human rights, the environment, and women’s rights, identifiably religious actors are mostly missing (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Their networks contain hardly any religious nodes. Examining the “politics of resistance” against globalization (Gills 2000), another group of authors finds religious participation barely deserves mention; a single chapter on Islamic critiques is the lone exception (Pasha 2000). A collection of readings on the “global backlash” contains no readings pertaining to religious critiques or activism, lists religion in its index only in conjunction with labor rights, and includes only one article referring to religious influence in the anti-debt movement (Broad 2002). According to all such accounts, entire swaths of global civil society, and critical responses to globalization in particular, seem to evolve along secular lines.

The religious silence at the WSF and in the study of global civil society is surprising for several reasons. If by civil society we mean all those forms of voluntary association outside of state and market, then religion comprises the largest segment of global civil society. The Roman Catholic Church alone counts more members than all global advocacy networks combined. It is surprising, then, that religious association receives little attention in conventional overviews of civil society. But students of civil society could respond that they still adequately capture the

absence of religious involvement in at least several civil society sectors. If this is the case, then it is surprising that religion should be so confined that the overall strength of global religion has no bearing on the crystallization of global concern about globalization. To this secular analysts could reply that globalization as a secular process calls for secular critique, so that globalization largely lies beyond religious purview. But this, too, would be surprising, for historically religious traditions have actively addressed the problems of the world. If globalization is now widely regarded as the fount of such problems, the absence of religious responses is puzzling.

Serious students of religion, by contrast with most civil society activists and observers, in fact have expected a much stronger religious voice on matters of globalization. As sociologists of religion have argued (Robertson 1992), religion as the authoritative source of comprehensive worldviews is bound to be intimately involved in debate about the direction of globalization. Insofar as globalization intensifies social problems already present in advanced industrial societies, religious contributions to discourse about such problems should become more salient (Beckford 1990). As a “disadvantaged modality” in global society, distinctively holistic religion should be a fruitful source of anti-systemic activity addressing the “residual” problems of globalizing institutions (Beyer 1994: 104-5). Questions of meaning raised by globalization should thus provoke at least some religious responses. Why, then, do religious rejections of globalization seem to matter so little?

In this paper, I propose to make these puzzles less puzzling by offering a double corrective. To WSF-style activists and civil society observers I suggest that in the struggle about globalization religious actors are more important and religious voices more articulate than many have realized. I will show that and how at least some religious activists and leaders have been

involved. To colleagues in the sociological study of religion I suggest that expectations of religious involvement need qualification. While religious contributions do have specific strengths, their impact is contingent on other developments in global civil society. Empirically, this analysis yields a more detailed picture of the directions that “religious rejections of globalization” take. Analytically, it sheds light on the relative significance of religion in the formation of global civil society or at least one sector thereof.

To organize my argument, I distinguish three aspects of global civil society.¹ First, in line with most studies of civil society, I treat it as a form of movement activity by organizations independent of markets and states. Among the wide range of movements that comprise the anti-globalization front, one stands out for the prominence of religious contributions, namely the movement to cancel the foreign debts of certain developing countries. Catholic and Protestant influences dominate in this effort. I argue that religion proved significant in framing the issues and organizing a coalition, but that with regard to the overall anti-globalization movement this role is the exception that proves the rule. The case thus only partially confirms Beyer’s expectations about the distinct role of religion in addressing globally residual problems. Second, I focus on civil society as a form of discourse framing common concerns, that is, on the content of what gets discussed in the global public sphere. Here, I analyze some specifically religious contributions to critiques of globalization. These contributions are not limited to Christian voices, and there is no

¹ This paper broadly relies on the view of global civil society described by Scholte, who argues that it encompasses civic activity that aims to change social order and addresses transworld issues, involves transborder communication, has a global organization, and works on a premise of supraterritorial solidarity (Scholte 2000: 177, 180). Like Scholte, I assume that global civil society is still in formation, that it depends on the expansion of “global thinking,” and that this “third sector” is not necessarily an arena of virtue.

