

The Global Economy and Religion: Contents, Specifications and Alienating Influences. Brief Considerations on the Phenomenon of Globalisation from an Orthodox Perspective

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Abstract

In his well-known and shocking discourse to the Harvard University in 1978, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (1918 – 2008), in a surprising/controversial approach, lamented, under the effect of the new economic-political and socio-cultural conditions in the West, the new desiderate/idol of this world, for a better life, which imprint many Western faces with worry and even depression, which closes though it is customary such feelings of spiritual development (The entire discourse is permanently available on the following address

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm>).

In the ranks below, we will try to highlight some aspects, specifications and influences of the global economy, influencing the alienation of the religious consciousness of the modern man.

Key words: globalization, post-modernity, anxiety, depression, internationalisation

J.E.L. classification: A12; A13a; A14

1. Introduction

The tough diagnosis of anxiety and depression, of the Russian dissident, weighting heavy on the shoulders of the people in the global post-industrial society, which started from the reductionist opinion of a *homo economicus*, who, in order to continuously satisfy the individual welfare and the accumulation of material goods (Achimescu, 2013, p. 413), is willing to abandon the natural tendency to religiosity in the favour of a new secularising materialist idol. Under these conditions we observe that our approach is of great topicality by the fact that, after almost three decades from the discourse of the Soviet dissident, the anxiety and the depression of the Catholics and Protestants in the western world of those times entered in the world of the Eastern Orthodoxy as well. From this perspective, the necessity of the research under the phenomenological aspect of the economic-financial component of globalisation is not only necessary, but also opportune.

2. The global economy – A. content, B. specificities and C. influences

A. Contents. From the start we observe, in general, the dynamics of the globalisation process and, especially, the dynamics of the economic-financial globalisation, by their reductionist features, generate special effects in the religious field and on the faith and the religious practice. Globalisation, as macro-economic, industrial, financial, technological and military process, presents a powerful socio-cultural dimension (Cescon, 2003, pp. 71-72) , a phenomenon which, as highlighted by the Italian Catholic economist Stefano Zamagni, a member of the Pontifical academy of Sciences, started to gain distinct outlines at the beginning of the 70's, when two political-economic decisions adopted by the USA had a major impact on the industrialised western world, also on the former socialist countries and the developing countries (Zamagni, 2002, p. 455):

- The unilateral cancellation of the direct international convertibility of the United States dollar to gold – in 1971, the so-called Nixon shock – that renounced to the value report to gold of the American currency, as previously stated in the Breton-Woods agreement in 1944; it abandoned the old international monetary policy, which practically maintained constant the value of the dollar by connecting it to the value of the gold;
- The liberalisation of the capital market, eliminating any restrictions in the circulation of the financial resources worldwide (1974).

These two fundamental causal factors will determine the genesis of the new economic world order, *followed, in our opinion, by a series of coagulant formative factors in the 80's and the 90's, among which we enumerate:*

- The progressive decrease of the economic role and significance of the heavy industry, the main element of any economy until the 60's, and its substitution with new branches of electronics, automatics, biotechnology and many others, based, more and more, on scientific and technologic progress, requiring on a large scale a more qualified and specialised working force;
- The rapid development of the computer hardware and of the informatics, which changed radically the content of the modern economic activities, limiting drastically their dependence to the modern factors as space, time or limited/difficult access to technical, scientific and financial data and information;
- The collapse of the socialist model of production, which, by the profound statist feature of the market economy, limited in an obvious manner and even programmatically the free circulation of the capital, technologies and working force, inhibiting the expansion of the globalisation process.

B. Specificities. In his analysis on the new world economy, Stefano Zamagni considers that the main constituent of globalisation is a pure economic one, the formation of a global financial market and of a global society, where the global expansion of the credit and of the investments, corroborated with the foundation of a global outlet market, leads to the coagulation of new financial circuits, able to influence the world economy. The new capital market is followed as significance by the development of the informational technology, not possible to eliminate from any modern economic-financial activity. This is followed as importance by other two economic factors: 1. the deepening of the concurrence – hyper-concurrence – as a result of the rapid multiplication of the producers of goods and services; 2. the affirmation of the culture of the contract – the generalisation and the uniformisation of the contract in the regulations of the exchanges related to investments, production and sale, eliminating any local customary and traditional element from the economic activity. The new global socio-religious culture appeared during the globalisation is the last from the major factors of this phenomenon, because any culture depends majorly on the economic-social structure of the society (Zamagni, 2002, p.45-465). In other words, globalisation will impose a new design in the action patterns of the modern economic agents, constrained to connect to an evolution difficult to anticipated in the post-industrial age, by: a. the new internationalisation of the productive activities (Dahrendorff, 2002, p. 451); b. the affirmation to a global level of the multinational company – the economic entity producing and selling goods and services on a large or even world scale, in the detriment of the national economies. In the new globalising dynamics, the raw materials will be exploited in the third world or in the emergent countries with a low life level, materials processed in the economically advanced countries and, in final, distributed worldwide with a maximum of economic efficiency.

