

Globalization, Religion and Islam

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Abstract

This is a time in which we are facing complex global changes. New intellectual phenomena arising confront people with different challenges in many fields. Among them is the process of globalization that is an outcome of modernized era of development in information technology. Because of its great impact on culture, economics and politics, globalization is of major relevance as a topic for discussion.

Given the stated definitions of globalization and a general description of what the process is comprised of, very little has been written or said about the correlation between Religion and Globalization. Given the fact most people of the world believe in a religion and/or a higher spiritual being, it is surprising that the phenomenon of globalization and its influence on Religion and vice-versa has not been further evaluated. Therefore, it is the initiative of this paper to discuss and clarify the effects of globalization, both positive and negative, upon Religion, its belief system and practices. As all major religions of the world derive from the same root source, it is importance to realize the significance of mutual respect that has been advocated in all religions. Furthermore, with globalization free flow of information via high technology and the movement of peoples across borders can positively help the increase in religious tolerance.

Considering the effects of globalization and it's positive and negative consequences, this paper seeks to review different dimensions and aspects of globalization and the Islamic concept of it by using descriptive-analytical method and some verses of Qur'an.

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Introduction

Changes of the last two centuries have changed the face of the world. The changes have been so fast that nowadays the world is different from even that of a decade ago. Some of social science theorists consider the narrowing of the world as the main feature of such changes. Some others talk about 'global village' through approaches affected by communicative science and some others use 'globalization' and 'global society' based on political scientist's concepts.

Being one of the dominant intellectual movements of our time, globalization is considered as one of the most important contemporary cultural phenomena. It has paved the way for many challenges in the field of civilization and culture. The effects of this intellectual movement's waves in the areas of culture, economics and politics are undeniable.

Globalization is a relatively new idea in the social sciences, though some commentators argue that, while the term is new, what the term denotes is an ancient, or at least not novel, set of phenomena. The central feature of the idea of globalization that is current in the social sciences is that many contemporary problems cannot be adequately studied at the level of nation-states, that is, in terms of national societies or international relations, but need to be theorized in terms of global (transnational) processes, beyond the level of the nation-state.

Globalization is an aspect of human life that has always been there since the beginning of humanity. It corresponds with the natural human instinct and man's tendency towards being a 'social animal.' It is the tendency with which God has created man to live on exchanging his sources and experiences with others around him, in order to achieve and realize the best chances of life.

Considering the effects of globalization and its positive and negative consequences, we have tried in this study to cover the concept of globalization, its features and outcomes first and then to review the Islamic concept of it by using some verses of Quran.

Definitions and Aspects of Globalization

As globalization is a multi-layered concept and it has become a buzzword in recent years, globalization has already been defined in many ways. Some scholar defines Globalization as a spread and exchange of people, goods, and ideas across the globe. Characteristically, it is directly associated with change, or transformation, modernity, and an increasingly interdependent relationship between different regions of the world.

Globalization is an umbrella term that refers to increasing global connectivity, integration and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political, and ecological spheres. It is a unitary process inclusive of many such sub-processes, perhaps as best understood as enhanced economic interdependence, increased cultural influence, rapid advances of information technology, and novel governance and geopolitical challenges. The Encyclopedia Britannica says that globalization is the "process by which the experience of everyday life ... is becoming standardized around the world."

Other scholars have specifically stated that 'globalization is defined as a process through which an increasing proportion of economic, social and cultural transactions take place directly or indirectly between parties in different countries' (Radice, 3).

I, to some extent, agree with how Thomas L. Friedman defines globalization. He says: "it is the inexorable integration of market, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before- in a way that it is enabling individuals, corporations, and nation states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that it is enabling the world to reach into individuals, corporations, and nation states farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before" (Friedman 2000, 9). He says: globalization "also has one overarching feature-integration. The world has become an increasingly interwoven place, and today, whether you are a company or a country, your threats and opportunities increasingly derive from who you are connected to. This globalization system is also characterized by a single word: the Web"(ibid, 8). This system is a dynamic ongoing process, with a driving idea of free-market capitalism, and "its own dominant culture" involving "the spread of Americanization" (ibid, 9). It has its own defining technologies, and is measured by its speed, "speed of commerce, travel, communication and innovation" (ibid, 10). He suggests that "globalization is not simply a trend or a fad but is, rather, an international system. It is the system that has now replaced the old Cold War system, and, like that Cold War system, globalization has its own rules and logic that today directly or indirectly influence the politics, environment, geopolitics and economics of virtually every country in the world" (ibid, IX).

