

effects, including "crisis cults" and indigenous Christian movements. In China, where domination failed, Chinese religion continues unchanged, when it is not hampered by another aspect of European influence, Marxist-Leninism. In northern Native America, where domination became extreme, focusing on but a single aspect, the concept of deity, we find the dominated culture profoundly influenced by the dominating culture.

## What Is New with Religious Contact Today?

HUBERT SEIWERT

The title of my paper is a question: What is new with religious contact today? The question implies two things: First that there is religious contact in the contemporary world, which is rather trivial, and second that there is something new in this contact, which is a thesis that may make historians raise their eyebrows. I am going to defend this thesis arguing that the global dimension of religious contact today has created a new situation that I call a world market of religions. I shall analyse some structures of this world market and try to show that its establishment entails significant changes in the development of the history of religions.

### 1. The global dimension of religious contact

While religious contact is by no means a modern phenomenon the intensity and scope of contacts between religions originating in different parts of the world are without historical precedent. Let me first remind the major forms of religious contact that we know from history, which all can be observed also today. With the possible exception of medieval Europe the most common form of religious contact was and is the plurality of religions within one society. Multireligious, and to a certain degree also multicultural societies, which for the European experience is a new and sometimes irritating phenomenon, was the normal state of affairs in most Near Eastern and Asian societies. Suffice it to refer to the cases of India, China or the Muslim world.

The second important form of religious contacts concerns the cases where religions of different societies meet each other. This is usually a concomitant of cultural contacts resulting from trade, wars, migration or planned mission.

Although nothing in history is stable and religious contact as a historical phenomenon certainly always comprises a dynamic aspect, we may distinguish more or less stable constellations. On the one end of the scale one can observe the coexistence of several religions with a rather constant following and without taking too much notice of each other. On the other end we find intensive competition and proselytizing, which usually also entails mutual polemics and apologetics. As a specific case I would like to mention what Michael Pye calls the "transplantation of religions", i.e. the propagation and spread of a religion originating in a foreign culture or society.<sup>1</sup> It is this phenomenon of the transplantation of religions which deserves special attention in a world where international contacts between states and cultures on a global scale have reached a historically unprecedented measure.

It will, therefore, be useful to notice that the expansion of religions into foreign societies and cultures occurs under two rather different conditions, both in history and in modern times. First, religions may spread following a general tendency of cultural borrowing and reception, as with the reception of Buddhism in Japan,

1) M. Pye, "The Transplantation of Religions", *Numen* 16, 1969, 234-239.

which was intimately connected with a general openness for Chinese thought and institutions. Religious transplantations of this kind usually depend on variations in the level of cultural development: religions are taken up as a part of the more developed culture. We may call this "extrinsic transplantations" of religions, since it is in a certain way a concomitant of a process determined by other factors than religious ones. As the spread of Western Christianity in modern times shows, extrinsic transplantations of religions can also be induced by colonisation and empire building.

The second form of religious expansion, then, could be called "intrinsic transplantation". In these cases the reception of a foreign religion does not depend on variations in the level of cultural development, but seems to result from a specific interest in the religion itself. The best example for an intrinsic transplantation is probably the spread of Buddhism in China, which was not accompanied by any significant reception of other elements of Indian culture. Another case would be the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

For the sake of completeness we may add a third form of transplantation which might be named "substantial transplantation". It occurs when the following of a religion or parts of it migrate into a foreign culture.

Any transplantation implies a change in the environment of the religion concerned, which induces changes in the religion itself. As a rule, one aspect of the new environment is other religions that did not exist in the culture of origin, and to which the transplanted religion has in some way to react.

If we look at the contemporary conditions of religious contact we find that all forms known from the history of religions are also present today: Cultural contacts through trade, wars and colonization, extrinsic transplantation as in the case of Christianity following the expansion of the Western civilization, intrinsic transplantation as exemplified by the reception of Asian religions in the West, and finally substantial transplantation through migration. International communication and the establishment of a system of global trade and of global politics have led to an intensity of global cultural exchanges that is unique in history. Religious contact is one aspect of it. We may ask what this means for the contemporary history of religions.

## 2. A world market of religions and ideologies

One obvious consequence of modern developments for the history of religions is the globalization of the environment of all religions. All major religions and many smaller religions have spread to all continents. Even those religions that have not spread beyond their traditional areas, as for instance the ethnic religions of aboriginal populations, are facing a global environment. Nearly all contemporary societies are multireligious. In some way the religions have to react to this changed environment. One aspect is contact with other religions, which often also means competition with other religions. Even more important as a development, however, is competition with secular ideologies, which have spread throughout the world in this century. This, too, is a result of the globalization of cultural contacts. Following

the title of the book of a German political scientist,<sup>2</sup> we may well regard this century as "the age of ideologies". The global environment of today's religions has not only led to an unprecedented contact with other religions but also with secular ideologies. This has considerably influenced the course of the contemporary history of religions.

