

## ȘTEFAN MARIȘ<sup>1</sup>, ROMÂNIA

**Cuvinte cheie:** Fundamentalism religios, secularism, ideologii religioase, globalizare, dispute ideologice locale.

### **Religia în contextul globalizării: între secularism și fundamentalism**

#### **Rezumat**

În lucrarea de față analizăm efectele și impactul globalizării asupra religiei. Mai precis, luăm în discuție procesul conex de globalizare a problemelor religioase și a mișcărilor complementare fundamentalismului religios, contradicțiile survenite între culturile locale și cultura globală. Semnalăm astfel faptul că mișcările ce însoțesc fundamentalismul religios alunecă înspre *ideologii religioase* ce au drept țintă declanșarea unor dispute ideologice locale, dar care, în cele din urmă, vor avea efecte majore la nivel global. Aceste mișcări religioase și ideologiile pe care le promovează sunt responsabile pentru conflictul deschis cu secularismul și cu tot ceea ce reprezintă „modelul occidental”.

Chiar dacă se vorbește tot mai insistent despre renașterea globală a religiei, aceasta are prea puțin conotații teologice și nu presupune în mod obligatoriu o reînțoarcere la normele religioase și la respectarea conduitei etice prescrise de o religie sau alta. În multe cazuri, acest fenomen implică doar o creștere a gradului de identificare a anumitor comunități cu o religie, identificare ce are adesea un caracter mai degrabă cultural, național, decât teologic.

---

<sup>1</sup> Centrul Județean pentru Conservarea și Promovarea Culturii Tradiționale Maramureș, Baia Mare.

**Key words:** religious fundamentalism, secularism, religious ideologies, globalization, local ideological disputes.

## **Religion in the Context of Globalization: Between Secularism and Fundamentalism**

### **Summary**

The present paper analyses the effects and impact of globalization on religion. More precisely, it tackles the process related to the globalization of religious problems, the complementary movements of religious fundamentalism, and the contradictions appeared between the local and global cultures. Thus, it points out the fact that the movements accompanying religious fundamentalism slide towards the *religious ideologies* that have in view the starting of local ideological disputes, but which will ultimately have major effects on a global level. These religious movements and the ideologies promoting them are responsible for the conflict opened with secularism and with all that represents the „western model”.

Even though a more and more insistent topic is the global rebirth of religion, this has hardly any theological connotation and does not presuppose obligatorily a return to religious norms and the respect for the ethical attitude prescribed by one religion or another. In many cases, this phenomenon implies only an increase of the degree of identification of certain communities with a religion, an identification that has often a cultural or national character rather than a theological one.

## **Religion in the Context of Globalization: Between Secularism and Fundamentalism**

Any analysis having as its objective the deciphering of the relationship between religion and the local or the global element has to start with the understanding of the connection of religion with nationalism or respectively with trans-nationalism. In order to tackle this extremely complex phenomenon a starting point could be Ronald Robertson's observation according to which the de-politicizing of religion has been only a central myth of the project of social modernization. The re-politicization of religion that we witness nowadays is nothing else but one of the multiple effects of the globalizing process. Considered a social-cultural category (in other than western societies), religion has acquired an essential role both in the structuring of the collective identity and as a personal need of individuals in the dynamics of globalization.<sup>2</sup> The global sphere being a secular one it cannot function in the absence of laity. In its essence it is multipolar, multicultural, open, relying on laic legal mechanisms and on norms that do not depend on the pressure exerted by clerical instances. Public policies – similar to the politics that model international relations – , have at their basis documents of a different character than those designed by various radical religious groups. Notwithstanding how penetrating they would be in the space of communication, they cannot be perceived as relevant and defining for whatever is identified as the global horizon or with the political activities of non-western paramilitary groups against the West, or with those of some groups from the inside acting against the acquisitions of the western world. The religiously motivated violence cannot be set among the basic characteristics of the global sphere and neither can it be regarded as representative for the presence and influence of religion on a global level.

The syntagm „religious fundamentalism” had been used in the USA before the 70's, and after the Revolution in Iran, it has been used more and more frequently on a global scale. The analysis of this phenomenon that has become a definite presence in international relations leads to the conclusion that fundamentalisms are activated by the spiritual rebirth movements or by powerful religious groups.<sup>3</sup> It is often stated that the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism has begun to contradict all sociological predictions regarding the extension of secularization at all the levels of society. Fundamentalist mobilizations cover entire regions, reaching gradually a global development and acquiring an increased power. The Evangelical movements in the USA, those Pentecostal from Latin America, the Judaic fundamentalism in Israel, the Islamic fundamentalism in Muslim countries, the Catholic one in certain European countries, the Hindu fundamentalism in India or the Orthodox-

---

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Robertson, „*Globalization, Modernization and Postmodernization. The Ambiguous Position of Religion*”, în Ronald Robertson and William R. Garret, *Religion and global Order*, Paragon House Publishers, New York.1991, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Robertson, *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage Publications, London, 1994, p. 168-169.