single religious line. Yet in some respects religious critiques converge with the thrust of secular anti-globalization discourse. While religious contributions to the discourse have become more salient, as Beckford leads us to expect, they are not uniquely influential in identifying problems of globalization. Third, in a more philosophical vein, we can also regard civil society as a normative concept (Anheier et al. 2001: 224), one that captures the emerging “awareness of a common framework of worldwide human society” (M. Shaw, quoted in Anheier et al. 2001: 224). On this score, religious conceptions of alternatives to ongoing globalization are especially pertinent, not only as rejections of dominant globalization models but also as ways of framing the normative core of civil society itself. In keeping with Robertson’s expectations, a number of religious traditions are actively engaged in framing new world orders. A complete analysis of all “religious rejections” of globalization would of course have to delve into a range of different traditions, but as this brief synopsis already indicates, the scope of this paper is more modest than the grand Weberian title suggests. It focuses on what I call the “global religious left,” using selective references to the Islamist “global religious right” for comparative perspective.² Drawing a distinction between reformist and more radical “rejections” of globalization, the analysis leads to a paradoxical point about religion in global civil society: religious actions and voices that operate within a largely secular world order and seem subordinate to secular rules and concerns are

² I deliberately limit discussion of Islam for three reasons. First, since the tradition is internally diverse and less centralized than others, the selection of representative authoritative statements is more difficult, especially for those of us who must rely on translations. Second, though some Islamic activists do project discontents onto “globalization,” the term does not appear to be as embedded in Islamist discourse as it is elsewhere (an initial review by an Arab-speaking assistant in summer 2002 found few explicit statements on the subject), limiting its relevance to the specific focus of this paper. Third, while transnational Islamist discourse and militancy might fit Scholte’s definition of global civil society in principle, their “civic” nature is in fact highly disputable, again limiting their immediate bearing on this paper.

nevertheless vital in undergirding a critical, independent “third sector” at a time when the very possibility of such a sector within world society is under challenge.

Religion and anti-globalization activism: the case of the debt movement

On November 6, 2000, President Clinton signed a foreign aid bill fully funding debt relief for poor countries. The Office of Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Catholic Bishops (2000) hailed the occasion by cheering that “We Won on Debt!!” It attributed the “tremendous victory” to a grassroots campaign led by religious groups that had been based “on a quixotic belief that we could turn the Scriptural call of Jubilee into concrete commitments on debt by our government.” Describing the range of activities in which Catholics had been involved, the Office took some credit for the U.S. Catholic community, which had “played a central role in this victory.” Somewhat later, Presbyterians similarly noted their role in advocating debt forgiveness and their participation at all levels of the campaign from the beginning (Silverstein 2001). “Jubilee 2000,” commented Rev. Gary Cook, “demonstrated once again the power of scripture to shape what we often call ‘secular history.’”

The Clinton signing represented the culmination of an intense global campaign. When Third World countries became burdened with debt in the 1980s, a loose group of NGOs began to call for restructuring and forgiveness of external debt. In the U.S., these included shifting and short-lived coalitions, such as the Debt Crisis Network (1985-1990); in Europe, Oxfam and the European Network on Debt and Development (1990-) took a leading role, complemented by an African sister organization, AFRODAD, since 1994 (Donnelly 2000). But by the mid-1990s, it is fair to say, their actions had produced few tangible results. The effort to resolve the debt crisis

only became a global movement when disparate efforts were connected as part of one campaign. Jubilee 2000, formed as a charitable trust in the UK in 1996, became the spearhead of a transnational advocacy network that used a specifically religious rationale to frame debt as a moral issue, organized the efforts of numerous groups into a single campaign, devised forms of protest drawing attention to their cause, exerted pressure on authorities to take effective action, and helped to turn debt relief into a tool of broader anti-globalization advocacy.

Religious organizations had addressed the debt issue prior to 1996. For example, the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace wrote in 1987 that “[d]ebt servicing cannot be met at the price of asphyxiation of a country’s economy, and no government can morally demand of its people privations incompatible with human dignity” (cited in Donnelly 2000: 2). In the U.S. a 1989 study by the Presbyterian Church-USA entitled *The Third World Debt Dilemma* and a report by U.S. Catholic bishops on *Relieving Third World Debt: A Call for Co-Responsibility, Justice and Solidarity* were similarly critical. Church groups were among the debt activists since the 1980s. But religious involvement changed when a number of people applied the biblical concept of Jubilee to the problem of Third World debt. Among the first to do so was the political scientist Martin Dent, who founded a group called “Jubilee 2000” at Keele University in 1990, drawing on parallels with the nineteenth-century anti-slavery movement (Dent and Peters 1999, Ch. 3). After he met Bill Peters, a retired diplomat who headed the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, at a seminar in 1993, they joined forces to found Jubilee 2000 as a national organization in 1996. Though they quickly drew in secular groups, such as the UK Debt Crisis Network, the UK coordinator noted that “church groups were the initiators of the campaign and this has allowed it to spread very rapidly” (Rosen 1999). Their impetus came from