The Formation Background and Development of Globalization

Globalization and establishing world government has long been one of the human aims. Humans have always been seeking to end wars and conflicts by use of common, elevated principles and to realize the wish of having peaceful life in reality. Divine prophets have also given the tiding of fulfillment of such a wish in the future history of mankind. The presence of believing in appearance of a savior in different religions is a proof on this claim.

Basically, three processes have had an important role in the formation and development of this phenomenon.

1. Development of national governments whose formation dates back to 16Th century.
2. Growth of economics, global capitalism, and also industrial revolution in Europe and West.
3. Development of global communicative tools and information technology. The rising of globalization waves dates back to 1984 and 1990 especially after the end of cold war. Some changes after the end of Second World War such as establishment of United Nations, International organization, collapse of Communist Regime in the former Soviet Union, development of multinational organizations, activities, information and transportation have played an important role in accelerating the process of globalization in a way that most of international media has focused their activities on preparing the so called Third World to accept the process of globalization. The concept of dialogue among civilization, holding international conferences, activities of World Trade Organization is an example of activities for the development of globalization.

Globalization of Religion

As all major religions of the world derive from the same root source, it is important to realize the significance of mutual respect that has been advocated in all religions. Furthermore, with globalization of free flow of information via high technology and the movement of peoples cross borders can only positively help religious tolerance to increase. This religious unity is mentioned in all religious doctrines but unfortunately, the events of history up until the present day has unfolded with the emphasis on differences than that of similarities. But if we are to revert to that which has been stated in all the following Holy verses, perhaps we can shift from religious harmony as a conception and materialize it into a reality.

The Quran stated:

'O Mankind, we have created you male and female, and have made you races and tribes, that you may know each other' (Al Quran 49:13).

In Judaism, it is states:

"Seek peace and pursue it.... Seek it where you are and pursue it in other places as well."
(Psalm 34: 15)

The Old Testament says:

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)

"May God...grant you to be of the same mind with one another" (Romans 15: 5-6)

In Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda states:

"Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension are the substance of my faith"

History of Globalization and Religion

In discussing the issue of Globalization and its relations to religion, very little remains outside these two very significant realms of society. Religion is an institution that has existed since the emergence of the first man and humanity. On the other hand, globalization, as we perceive it today, has been an undergoing process for centuries. Although the term 'globalization' emerged as a buzzword in the 1990's after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of globalization had been taking place long before.

Finally, we come to what many scholars see as the birth of Globalization; the discovery of the Americas and the travels of East and West by Columbus and De Gama. This not only inaugurated the age of European seaborne empires, but it also pioneered the exponential expansion of Christianity in these conquered regions. With the development of the slave trade in 1650, marked as a dramatic factor which sustained the expansion of Atlantic Economy, giving birth to integrated economic/industrial systems across the Ocean—with profits accumulating in Europe during the days of mercantilism and the Enlightenments. The 'integration' of religions and various other aspects of culture took about a natural discourse with the merging of civilizations and their evolving trade routes, which ultimately led to the colonization of the Asia, Africa, Central and South America. Thus, here marks the pivotal point where religion becomes an integral part of globalization and vice-versa.

Negative Impact of Globalization on Religion and Religious Ethics

It can be said that the global dominance of globalization has affected religious and cultural values, whereby its process is seen as a threat to these traditions. For reasons such as diversity and its perceived threat to the religious, traditional values, globalization is seen as a polarizing factor within the defined religious identity and its practice. *The Economic and Political Weekly* March 27 , 2004 stated the following arguments on the major interface between religion and globalization in India: (1) the major consequences of globalization have been the transmogrification of traditional religious and belief system and (2) the beginning of the disintegration of the traditional social fabrics and shared norms by the invasion of consumerism, cyber culture, newfangled religious, social fads, and changing work ethics and work rhythms, (3) allowing people to fall back on religion for moral and social support, attributing to religion the creation and acceleration of extremist, fundamentalist, which are intended to destabilize them, and strike at the root of their civilization, and multicultural and pluralistic nature.

The study further makes an argument that globalization is the first truly world revolution. And "all revolution disrupt the traditional and customs of a people. Indeed, they threaten a people's very security, safety. And even identity. The world revolution that is globalization in some measure threatens the security of every people on the globe". For example, with the infringement of these religious and traditional cultural values by Western Capitalists, values such as the attainment of wealth often contradicts what Islam allows as a means of wealth accumulation. This paper reiterates that globalization is designed to hide and obfuscate the form taken by imperialism in the current, increasingly worldwide capitalist system for organizing economic production and society.