Christian one in certain east-European post-communist countries are sufficient proofs in order to sustain the global character of this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that these movements represent a global relaunching of the religion they are related to. One cannot say that Islam, Christianity, Judaism or any other religion would be the actor on the global scene. There is always the possibility to observe which are the religious groups that are forcing the boundaries of the religion on whose territory they have appeared. The interventions and violent manifestations of certain religious groups on a global level should not be perceived within religions, but more as ideological actions inside religious fundamentalisms. Or formulated more precisely, one could say that the conflictual situation maintained by ideological groups who justify their violence referring to religion should be viewed from the perspective of the metamorphosis of religions into ideologies.

And whenever religious consciousness is mentioned, the radical groups are perceived and act as entities with social-political pretenses and sustain a religious conflict in the name of the re-drawing of the maps or religious faith.

The term *globalization* should be understood as describing a planetary phenomenon through which the states of the world integrate into a more coherent system of relationships that have at their core economic, technological, political etc. relations, something that may imply that this processes of globalization and secularization are simultaneous. Nevertheless, the understanding of globalization is incomplete if the processes related to the globalization of religious problems and the complementary movements of religious fundamentalism are not taken into consideration, and moreover, without the provocation that these fundamentalisms propose a religious integration without any differentiation. But, beyond all these, globalization is a phenomenon that relies on the value hierarchies of laicism, pluralism and respect of alterity, In order to correctly perceive globalization as a world-wide phenomenon it is less important the fact that certain processes have a similar dialectic on the entire globe, but more the fact that the elites of a society situate their own society in a global hierarchy. This hierarchy is actually an entirely secular one, even if it takes into consideration the cultural specificity of participation in the global relationships. In the complex process of establishing a hierarchy, the economic factor has been considered as an essential one, imposing a certain division of the world but also stating a model of global culture. And this global culture has become the depository of the standards of the global political order. The reactions to this process, especially of religious nature, have immediately shown their presence. Global culture has become the target of the fundamentalist movements. Thus, one can see that the reaction against modernity has revealed its global implications. Religious fundamentalisms rise against the configured global structures, acting in the direction of changing the power relationships and the cultural models considered „impure”. Religious fundamentalisms are not only a reactions against modernity but also against a global model structured on the functioning pattern of Western societies. But Westernization imposes diversity and multiculturalism. Therefore the type of reaction developed by fundamentalisms is in strong relationship with the equilibrium of

the forces characterizing diverse cultures, societies or regions.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, fundamentalism could be considered an essential element of the global changes, imposed by the wish to establish a certain religious tradition as a basis of the social and global order, as basis of a cultural identity reported to the identity of global culture. In a global perspective, fundamentalism is a form of anti-modernism that is inevitably contaminated by modernism, namely, by the global culture represented by the culture of modernism.

This means that the problem of alterity should be treated in the terms of a global repertory, of a common society that orients the entities one towards the other in the course of action.<sup>5</sup> In the same time, as an active vector in the modernization processes, fundamentalism should have a more and more limited role in the context of the development of liberal modernity, even though fundamentalism starts from the discontents of real individuals, from the tensions induced by *globalization*, from a series of contradictions as real as possible between the local and global cultures.

In case a dissipation of the force of fundamentalisms be reached, then this would be a condition fulfilled in order to vitalize authentic religiosity. On the other hand, the rebirth of religiosity would be a failure in case it did not take into account the fact that in modernity religion loses its traditional social and political role.

For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism it is necessary to take into consideration the relation between the two essential components of the process of globalization: a) the discourse and the institutional construction that create the global situation and b) the concentration on the preservation and development of local structures.

The inter-conditioning of global-local has been analyzed from the perspective of appealing to the search of fundamentals as an ideal of authenticity in the conditions of the „compression” of the world in a way unprecedented in history. The global character of the search for the fundamentals makes of fundamentalism a global phenomenon. There is the mention of a number of ideas globally disseminated, ideas emerging from tradition, identity, indigeneity, the fact of feeling at home, all these constituting real force lines that are at the basis of the processes of reflexivity and choice in a global context.<sup>6</sup> Thus, fundamentalism cannot be totally separated from the search for fundamentals. Still, the modality of valorization and mobilization used by fundamentalist movements can in no way be explained as related to traditions and the history of a certain religion. One could probably understand these mechanisms only taking into consideration the effects of intercultural exchange, the phenomenon known as the ”invention of identities”, of the relation that it induces with whatever can be described and made intelligible in the terms of democratic culture and of the tendencies of formalization by westernization.<sup>7</sup> In the modern society,

