

The Phenomenon of Migration in Contemporary Society Viewed from a Religious Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The migration phenomenon has always existed in our world, fluctuating by the historic context, the economic, political, social and demographic disparities between the Central and East European countries and the EU Member States, the interdependencies between the origin and receiving countries and the European integration process evolutions. In the European Union, an integrated and inclusive approach of the migration issue is necessary. But a common policy regarding world migration rests on an ambitious objective. A common approach of the economic migration management and the harmonization of the migration policies of the Member States represented a challenge for the European Union and will become urgent in the future, especially due to the demographic ageing.

KEY WORDS: migration, society, religion, Islam.

Introduction

Migration is not a new concept, but it has existed since the beginnings of mankind. The phenomenon has not stopped in time, but has changed and acquired new forms. Migration processes are conducted simultaneously, are increasing in many countries of the world and behaves in a completely unexpected. One of the long term results of this development could be the emergence of

multicultural societies, tending toward new concepts of citizenship or national state.

Most developed countries have become diversified companies, multiethnic, and those who have not yet reached this level turned decisively in this direction. For researchers in the field of migration has become increasingly clear that this phenomenon should be seen as normal and structural element of human society throughout history.

An important characteristic of the population is moving from one place to another. The right to move was recognized globally for over half a century by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Declaration stipulates in Article 13: “Everyone has the right to move freely and to reside in the territory of any State” and “Everyone has the right to leave a country, including the home, and to return to his country”.¹

CNN Analysis on the Migration of Syrian Refugees²

TURKEY: 1.9 million immigrants

Remarkably, this country accommodates nearly half of the total number of Syrian refugees and, clearly, is more than it can bear. Turkey is the number 1 of these displaced families. And geography can be an explanation, because Turkey and Syria share borders.

LEBANON: 1.1 million immigrants

Influx of refugees in Libya is so great that the country’s population of 4.4 million grew by 25%. And this country is neighboring with Syria.

JORDAN: 629 000 immigrants

Jordan offers shelter to a large number of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, but the Syrians are the majority in the population of refugees, according to the United Nations. Moreover, Jordan has a history of this—about half the population of 7 million people being of Palestinian origin. However, the arrival of the Syrians can cause problems with resources and “could have a negative impact on public opinion in Jordan, regarding the situation

of refugees,” says the UN. About 20% of immigrants Syrians are now sheltering in camps.

IRAQ: 249,000 refugees

Like Syria, Iraq was the target of attacks launched by Islamic State — a terrorist group that conquered parts of both countries in order to establish their own Islamic caliphate. However, it is not surprising that many Syrian refugees receded in northern areas such as Irbil, Duhuk and Nineveh, which are closest to the Syrian border and a majority Kurdish population, the UN says.

On the other hand, the situation of Syrian refugees in Iraq is a little ironic, given that, at some point, Iraqis were the ones that took refuge in Syria. Around 38% of Syrian refugees are living in camps in Iraq, according to US Department of State.

EGYPT: 132,000 refugees

Egypt made a discordant note on how the Middle East countries deal with refugees. Specifically, there is no refugee staying in a camp. In fact, an Egyptian billionaire, Naguib Sawiris, one of the richest men in the region, has offered to buy an island for refugees. He could buy an island in Greece or Italy, and that island would be named Hope.

Countries which have applied for asylum Syrians:³

GERMANY: 98 700 applications

SWEDEN: 64700 applications

FRANCE: 6700 applications

UK: 7000 applications

DENMARK: 11,300 applications

HUNGARY: 18,800 applications

Syrian refugees have made several requests for asylum in other parts of Europe, between April 2011 and July 2015 as follows:

- Romania: 2292 applications
- Spain: 5500 applications
- Netherlands: 14,100 applications
- Austria: 18600 applications
- Switzerland: 8300 applications
- Bulgaria: 15000 applications
- Italy: 2,143 applications
- Greece: 3543 applications

The Official Position of the US and Canada

Approximately 1,500 Syrian refugees were admitted to the United States, most of them since January, but a State Department official said the number could increase in 2016.

Regarding Canada, over 2,370 Syrian refugees arrived in this country in January 2014. The government promised in January that it will accept 10,000 Syrian refugees over a period of 3 years, according to Toronto Sun. Since then, 1074 refugees arrived in Canada.