Positive Aspects of Globalization on Religion

Thus far, the negative repercussions and complexities of globalization and its infringement on religion and culture and its attribution to class differences have been presented. That is not to say that globalization is all negative. It has also brought about a culture of pluralism, which is so prevalent in all religious teachings. With globalization, we have seen the emergence of global human rights and environmentalist groups that protect the interests of those often victimized by globalization. Furthermore, with the creation of Organizations such as the United Nation, World Health Organization and World Bank, etc., whether effective or not, has increased means of transparency and security. In this regard, the creation of a peaceful 'global village' has allowed the issues of poverty, war, and environment

to have a global consensus and participation. This integration has allowed the erosion of cultural, ethnic and religious differences that often pertained as ideologies that divided in the past. Therefore, with the free movement of populations and the immigration, we have seen the development of multiculturalism and perhaps mutual understanding and respect.

The Quran declares:

"We have sent three Inspirations to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Issac), Ya'qub (Jacob) and the Tribes, to Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron) and Solaiman (Solomon), and to Dawud (David) we gave Psalms. Of some messengers we have already told thee the story" (Surah Al Nisa 4: Verse 163-164).

Essentially, all religions teach these shared principles of love, patience, peace, justice and equality. The Unity of the Creator and mankind are the essence of all religions as sent through the Holy Prophets and messengers of God; from the first Man and Prophet, Adam, to successive Prophets such as Prophets Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus, and Prophet Mohammad, there has been a call for human understanding and peace. They have all carried the messages of God to bring forth a perfect equilibrium towards our existence on earth. They have shown us the way to achieve this harmony in the institutions of Marriage, Society, Education, Politics, Justice System, Economics/Trade and all the other remaining spheres of our lives.

Qur'an as a Witness for Globalization of Islam

Some verses of Quran explicitly or indirectly states about the globalization of Islam mission and talks about its unlimited, in time and place, and draws the point of view of Islam. Needless to say that Quran has an inward meaning besides the outward one. The outward of Quran is the same indication of the appearance of Quran. The outward interpretation of Quran is individual and depends on events which happened while Quran was been revealed to the Prophet but the inward interpretation of Quran is produced and deduced from the inner layers of the verses of Quran then is global and pervasive, otherwise Quran could not have provided for today's demands. Therefore, the inner and global interpretation of Quran guarantees it forever and makes Quran to be eternal. If the interpretation of Quran was for the certain and determinate time it would lose the characteristic of life and its everlastingness. Some Traditions mentioned that if Quran was revealed only for a certain nation and tribe it would have been annihilated with the destruction of that nation.

These verses, as follows below, show that the Prophet announced his Quranic messages, which is the same divine revelation with the universality characteristic to the whole of mankind. These verses indicate to pervasive and globalization of Islamic organization and also declare that Prophet Mission is global and for whole of mankind:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا (الاعراف – 158)

[7:158] Say, "O people, I am GOD's messenger to all of you.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (البقره – 21)

[2:21] O people, worship only your Lord - the One who created you and those before you - that you may be saved.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ (سباء – 28)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ (الانبياء – 107)

[21:107] and We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds.

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَالَمِينَ نَذِيرًا (الفرقان – 1)

[25:1] Blessed is He Who sent down the Furqan upon His servant that he may be a Warner to the nations

– (33) آل عمران (إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

[3:33] Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh and the descendants of Ibrahim and the descendants of Imran above the nations.

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَى وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا (الفتح – 28)

[48:28] He it is Who sent His Messenger with the guidance and the true religion that He may make it prevail over all the religions.

On the other hand, there are some other verses which are giving glad tidings about the establishing of global society:

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ (الانبياء – 105)

[21:105] Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the reminder that (as for) the land, My righteous servants shall inherit it.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا... (النور – 55)

[24:55] *Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange...*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السَّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ (البقره – 208)

[2:208] *O ye who believe! Come, all of you, into submission (unto Him); and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! he is an open enemy for you.*

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا آرِبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ.... (آل عمران – 64)

[3:64] *Say: O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah...*

Some scholars believe that the verses which implicate Quranic proverbs show that the Message of Qur'an is Global and not limited to a certain space or time.