---

<sup>4</sup> Frank J. Lechner, *Global fundamentalism*, în Frank J. Lechner and John Boli (EDS), *The globalization reader*, Blakwell Publishers, 2000, p. 338.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 339-341.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Robertson, *Globalisation. Social Theory and Global Culture*, p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

the experience of secularization has its consequence in the laicization of identity, the phenomenon of de-sacralization (or de-mythization) of the world becoming a constant in the communities. After some decades, the reaction that is observed more and more insistently nowadays is the resurrection of religious movements. These are not anymore revealed in the perspective of the tradition from which they reclaim themselves, but more from the religious ideologies aiming to start some local ideological disputes with major global effects. Such types of religious movements assume completely social and political missions and objectives that actually constitute the hard core development of a religious ideology. Thus we witness *not* the end of ideologies, as it had been predicted (S. Huntington), but rather a return of the new ideological paradigms.

In nowadays postmodern world the religious fundamentalisms activate the most diverse ideologies responsible for the open conflict with secularism and its phenomena, namely with the western ideologies. Observed in different zones of the world, these ideologies born from local conditioning impose ultimately objectives and messages with global resonances.

Fundamentalisms as global phenomena are a consequence of the strong reaction to what we call “western values” and modernity in general. Indifferent from the religion that is under analysis, fundamentalism aims to impose the strict respect of the religious law at the level of the entire society, to oppose other cultural models, to stop the decline of the traditional religion in the way it is perceived by the group militating for the conservation of the purity of faith. Thus, one of the aims of fundamentalism is to protect religious identity and to stop secularism.

Step by step, modernity has imposed a change of paradigm whose consequence is a slide of symbols and mechanisms, of significances and ultimately of power, from the structures closely linked with religion towards those connected to the social life and especially to politics. Thus, there is actually a constant transfer from the religious imaginary towards the political one, from the religious behavior to a ritualization of everyday life, and especially of the social and political behaviors. This status of things is the actual effect of a long process whose consequence is that modern ideologies have succeeded to replace the old social patterns structured on religious principles. The need for myth and religion is offered by a set of mythologies created in the modern world. We have lately seen a very interesting phenomenon of the rebirth of interest for a certain form of religion and affirmation of the religious movements as a political force in the new global order. Everything is, ultimately, an effect of a marked interest of the communities in the problem of identity. The new division of the world does not take into consideration anymore the political interests but rather those of identity solidarities.<sup>8</sup> These new identity patterns have not at their basis the old aspirations of the religious traditions but are derived from a strong sense of belonging to social-political groups for whom the religious imaginary is superimposed on the ideological one. The multiplication of identity crises generated by the traditional groups' actions (firmly supported by the religious hierarchies) has often led to

---

<sup>8</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor*, Editura Literară, București, 2012, pp. 36-38.



difficulties in the efforts to govern, reaching situations with the impossibility to exercise the basic functions of the state. As a consequence, nowadays, this has led to the identification of a connection between nationalism (derived from the ignoring of the national political strategies of different minority groups' identities) and religious resurrections. All these actions of ethnic or religious communities have as their consequence not only creating difficulties to the authorities but also to increase the social disequilibriums as a consequence of the intensifying of the heterogeneous character in the states that are confronted with the new dimensions of migration and the spreading of certain religions.

How could one explain the apparition of these movements of spiritual rebirth both in the East and the West? In order to formulate an answer, one should start from the observation that secularization and modernization have effects both on the individual and on the society, leading to a multiplication of the political and economic power, but also on the attitudes, feelings of alienation and of identity crises felt by individuals. These effects both on the individual and on the society have a considerable role in the rebirthing of the cultural and religious phenomena.<sup>9</sup> The identity crisis induced by the recourse to a basis of existence constituted from secularized religions, as is the case of ideologies, has started a reaction of response that aims the remaking of the substratum coming from a revelation and from the traditional religions.

Hence we have those new movements that could be identified in many zones of the world, movements that develop on the structure of the great religions but which are rather a combination between religious ideologies and movements of spiritual rebirth.

Finally, we can conclude by affirming that from a global perspective, fundamentalism has a variety of forms that reclaim themselves from different cultural contexts and are based on diverse religious doctrines. As a planetary phenomenon, fundamentalisms haven't anymore a definite territorial or cultural character and thus do not belong anymore to territorial entities, but rather to globalized spheres of influence.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

**Huntington, Samuel P.**, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor*, Editura Literară, București, 2012.

**Lechner, Frank J.**, *Global fundamentalism*, în Frank J. Lechner and John Boli (EDS), *The globalization reader*, Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

**Robertson, Ronald**, „*Globalization, Modernization and Postmodernization. The Ambiguous Position of Religion*”, în Ronald Robertson and William R. Garret, *Religion and global Order*, Paragon House Publishers, New York.1991.

**Robertson, Ronald**, *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage Publications, London, 1994.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 110-111.