The secular ideologies of this century, like Communism, Fascism and to a lesser degree Liberalism and Nationalism, show many traits common with religions. They provide all-encompassing world views, systems of values and world interpretations, and often comprise also the hope for some kind of liberation and salvation. Thus, they may give both normative and cognitive orientations for individuals and social groups. As far as most religions also serve some of these functions, religions and secular ideologies can to a certain degree substitute each other.

The history of religions in this century has been extremely affected by the tremendous spread and political influence of secular ideologies, for which I do not know any historical comparison. What is important for the present context is the fact that the expansion of secular ideologies has put the religions to the background of the historical stage of this century. This is certainly one reason for the prevailing impression of a thoroughgoing tendency towards secularization. There is a global competition on the market of ideologies, and the religious segment of this market has diminished considerably in the past for the benefit of secular ideologies.

However, there are indications that the religious segment in the world market of ideologies is about to increase again after the decline of Socialism, the major secular ideology with strong antireligious tendencies. More than Capitalist Liberalism, Socialism shares many traits with religious ideologies providing not only values and orientations for action, but offering a comprehensive interpretation of history and social reality. The loss of plausibility that Socialism suffered after the decay of Communism in Eastern Europe leaves an ideological gap. This concerns not only parts of the Western intellectuals and youth, but applies also for many intellectual and political elites in countries of Asia and Africa. Capitalist Liberalism can only partly fill that gap, since it does not offer a very comprehensive world view. However, in the form of Consumerism it can motivate individual and social action and influence the value orientation of large parts of the populations. A further supplier on the global market of ideologies is modern science, which partly also serves ideological functions by providing interpretations of the world, but usually does not offer value orientations unless it is instrumented by political ideologies.

Thus, it seems that there has arisen a new demand for ideological orientation to fill the gaps left by obsolete secular ideologies. Religions are the historically most important suppliers of ideologies, and their traditions prove to be stronger than previously expected. They are now acting under the conditions of global religious contact, that is on a global market of religions, and have to respond to the particular demands created through the decay of primarily politically oriented

2) K. D. Brachmer, *Zeit der Ideologien. Eine Geschichte des politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt 1982.

ideologies. We should expect, therefore, that a considerable share of the market can be gained by religious movements that respond to the need for political orientation. This may be one reason for the growth of several forms of highly politicized forms of religion, which are often summarized as "fundamentalisms". Even if this term may not be fully appropriate, the fact that politicized versions not only of Islam, but also of Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity have gained considerable significance in recent years is obvious.<sup>3</sup>

The place that politicized religions cover on the front pages of the newspapers should not, however, make us overlook that besides political orientation there are still other demands on the market of religions. There are also demands for individual life orientation which cannot be satisfied by the consumerism prevailing in many countries, particularly in the West. The reception of selected brands of Asian religions in the West, even if it concerns only a small minority of religious consumers, can be interpreted in this context. Furthermore, there is a widespread demand for cultural identity, particularly in societies dominated culturally by the West. Here again religions may fill the gap allowing to look back to one's own glorious tradition and to stimulate a consciousness of cultural superiority.

I do not need to stress that these types of demands on the global market of ideologies are theoretical distinctions that in practice often overlap. Thus the demands for cultural identity and for political orientation may be felt by the same individuals or social groups, and the same religious movement may respond to both demands. Examples would be political Buddhism in Sri Lanka or Islamic fundamentalism.

### 3. Implications of the global market of religions

So far we have described some of the demands that exist on the market of religions and ideologies. I have used the market metaphor because I believe that this can help us to theoretically reconstruct some processes of contemporary religious history. To my knowledge a market model of religions has first been proposed by Peter L. Berger, but he confines his considerations to the functioning of religions within one society.<sup>4</sup> As I have argued that the globalization of religious contacts in modern times has caused the formation of a global market of religions, I shall try to analyse the main factors of this global market.

As any market the global market of religions is regulated by the mechanisms of demand and supply. Unlike a domestic market the international market exhibits an extremely great variety of demands, depending on the specific conditions in certain societies and parts of the world. Religious forms that may be able to satisfy large parts of the population in Scandinavia may not be very attractive to people in Brazil and vice versa. We have to take into account this distinction between domestic and international markets.

The second distinction to notice is that between stable and dynamic markets. Stable markets are those where the demand is largely satisfied by established

suppliers and where there is not much demand for new products. Dynamic markets, on the contrary, are characterized by high demand and usually strong competition among various suppliers trying to gain shares of the market. On the global market of religions Latin America seems to be a fairly dynamic market with many new and small religious groups increasing their share. On the other hand, the countries of Western Europe that were not dominated by Communism represent rather stable religious markets, though in some segments there are also dynamic elements as the growth of new religious movements indicates.

The third aspect of the global religious market is competition and the regulation of markets. Regulation of markets means that not all suppliers engage in unrestricted competition with each other. Sometimes common institutions are installed to promote cooperation or to make arrangements for mutual benefit. The protection of domestic markets against foreign suppliers or joint actions on foreign markets are other forms of the regulation of markets. We can observe these phenomena also in the field of religions, e.g. cooperation between various Christian denominations in the World Council of Churches. Similarly, in the Muslim world tendencies towards Islamic ecumenism can be observed. We can also refer to various attempts for interreligious dialogues which try to promote mutual interests and to restrict competition.