the biblical injunction in Leviticus (25:10) to “hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee to you; and you shall return every man to his possession, and you shall return every man to his family.” As Pope John Paul II interpreted the injunction in a message to a Jubilee 2000 gathering in 1999, the original Jubilee “was a time in which the entire community was called to make efforts to restore to human relations the original harmony which God had given to his creation and which sinfulness had damaged. It was a time to remember that the world we share is not ours, but is a gift of God’s love. During the Jubilee, the burdens which oppressed and excluded the weakest members of society were to be removed, so that all could share the hope of a new beginning in harmony, according to God’s design” (John Paul II 1999a). Debt forgiveness thus fit divine design.

This new religious impetus behind the anti-debt movement proved critical in several ways. By framing a policy issue as one of moral urgency, Jubilee created a new form of symbolic politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 16). It called upon new symbols and stories to make sense of an otherwise fairly arcane problem for a broad audience in developed countries, thus generating a certain amount of grassroots support (Donnelly 2000: 31). It provided a broad enough rationale to bundle the efforts of numerous groups under one ideological umbrella, thereby breathing new life into the old, loose network (Donnelly 2000: 3). The frame became the movement’s primary resource, as it operated on a small budget (Busby 2001: 11). The religious factor was a necessary element in the success of the movement on two dimensions conventionally used to judge its success, namely agenda setting and network-building (Donnelly 2000: 31). The religious dimension of the campaign was decisive in very specific ways as well. When rock star Bono lobbied Senator Jesse Helms on behalf of debt relief legislation, his scriptural references were his

trump card, moving Helms to unaccustomed tears (Busby 2001). Without Helms' support, the Clinton signing might not have occurred. That signing was only one of the movement's tangible results, since the G-7 had already adopted a debt reduction plan in Cologne in 1999.

More than debt relief alone was at stake in the anti-debt movement. For radical elements in the Jubilee coalition, especially in southern Africa and Central America, legislative reform and cooperation with financial institutions presented a problem because they ultimately wanted to question inequitable approaches to development and repudiate debt altogether (Rosen 1999; Bond 2001; Broad 2002: 5.6). As one activist put it in Cologne, "Not just debt, but the whole neo-liberal model. Not just debt cancellation, but reparation for neo-colonial repression" (Donnelly 2000: 29). The leader of Jubilee UK recognized the radicals' "all-encompassing demands" as key elements in Jubilee's "progressive radical movement" opposing neoliberalism as based on "absolute freedom of capital to go wherever it wants and do whatever it wishes. What cancellation of debts would do is curtail those freedoms. It would make borrowing and lending more difficult" (Rosen 1999). Though she did not spell out how making borrowing and lending more difficult would help the interests of the poor she presumably had at heart, her message was symbolically important, since it indicated the broader thrust of the anti-debt movement as part of rising anti-globalization activism. As one Catholic theologian commented, "the hidden blessing of the debt crisis may be that it will force the world toward a new global order, and there is more than a hint of this vision in the realistically ambitious goals of Jubilee 2000" (Rosen 1999). The World Council of Churches affirmed the point at its Harare meeting in 1998: "We are called . . . to seek new ways to break the stranglehold of debt, to redress its consequences, and ensure that debt crises will never recur. This can only be achieved through a new, just global order" (WCC

1998). The Jubilee vision, in short, “challenges the triumphant claims of global capitalism” (Mihevc 1999).