AUSTRALIA announced that it will accommodate 12,000 migrants, which exceeds the maximum number accepted in Australia through humanitarian programs, set at 13750 per year. Also, the country plans to spend 44 million dollars for food, blankets and emergency supplies to ensure the livelihoods of 240,000 people who are in refugee camps.

In contrast, other rich countries such as Russia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea have offered zero places for Syrians fleeing war — Amnesty International says.

Also, wealthy Gulf Arab countries do not accept any refugee:

- Saudi Arabia: 0
- United Arab Emirates: 0
- Kuwait: 0
- Qatar: 0
- Bahrain: 0

The conclusion of the study conducted by CNN highlights the growing crisis of Syrian refugees and the differences that have arisen between the countries that welcome these desperate people with open arms and those who refuse to open their borders. It is also understandable that the rich countries of the Arabian Gulf have not solidarity with their fellow Syrians, and there are many questions about how Europe will look like in a few decades, when these immigrants will have become citizens of the respective states and will influence social, political and especially religious life.

It outlines a threefold fundamental question of religious freedom in the context of the current religious phenomenon: Islam will absorb Christianity in Europe? Reverse? Or survive together, both? European specificity involves a kind of partnership between state and church, and “identity politics has become the central feature of the European political landscape in this century,”⁴ while the European Union has itself become a source of identity or identities.⁵

The Role of Religious Symbols and Practices in Contemporary Education

Few people really realize the immense power a symbol possesses, because we cannot understand the history and evolution, we think simplistic or stereotypical or just realize that the symbol existed at a certain time in history. We truly understand some of its mystery, only when we recognize the eternal substance, because the symbols, which are universal expressions of the sacred refers to the primordial, or definitely statements about the human condition: birth, initiation, sexuality, death. So that “in one time or another in history a symbol can pass under the shadow of silence (sometimes surprising), while another may burst downright incendiary.”⁶

Although most symbols are universal, there are a number of specific symbols for each culture. Various symbolic elements are characteristics of human existence, leading to a combination of ordinary and supernatural.

Specific cultural symbols.

If some symbols are universal, most of them present cultural specifics and individuals’ existence is determined by these symbols. Thus, since the early ages of life the meaning of various symbols and representations is learned. This learning process is done using elements such as icons for primitive populations, or symbolic signs: the cross, the lamb and the fish for Christians or crescent and the Star of David. By learning, when the individual will face that symbol, the religious sentiment will be implicitly generated.

Consumption or prohibition of consuming certain foods are also linked to religious symbolism. In numerous religions, some plants and animals fulfill a symbolic function, religiously relevant. Thus, certain foods are prohibited of consuming or consuming them is allowed only under certain circumstances, but mainly in a religious context. For example, in India it is known that the cow is a sacred animal so its meat cannot be consumed. For Hindus, the cow is “revered as a symbol of warmth, as the mother of earth, milk producer and indirectly of ghi (Butter-N, N.), essentially for sacrifices.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, through specific activities undertaken by representatives of the London Missionary Society, the celebration of Christmas came to be known even by the Tswana tribes. Subsequently, the local substrate was merged with the Occidental one, spreading to the pastoral Bantu populations, even in the most isolated regions of the Kalahari.

The natives’ perception about Christmas was restricted to the idea that it would signify the birthday of the god–head of the white men. To the amalgamation of local and Western traditions contributed a Tswana Custom–Herero tradition which consisted in sacrificing a bull for their Bushman neighbors, as an annual gesture of good intentions. The bull began to be identified with Christmas. Since the 30s of last century, every time in December is held a meeting of Bushmen for marketing cattle and settling marriages.⁷

Throughout history we grasp a series of violent conflicts around religious symbols. There are many examples that could be mentioned here, but a good example is the order of the Moscow Patriarch, Nikon in 1653. The stake was whether believers must make the sign of the cross with two fingers (symbolizing the dual nature of Christ) or three–finger (symbolizing the Trinity). However, most of them preferred to endure a terrible persecution, only not to abandon the ancient tradition of making the cross sign with the thumb and forefinger together.

Even Tsar Peter the Great (1682–1725), in his huge effort of westernization of Russia, was linked to the ancient symbols. He was forcing his subjects to wear European suits and smoke. He ordered that the beards of the boyars must be cut, and, if necessary, he would

cut them himself. Another particularly strong symbol: ancestral laws were punishing the one who snatched someone else's bear by paying 12 coins and only 5 coins for a man who killed a peasant without reason.