After having introduced an elementary vocabulary of a global religious market economy we can analyse current trends on the market. It is above all the dynamic markets, which are open to the influx of new religious supply, that deserve our special attention. As I mentioned before, on the international religious market there is a great variety of demands, domestic and foreign. Although the established religions are bound to serve the traditional demands on the stable – mostly domestic – markets, they cannot neglect the globalization of the market: On the one hand foreign and new religions are trying to gain shares in the domestic market, while on the other hand they have to establish or defend their own position also on foreign markets. The variety of religious demands in different parts of the society or in different parts of the world requires a variety of religious supplies.

There are mainly two ways to cope with this requirement. The great and established religious traditions, like Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, may develop internal diversifications of their tradition. In fact, they mostly can rely on a vast repertory of varieties in their own traditions that can be activated in different circumstances. Thus, the tradition of Sinhalese Buddhism comprises both, militant national and quietist elements. While the former are mainly used on the contemporary domestic market,<sup>5</sup> the latter are stressed on foreign markets where Buddhism is perceived as a religion of tolerance and peace. Similar examples could be taken from Islam, Christianity or Hinduism. Sometimes varieties within the tradition are not sufficient to serve the demands on particular markets, and it is necessary to develop new forms. We can take South American theology of libera-

3) Cf. M. E. Marty – R. S. Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms observed*, Chicago – London 1992.

4) P. L. Berger, "A market model for the analysis of ecumenicity", *Social Research* 30, 1963, 77-93.

5) Cf. S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism betrayed? Religion, politics and violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press 1992.

tion as an example for the development of national theologies in general. Another case is the effort to adapt Buddhism or Hinduism to the demands of a Western audience.

The second way to face the variety of demands on the religious world market consists in the specialization of the supply. This applies, of course, particularly to smaller religions and certain denominations. The great increase of various Protestant denominations in Central America or the missionary successes of the Mormon Church can be interpreted in this context. But we may also look at Hindu sects like the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON), which offers a very specialized form of religion in the Western market serving a very specialized demand.

Although demand on the global religious market is highly diversified, demands on the most dynamic segments of the market exhibit some common structures. The dynamic religious markets are generally characterized by some kind of dissatisfaction with present experiences, are they individual or collective. There is a demand for religious or ideological orientations that on the one hand offer explanations for the unsatisfying state of affairs and on the other hand include the prospect of better conditions. There are different kinds of dissatisfaction, it may be material or spiritual dissatisfaction, discontent with one's own situation or with the state of society, or all of it. Depending on it, specific demands vary, but it is common to the dynamic segments of the religious market that there is a demand for some kind of change, personal or social. The situation is quite different from the stable religious markets that do not demand change but continuation.

This accounts for some typical traits of the religious supply on the dynamic markets. Often we can observe a stress on morality and value orientation combined with the belief that the deteriorated state of the society results mainly from moral decadence. Examples for this can be found in "fundamentalist" Christian and Muslim groups. In other cases stress is put on individual spiritual realization and liberation from the pressures of social constraint, as with most religious movements in the West related to Buddhism or Hinduism. Again, there are also cases in which social and political action is legitimized religiously, which can be found mostly in societies where intensive internal or external political struggle prevails.

One common denominator of religions which are most successful in the dynamic markets is that they offer some kind of liberation or redemption: liberation from foreign dominance and the experience of cultural inferiority, liberation from moral decadence, liberation from the experience of meaninglessness. These are indeed demands to which religions of salvation may offer the fitting supplies.

#### 4. A new era in the history of religions?

I come to the conclusion and resume the question asked in the title of my paper: What is new with religious contact today? It is my impression that the quantity and quality of religious and ideological contact in the contemporary world have reached a degree that we may speak of a new stage in the history of religions. The global dimension of religious contact has created a global environment for all major religions, which will be a main factor in the future development of the history of

religions. The fate of the various religions will probably depend significantly on how they can cope with the inputs from a global environment. We can further expect that religiously homogeneous societies will be transformed into multireligious societies.

The establishment of a world market of religious demands and supplies will probably entail fundamental changes on the global religious map, a process accelerated by large scale migration in the contemporary world. The intensity of social and cultural change in most parts of the world causes experiences of individual and collective frustration that create new demands for specific kinds of religions, which may grow disproportionately. I am inclined to the expectation that these will be above all religions stressing various forms of redemption and liberation.

Although our analysis leads to the conclusion that the present time and the near future will probably encounter a considerable dynamic in the history of religions, we must not forget that regions are not the sole suppliers on the contemporary world market of ideologies. Among the various symbol systems providing world interpretation one of the most influential is modern science and its offspring modern technology. The social, economical and political significance of science and technology is overwhelming, and it seems more than improbable that their influence will diminish in the future. We may conclude with the expectation that the new era in the history of religions that we are going to enter will not only be characterized by a resurgence of religions of redemption but also by an adaptation to scientific explanations of the material world. There are not the slightest signs that religions will cease to exist, but we have to expect that those which will be most successful in the religious world market will undergo considerable changes.