Should we infer from this that since religion played a key role in anti-debt mobilization and this mobilization was one platform for anti-globalization activism, religion does contribute significantly to the anti-globalization movement after all? Catholic and Presbyterian activists have reason to see the debt campaign as evidence of the power of religious forces. The religious role in the anti-debt movement provides a counterpoint to overly secular perceptions of the anti-globalization movement. In reframing the debt campaign, religious activists did not simply reject the inequities of globalization but prophetically imagined an alternative global policy. Yet the Jubilee record does not demonstrate that the “secular history” of anti-globalization activism is predominantly shaped by religious forces and it would be wrong to overestimate religious influence in this sector of civil society. The anti-debt advocacy network was one among others; within the network, many groups combined for different reasons. The Jubilee record does not support the most ambitious self-interpretations among religious activists, since the course of secular history was altered only slightly. The record also casts some doubt on Beyer’s claim that religion will concern itself with “residual” matters left unattended by other global systems, for although Jubilee did heighten global concern about debt, such concern had already been building in secular circles and also in international financial institutions. The campaign may well have been successful to the extent that it amplified the thrust of debt reassessments in the halls of government and lending institutions.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of Catholics and Presbyterians about their accomplishments, many activists are not as sanguine about the results of their efforts. At the

WSF in Porto Alegre, the “International Peoples’ Tribunal,” convened by groups including the Jubilee South Brazil Campaign, issued a withering verdict (Social Justice Committee 2002). Denouncing the debt as part of a profoundly unjust economic system, it declared external debt “fraudulent, illegitimate and the cause of the loss of national sovereignty and the quality of life of the majority of the population of the South.” Not satisfied with mere reforms, it called for tough action against the perpetrators of economic crimes, in the interest of “justice of the peoples of the South and for all humanity.” If nothing else, the verdict confirmed what some Jubilee leaders also argued, namely that action for debt relief was part of a larger critique of globalization. In this, too, religious actors have participated.

Religion and anti-globalization discourse

On his visit to Cuba in 1998, Pope John Paul II delivered a homily at a mass on José Martí Square in Havana in which he criticized, not surprisingly, systems that “presumed to relegate religion to the merely private sphere” and thereby prevented the expression of faith in the context of public life. Turning to a subject that must have been more congenial to Cuban authorities, he went on to lament “the resurgence of a certain *capitalist neoliberalism* which subordinates the human person to *blind market forces* and conditions the development of peoples on those forces” (John Paul II 1998; emphasis in original). The process was wrong in principle and unjust in practice: “From its centres of power, such neoliberalism often places unbearable burdens upon less favored countries. Hence, at times *unsustainable economic programmes* are imposed on nations as a condition for further assistance. In the international community, we thus see *a small number of countries growing exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a*

great number of other countries; as a result the wealthy grow ever wealthier, while the poor grow ever poorer.” The Church, said the Pope, has the answer in its “social Gospel,” which “*sets before the world a new justice.*” Read against the background of the Pope’s overall stance toward globalization, his critique of neoliberal market expansion in Havana was hardly intended to placate his hosts. Rather, it was one instance among many in which he applied key tenets of Catholic social teaching to the evils of globalization. As the U.S. bishops have noted, “[t]he Third World debt problem exemplifies a recurring theme of recent Catholic teaching: the meaning and moral implications of increasing global interdependence” (U.S. Catholic Bishops 1999).

The rejection of ongoing globalization by the Catholic Church under John Paul’s leadership has some distinctive features. There is something ironic about the anti-capitalist rhetoric of a Pope whose opposition to liberation theology was a hallmark of his early tenure. There is also a note of ambivalence in statements about the world economy that recognize ways it can become a force for good. In key respects, however, the Pope’s message converges with that of other Christian critics. These, in turn, converge with the central thrust of secular globalization critiques.

To describe John Paul II’s stance toward globalization as a form of “rejection” at first blush might seem an overstatement. Apart from issues such as celibacy and abortion, church doctrine tends to be formulated in nuanced terms. With regard to globalization, the Pope has noted that it is a “complex and rapidly evolving phenomenon,” one that is in itself “neither good nor bad” (John Paul II 2001a), but “basically ambivalent” (2001b). Its ethical implications “can be positive or negative” (John Paul II 1999b). Yet his Havana homily reflects a persistent and unmistakably critical diagnosis of globalization. The hallmark of globalization, from the point of

view of Catholic social teaching, is that “*the market economy seems to have conquered virtually the entire world,*” enshrining “a kind of triumph of the market and its logic” (John Paul II 2001a; emphasis in original). But if globalization is “ruled merely by the laws of the market to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative” (1999b). Among the negative consequences are “the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever-increasing inferiority” (1999b).