C. Influences. This will lead to a set, relatively limited, of old economic-socio-political values, whose operationalisation provokes a huge rollover in the traditional/community/national axiological references, until the point when the collective consciousness of a social group loses part of its consistency (Raiu, 2012, p.15). This evolution is in fact a social-cultural-economic involution through the new reductionist uniformisation and the flattening of the identity factors consecrated by the classic modern industrial societies, which favoured rapidly the national landmarks, including those from the fields of culture and religion. The internationalisation of the production, the coagulation of the global markets and the international division of the work, significant elements identified by the dedicated literature, became the new compulsory (non)values in the post-industrial world, because their refuse equals the self-conviction to economic failure and, implicitly, to

pauperisation, leading to economic autarchy and political isolation. Similarly, the generalisation of the work productivity, the economic efficiency and the search for profit show that the phenomenon of globalisation *expects the triumph of the economic efficiency* (Ică, 2005, p. 689), willing to pay any price, including the *decrease of the common knowledge (reciprocal – A/N) of the people* (Raiu, 2012, p.16) leading to the *destruction of the social cohesion, the disintegration of the states and nations, and to the dissolution and fragmentation of the culture, by accenting the inequality and the social chaos* (Ică 2005, p. 689) These consequences of the dynamics of the globalising phenomenon must not be understood/ perceived as presenting a theoretical/potential feature, because, as shown in 1995 by the Japanese management specialist Kenichi Ohmae, *the traditional state-nations have become unnatural, even impossible, economic units in a global economy, thus the global market produces a cross-border civilisation, capable of generating profound cultural cleavages* (Tomlinson, 2002, pp. 27-28) similar to the case of the first category of factors, the refuse of the state/national actors to accept the criteria circumscribed to the globalising pragmatism and economic efficiency leads the nations to poverty and marginalisation. These conditions favour inclusively the appearance of a new culture, of the supply and demand, based on the criteria of management and marketing, determining inclusively the moral-spiritual values of the community – especially the religious values – to remain in the individual background (Achimescu, 2013, p.215), and the religious faith to be indifferent to the postmodern world. Everybody may believe whatever they desire to. In these conditions, the modernity and the post modernity seem to cohabitate, participating to the globalising process – because modernity is inherently globalising inside the network (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 73) and vice versa – and imposing a culture lingering in a horizontal immanent dimension, with no possibility to affirm a vertical transcendent credible principle (Patapievici, 2001, p.87). The globalisation facilitates the transfer of spiritual values from one side to another (Achimescu, 2013, p. 444) and the course to spiritual uniformisation/levelling – in fact the course to westernisation – seems natural, while affecting irreversibly the most intimate part in the cultural-religious identity of the communities. Similar, the globalisation did not set aside the new profile of the man animating it, a man with no authentic spiritual roots/demiurge, who, willy-nilly, must assume the new social values of the world he lives in. To this man, the post-industrial society seems to solicit first of all the technical integration an efficient production system (Achimescu, 2013, p. 183); the economy and the technique seem to be now-a-days incompatible with the ideas of the traditional spirituality and religiosity (Ică, 2005, p.692) , a factual state that imposes to the postmodern man to concentrate and report quasi-exclusively to the landmarks of the productivity and efficiency imposed by society. From the point of view of its content, this consequence of the globalisation is identical with the impact generated on the human behaviour and on the attitude of the man toward work, announced by the Calvinist thesis on predestination (related to the teachings on 1. the unconditioned choice – God establishes from eternity who is destined to Heaven and who is destined to Hell, being impossible to overcome His decision; 2. the limited redemption – the sacrifice and the Resurrection of the Saviour are truly efficient and valuable only for the chosen ones, with no soteriological significance for the others; and 3. the irresistible grace – as divine mercy/ goodness *given freely*, ensuring the salvation of the chosen people in spite of the possible attitude of their disconnection from faith). Those following them – the Reformed, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, etc. – considering, unofficially, outside the Creed and of the private Faith confessions, that the success obtained in the earthly life [...] is a premonitory sign for gaining the eternal life, inside a psychological mechanism that promoted what was called the ethics of the work, in the detriment of the religious moral values and oriented the people to success (Achimescu, 2013, p.16).

3. Conclusions

In order to be functional, the conditioning mechanism operated by the alienating globalisation economy should have imperatively put at the disposition of the postmodern man – whose intellectual and physical resources fully exploits – a new set of motivational factors, able to stimulate his engagement and involvement and to determine him to prove loyalty and support for the economic-social order of the post-industrial and postmodern world. Because globality overlaps the modernity emptied by spirituality, hostile to religion and refusing any possible vertical axis of

the existence, the solution was the consumerism and its immediate corollary – the continuous measurable growth of the individual/ family welfare. Thus, it seems that a secular consensus is established between the man and the global society, a two-way connection, which seems to be reciprocally advantageous: the man is required productivity, efficiency and creativity and he gets in exchange the hope, often materialised, at least in the West, represented by the earthly heaven of welfare, comfort and consume. These will be the new axiological post-modern universes exclusively horizontal pseudo-landmarks/idolaters for the global economy, where the verb *to be* is substituted by the verb *to have*.

4. References

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