Tabarsi who is a commentator of Quran, while discusses about the Quranic proverbs and its means is saying that God appointed the proverbs in Quran to spread and expand the Quranic culture on the every lands of the world and in other words to make it as a global culture. Quran declares:

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ.... (الروم – 58)

[30:58] *and certainly We have set forth for men every kind of proverb and example in this Quran....*

4- God the Almighty in his book says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (الحجرات – 13)

[49:13] *O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).*

This verse declares that firstly humankind has the unity of essence and substance and that the ethnic and national differences are not natural. Secondly, this verse pays attention to two verbs: [To know each other] and [The most righteous of you] introduces the various

nations and civilizations of humans as a reason for increasing of men knowledge and his felicity and global welfare of mankind.

5- Every verse which began with **(O mankind!)** or **(The children of Adam)** can be witness to globalization of Quran's message such as this verse:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا.
(الاسراء-70)

[17:70] *And surely We have honored the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We have given them of the good things, and We have made them to excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom We have created.*

An Islamic View

Islam not only recognizes all the Messengers but also makes no discrimination between them. The Holy Quran states:

“The Messenger Mohammad believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in: (a) Allah, (b) His Angels, (c) His Books and (d) His Messengers. They say we make no distinction between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness” (Surah Baqara 2 vs.285).

Referring to the honorary status bestowed upon Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as a Friend of our Lord, it is mentioned in the Quran: *“And who can be better in religion than one who submits his face (Himself) to Allah; and he is a Muhsin (a Doer of good). And follows the religion of Abraham the Hanif (Monotheist). And Allah did take Abraham as a Khalil (an intimate friend).”* (Sura Al –Nisa: vs125).

As the descendants of Prophet Ibrahim, prophets of our Creator, Prophet Musa and Prophet Mohammad share the religion and teachings of their ancestor, Prophet Ibrahim. Given this fact, it is only appropriate to say that all religions collectively seek inter-religious cooperation through dialogue to further seek knowledge on the prayers that were asked by the Prophets. The Quran repeatedly declares that the high status and dignity must be given to these Prophets as an essence of Islam, which reveals the acceptability of other Prophets.

In the era in which the term globalization has been given concrete definitions by which most of the world and its diverse religions, cultures, languages are an integral part of its process, it is crucial that we look upon something that is more definite to unify us in a positive

direction, By utilizing the free flow of communication easily available through advanced technology, religions should focus more on the humanitarian and pluralistic aspects of their teachings as a means to lessen the divide. Furthermore, religious understanding can be one of the most essential means by which foundations of peace and harmony can be achieved. By overlooking differences and uniting under the doctrines of our Creator, we can oversee that the functioning of global groups and their strive towards humanitarian equality is not just rhetoric but a reality. Whereas the adoption of economic aspect of globalization overrules those of the spiritual needs of humanity, let religion be the principles by which we follow to fill the vacuum of inequality that is so often created by globalization of capitalist economies and free markets. The integrated economic, social, and political needs are subordinate to imperatives of faith and morality.

Faith as a whole should be seen as a collective unity of all religions, so that they may emancipate themselves from the negative consequences of globalization. As stated in the Quran and so eloquently practiced by Prophet Mohammad in his roles as a spiritual guide, a head of state and leader of community, a supreme judge and arbitrator of dispute, a reformer of society; that we all descend from the religion of Prophet Abraham and we all look upon our Creator as the ultimate source of perfection and emancipation. The source of religion is not to divide but to unite to bring upon this justice and equality in this world, whatever the challenges and adversaries may be.

Islam's Role

Islam is not anti-globalization (or modernity, which is considered to be a by-product of globalization) in its original sense, but Muslims do have a problem with Westernization. Although Westernization of society is condemned, modernization as such is not. Science and technology are accepted, but they are to be subordinated to Islamic beliefs and values in order to guard against the Westernization and secularization of Muslim society. Based upon historical precedence and contemporary evidence, Islam clearly embraces globalization in its original form, which is based upon free-will and not upon the aggressive imposition of the West upon the East. First of all, it is important to note that Islam orders people to cooperate, to be helpful to one another according to goodness and piety, and not to be helpful in evil and malice (Qur'an 5:2). This principle is fully endorsed by Prophet Muhammad on the local level, regardless whether one's neighbor is a Muslim or not. Surely this principle can be extended to

the international level, where a neighboring country can be defined as any country that has normal economic and political relations with the Islamic world.

We have to differentiate between the gifts of globalization and the products of Westernization. More specifically, the Islam-globalization debate in itself is built upon a number of mistaken diagnoses that misconstrue Islam's place in the globalized world -- one that has been quite productive in the past and has the potential to be productive in the future too. The misguided assumption that Islam opposes globalization and modernization is dangerous, because it could potentially result in the loss of Islam's significant contributions to the rest of the world.

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