“Absolutizing” the economy is intrinsically wrong, the Pope explained in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods becomes the centre of social life and society’s only value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension has been weakened and ends up limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone Economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous, when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a subject, who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him (John Paul II, 1991).

From the Pope’s point of view, the consequences are equally worrisome. First, since markets are imperfect, they are bound to leave certain needs unsatisfied--the needs of those without the skills or resources to access the market, collective needs not amenable to market solutions, and immaterial human needs that cannot be left to its mercy (1991: n. 33, 34, 40; 2001b). Second, without appropriate regulation by the community, markets do not serve the common good; when commerce knows no borders, the absence of such controls especially risks new forms of exclusion and marginalization (1991: n. 35; 2001a). Third, left to their own

devices, world markets exacerbate inequality, as the Pope noted in Havana; as wealth becomes more concentrated, weaker states lose sovereignty, thereby lagging farther behind (2001b). Fourth, “[o]ne of the Church’s concerns about globalization is that it has quickly become a cultural phenomenon. *The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture*” (2001a; emphasis in original).

The Catholic concerns echo in similar statements by the World Council of Churches. Globalization was a key item on the WCC’s agenda at its fiftieth anniversary meeting in 1998 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The meeting’s official report, *Together on the Way* (WCC 1998), treats globalization as a threat. “The vision behind globalization,” it says, “includes a competing vision to the Christian commitment to oikoumene.” Like the Pope, the WCC describes that vision as the “neo-liberal” faith in competitive markets and individual consumption that is bound to produce a “graceless system that renders people surplus and abandons them if they cannot compete with the powerful few” (WCC 1998: Ch. 8.4). The consequences of this lamentable “unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalization” are once again dire as well: it contributes to “the erosion of the nation-state, undermines social cohesion, and intensifies the conquest of nature in a merciless attack on the integrity of creation.” While new technologies may produce some “potentially positive” consequences, the reality of “unequal distribution of power and wealth, of poverty and exclusion” makes a mockery of neoliberal expectations. “The life of the people is made more vulnerable and insecure than ever before,” the WCC declares. Growing interdependence also leads to greater concentration of power, fuels fragmentation of the social fabric of societies, and causes people to lose their cultural identity (8.4). “We have compromised our own convictions,” a preparatory report concluded (WCC 1998). “We acknowledge the

temptation we have to strive for our own inclusion in a world which has space for a privileged few.” To resist the temptation, *Together on the Way* calls on churches to resist globalization.

After Harare, this became a common theme in the WCC’s work. For example, a statement on “Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” by a WCC commission to the UN Human Rights Commission (WCC 2001a) laments the way “[t]raditional life styles of self-reliance have been undermined by integrating people into a market culture,” opposes the “increasingly dominant role of economic mechanisms” and the concomitant concentration of power in the hands of a global elite, and cites with approval a WCC workshop’s definition of the project of globalization as “a link in the chain of series of exploitative actions to appropriate the resources of the countries of the South by the countries of the North -- first through slave trade then through colonialism and now through neo-liberalism.” Thus, the WCC approach to globalization is even more emphatically negative than the Pope’s.

What, if anything, does this common Christian critique add to anti-globalization discourse? In many ways, Christian responses resemble their secular counterparts, as exemplified by WSF and other activists’ statements and by kindred academic critiques (e.g., WSF 2001, 2002; IFG 2002; Broad 2002; Falk 1999). In both kinds of anti-globalization discourse, globalization is of course subjected to ritual denunciation. Both treat neoliberalism and the “absolutizing” of the world economy as the source of all troubles. Those troubles comprise a highly standardized list: decline of nations, undermining of cultures, ecological devastation, and so on. Inequality of wealth and power is the key shared concern. All sides of the oppositional discourse emphasize advocacy over analysis, attributing assorted problems, from poverty to fragmentation, to vaguely characterized globalization in broad-brush fashion. To be sure, motives differ (few WSF activists

claimed to be moved by faith) and so does language (the Pope's cautious phrases are mild by WSF standards). But the overall picture is one of convergence: with regard to globalization, the global religious left and the global secular left speak with one voice.³ Even as the problems of globalization become more salient from certain religious perspectives, as Beckford expected, the actual religious discourse largely follows a pattern set by secular critics. There is no single global problem that is defined mainly by religious actors from religious standpoints. Of course, this does not mean that religious voices therefore do not matter; it simply implies that they are only part of an intricate cacophony.

One could object that focusing on Christian anti-globalization discourse is misleading: many Muslims, after all, do define global problems from a distinctly religious perspective, and Islam does not converge in the manner just described. The objection is a bit too broad, since some liberal Muslim critics of globalization fit the general pattern. To give only one example, Chandra Muzaffar of the International Movement for a Just World takes globalization to task for aggravating global disparities (Muzaffar 1998). The objection is also too broad because, for all the various aims of movements across the Islamic world, they do embody a form of resistance to neoliberal globalization (Pasha 2000). It would therefore be a mistake to portray Islam as wholly divorced from non-Islamic globalization discourse. Yet it is fair to say that "widespread Muslim misgivings about globalization" have less to do with "an expression of opposition to global capitalism" and more with a "cry of desperation" about the perceived effects of Western

³ For the purpose of this analysis, it is reasonable to group the Catholic leadership with the religious left in view of the former's consistent opposition to capitalism, consumerism, and economic inequality. This is not to deny in any way that the Catholic leadership takes far more conservative positions on what in America are called the "social issues."

dominance on Muslim societies (Kuran 2002). As the imam of the Masjid al Haram in Saudi Arabia put it, citing Quranic verses, globalization is a new form of colonialism and Islam is its main victim (Hameed 2002). Islamist critiques of globalization, to generalize for the sake of brevity, stand out in several ways. The neocolonialist theme in Hameed's statement, though present in other responses, is a more prominent part of an explicitly anti-Western diagnosis of globalization. Like their counterparts on the religious left, Islamists are concerned about the inequities of globalization, but their focus is obviously on the suffering of Muslims. To overcome the vices of neoliberal globalization they propose a new form of Islamic economics (Kuran 1997). More than other globalization critics, they challenge the existing secular order: "The "revolt against the West" is in substance a revolt against the dominant world order" (Tibi 2002: 84; cf. Murden 2002). To put it mildly, globalization problems have become far more salient from an Islamist perspective in recent decades. Whether this is quite the kind of salience that fits Beckford's expectation, which draws on a Simmelian view of the autonomy of religion under conditions of secularization, is questionable.

Since the thrust and context of Islamist globalization critiques differs so greatly from others, their absence from standard WSF-style discourse is not surprising. Islamists obviously do not participate in the convergence noted above. Yet they have one thing in common with their counterparts of the global religious left. Beckford (1990: 12) already pointed to religion "striving for holistic contributions that defy compartmentalization of problems." As the next section shows, this is evident in several religious visions of the globe and their symbolic attempts to change civil society itself.

Religion and alternative visions of globalization

When the Dalai Lama gave the Commencement Address at Emory University in 1998, the program quoted him as saying that “[c]ompassion can be put into practice if one recognizes the fact that every human being is a member of humanity and the human family regardless of differences in religion, culture, color, and creed. Deep down there is no difference.” Like WSF activists, the Dalai Lama obviously believes “another world is possible.” But the texture of his vision subtly differs from theirs. Of course, he has different reasons, and therefore justifies his worldview in different terms. His concern is not with any single issue; it is more encompassing. The core value at stake for him is not one that found expression at the WSF.

While the theme of compassion is characteristic of the Dalai Lama, his portrayal of humanity as a single family that strives for universal respect regardless of differences resonates with similar statements from leaders of other traditions. The convergence of religious views on a minimally shared global vision constitutes a distinctive contribution to the way civil society grapples with the implications of globalization. In the evolution of global civil society as a normative order, religious actors stand out in several ways. More explicitly than secular participants in civil society, they focus on the unity of the world, the interests of humanity, and the importance of accommodating cultural difference. Though some traditions show intriguing convergence in the framing of their actual worldviews, there is no full consensus.

One reason the Pope described globalization as “ambivalent” (2001b) is that “for all its risks,” it also “offers exceptional and promising opportunities, precisely with a view to enabling humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity and solidarity” (John Paul II 2000). Catholic leaders in fact see the universal church participating in globalization to

advance a global moral project. This project starts from “the awareness that humanity, however much marred by sin, hatred and violence, is called by God to be *a single family*” (2000; emphasis in original). While the family metaphor resembles the Dalai Lama’s, in the Catholic view the unity of humanity ultimately derives from common dependence on God, which provides a “new model of the unity of the human race” (John Paul II quoted in Martin 2001: 84). This conception of unity has moral implications. As the *Catechism* (n. 1911) states, “[t]he unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a universal common good. The good calls for an organisation of the community of nations able to provide for the different needs of man.” More concretely, “[i]n our linked and limited world, loving our neighbor has global implications and continuing participation in the body of Christ call[s] us to action for “the least among us” without regard for boundaries or borders” (U.S. Catholic Bishops 1997). The whole Church is called to global solidarity and responsibility (ibidem). “To give positive bearings to developing globalization, a deep commitment to building a “globalization of solidarity” is needed by means of a new culture, new norms and new institutions at national and international levels” (2001b). Central among the new norms, Catholic leaders have repeatedly stressed, must be universal respect for the human person (Martin 2000: 88-9), and here, again, Catholic views resonate with those of Buddhists.

The World Council of Churches, as we have seen, opposes the vision that currently undergirds globalization. It puts forth a competing one: that of the “oikoumene, the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth” (WCC 1998: 5.3). In *Together on the Way* it said that “[t]he logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity” (ibidem). The “catholicity” of the church may provide a model for the desired plurality

within a single ecumenical movement (8.4). If the earth is to be treated as “home,” then “people in very different situations and contexts” must “practice faith in solidarity and affirm life on earth together” (ibidem). A subsequent WCC consultation in Fiji elaborated the vision of unity. Representatives of Pacific churches offered the “Island of Hope” as a “metaphor for the wholeness of life” (WCC 2001b). In contrast to prevailing features of globalization, that wholeness should be marked by “generosity, reciprocity and the sharing of communal resources.” The meeting offered the churches as “places of sharing” on a journey toward “an alternative global family.” In this way, the WCC brings to bear its traditional ecumenical commitments on the formulation of alternatives to globalization.

The statements briefly reviewed here fit sociological expectations. As Beyer and Beckford suggested, these views of world order as distinctly transcendent, holistic, and inclusive. As Robertson argued, it is precisely in formulating alternative views of world order that religion itself becomes more salient. The content of these views specifically fits one the images of world order he described. Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant leaders portray a world Robertson captured in the image of “Global Gemeinschaft II.” As repeated use of the family metaphor illustrates, hallmark of this image is that “*only in terms of a fully globewide community per se can there be a global order*” (Robertson 1992: 78; emphasis in original). In such a community, as the statements above also suggest, distinct traditions will somehow be united in a new harmony (ibidem: 81). The global religious left envisions this harmony in an essentially ecumenical way, allowing for the expression of differences, and it therefore adopts what Robertson has called a “decentralized”

version of the *Gemeinschaft* model.⁴ Though globewide unity and solidarity ultimately must be rooted in common dependence on God, certainly in the Catholic view, this decentralized version legitimates civil society as the critical sphere in which many actors from many different standpoints can work on reforming the thrust of globalization. While the rationale for the vision is obviously religious, it does not seek to define global civil society in exclusively religious terms. Civil society must make room for religion but should not itself be a religious edifice.

Liberal Muslims share this vision. They advocate a version of Islam that contributes to an inclusive “international morality” centered on human rights (Tibi 2002). They say that “in the midst of globalization, you have to reassert [Islam’s] essence. And that is its universalism, its inclusiveness, its accommodative attitude” (Muza ffar 2002). But among contemporary Muslims such voices are in the minority. More common is the Islamist version of “Global *Gemeinschaft* II,” i.e. the vision of an alternative Islamic world order brought about by defeat of the unbelievers, the spread of the *umma*, the return to first principles, and the reorganization of society under the *shari`a*. As Sayyid Qutb envisioned, by ending the dominance of the West the “Islamic world revolution” will enable Islam to “take over and lead” (Tibi 2002: xv, 89, 187). Whereas the global religious left vests its hopes in the vigor of global civil society, Islamists delegitimize any activity that does not serve the Islamic cause and therefore aim to eliminate civil society properly speaking. Whereas the global religious left seeks to reform world order through civil society, the Islamist global religious right seeks to transform world order by eradicating it.

⁴ Though the Catholic Church under John Paul II has by no means given up on its universal ambitions, its explicit statements on world order tend not to support the kind of “harmonizing theocracy” Robertson associates with the Unification Church and therefore fit the “decentralized” rather than the “centralized” versions of *Global Gemeinschaft*.

Religion thus has its greatest bearing on global civil society in the articulation of such contrasting visions, one sustaining a viable global “third sector,” another challenging the very concept. The future viability of global civil society may well depend on which vision prevails.

Conclusions

With examples pertaining to three dimensions of global civil society, this paper has tried to assess contrasting claims about the relative significance of religious contributions. While correcting misperceptions about the absence of religion in one sector of civil society, it also has qualified sociological expectations about the capacity of religious actors to address residual social issues, to define new problems, and to articulate compelling new visions of world order. Though to religious actors the overall argument may present a too-constricted view of religious influence, in this concluding section I also want stress a point that reinforces the significance of religion in global civil society. By contrast with Islamist responses to globalization, those I have broadly characterized as part of the global religious left provide crucial legitimation for a free, independent global civil society critically engaged in reform from within the existing world order. Their prophetic participation in specific movements, their convergence with secular critics, and their articulation of a new form of global community infuse global civil society with symbolic support. Religious voices may have been absent at the WSF, but in the battle of ideas about civil society as a normative order the viability of WSF-style activism depends in part on the strength of larger visions that resonate with religious publics.

To retrace the steps in the argument briefly, by framing the moral rationale for debt relief and exerting political pressure, Christian groups played an important role in the anti-debt

campaign. They mobilized a previously disjointed network and set a clear policy agenda. They helped to achieve leverage with public officials and international organizations. Religious involvement was necessary to the success achieved by the Jubilee campaign. Yet religious groups did not create the issue. They constituted only one segment of the overall movement. Among those resisting the effects of globalization, the movement itself was a small part of a very large set of advocacy groups and networks. In the expanding scope of the anti-globalization movement, few “residual” issues are untouched, left for religious figures to address. Of course, religious actors are active in various branches of other, largely secular advocacy networks religious. But the thrust of this argument is that the significance of religious involvement in the anti-debt movement is the exception that proves the rule. We cannot infer from it that global civil society affords ample opportunity to religious groups to shape agendas and mobilize movements. The religious absence from the WSF is no accident.

Religious action on the debt crisis was related to broader religious critiques of the larger thrust of globalization. These critiques offer some distinct themes and rationales, but, at least in the Christian orbit, converge to a large degree with the emerging anti-globalization consensus among progressive secular activists. On globalization the religious and secular left tend to speak with one voice. Both reject, above all, the neoliberal version of globalization. Since secular anti-globalization discourse proceeds on its own terms and encompasses many global problems, it is difficult to infer that the increased salience of religion in this overall discourse also demonstrates a distinctive religious capacity for the identification of new problems.

Yet religious critiques do stand out by the way they are embedded in larger visions of another world order. From their distinctively transcendent and “holistic” vantage point, religious

voices, notably those on the religious left, have begun to address the moral issues not addressed in equally systematic fashion by secular globalization critics. They call for universal solidarity, demand global religious freedom, inspire care for God's creation, and express the interests of humanity as such. Of course, the very slogan of the anti-globalization forces, "another world is possible," indicates that secular thinkers do not hesitate to think in such grand terms. But even the brief examples given here suggest that religious actors think about "another world" more literally and precisely, guided by more definite, though still vague and general, overarching worldviews. In this way, ostensible rejection of globalization begins to turn into reformist reconstruction.

This paper has shown that religious actors like the ones on the global religious left studied here have not only been participants in civil society activism and contributors to civil society discourse but have also begun to articulate normative rationales for the structuring of civil society itself. As activists and critics, their relative significance has been modest in a rapidly expanding arena; in the rethinking of world order itself their role is potentially more significant. Yet by their actions and their words, they sustain a lively third sector from which the state system and world markets can be critically addressed. Insofar as they shy away from utopian transformation, they provide a counterpoint to the less-than-civic Islamist rejection of globalization and its attempt at wholesale transformation of world order. If global civil society is to flourish, that attempt at transformation must be resisted, both from within the Islamic tradition (An-na'im 2002; Hefner 2002) and by the larger world religious communities.

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