When the great leader Atatürk Kernal wanted to modernize Turkey after World War I, not only he imposed the introduction of European digits, alphabet and calendar, but he also prohibited wearing a fez instead of a traditional "hat" to the "hat".

Also, neither the history of France is not exempted from the fight against symbols of overloaded significance, but also the contemporary period is loaded with tensions regarding religious symbols: The Islamic hijab etc. During the French Revolution, from 1792 it was prohibited wearing ecclesiastical clothes, and the authorities were confiscating anything with bronze (crucifixes, pews, angels, devils, etc.) to turn them into cannons. During the terror, the cemeteries were left without any religious symbol. To prove that the old regime and the old times had been abolished, the Christian calendar is replaced by the Republican calendar, which inaugurates a new era with the first year.⁸

Wearing Religious Clothes or Symbols

Various religious people often feel forced by their religion, or have a religious motivated desire to wear religious symbols, religious attire or other symbols that constitute proof of their membership of a particular religion. As practices that espouse some individuals religious, I could mention: wearing a turban and kirpan (the religious knife) by Indian Sikhs, the adoption of the dreadlocks hairstyle by Rastafariens, wearing a hijab (Islamic veil) by Muslim and Hebrew women, kipa for the Hebrew men and wearing the cross by Christian religionists. Also, even members of the same religion may hold different opinions about the rules of their religion in such cases.

Even the UN Human Rights Committee have legitimized that exposure of religious symbols or wearing religious clothing or head coverings is a manifestation of religion to be protected by international law.⁹

If we analyze the veil headwear on women, it seems that it is imposed at the beginnings of Christianity, being about a submission gesture from it. Decisions about the form of the vestments and religious symbols should be taken individually, in principle. In a UN report on freedom of expression of religion, the police chief of Iran said that “in 2006 more than one million women were sanctioned because of how they were wearing the hijab, and 10 000 of these were accused of violating the dress code.”¹⁰

We could say that these coercive measures are limiting religious freedom of the people involved and at the same time signifies a serious violation of freedom of expression and women’s rights.

In some European countries, it is developing an opposite phenomenon: women who want to wear the veil, are forbidden to wear it and the places where it can be worn are becoming fewer. Recently, there have been efforts to implement even more coercive measures, that prevent women from wearing the Hijab in public places in France, Belgium and Italy. There is a modern school of thought which says that wearing the veil is not required by Islam, yet there are even more schools of thought who say the contrary.

The most serious arguments justifying restrictions on attire and religious symbols could be:

- Security or public safety. Sometimes these restrictions are justified and quite accurate by not allowing the Sikhs students to wear religious knives with them. In Canada, the Islamic veil is associated with the extremist Islamic fundamentalism.
- Wearing the Hijab is incompatible with women’s rights. Wearing it is considered a synonym with the alienation of women.
- Wearing robes and religious symbols are worn often due to pressure by religious leaders, but not willingly.

Prayer, Education and Religious Practice in Schools

Freedom of expression and religion take a new look when placed in the context of public institutions, especially in schools, prisons or army, where some participants may have very little freedom to escape the forms of religious speech or other forms of expression that they even find offensive.

School environments have proven to be real controversial battlefields for freedom of religion and expression. Various teachers and students who spend many hours in school, have a desire to express their religion in different ways: by wearing dresses or religious symbols, prayer or participation in other forms of religious expression, such as religious meditation or Bible reading.

Sometimes even parents and children, may require the school to teach personal religious values or doctrine or exclude school subjects included in the curriculum which, in their view, could undermine the religious teachings. On the other hand, other teachers, parents or students may be hostile to all these forms of religious expression and may feel bothered by them.

It is quite difficult to maintain a balance between the two sides, especially in institutions like school, because there can be a wider context of religious pluralism. Usually, it is accepted that forcing students to participate in religious practices or imposing the participation in sectarian religious education or other forms of religious expression represents a serious violation of human rights in contemporary society.

Also in schools it is forbidden to recommend religion by using prayer, meditation, reading of religious incantations, even if participation is voluntary.

Institutions of United Nations Human Rights focused on the issue of religious freedom, without taking into account the neutrality clause factor of the state towards any religion, a complex factor. They allowed religious education, as long as parents and students, adopt an honest way and not an overwhelming one not to participate in those subjects.

European Court of Human Rights has been more open to the idea that the ability to participate or not in the religion classes in schools is enough to protect students' rights and to protect them from pressures or serious social difficulties that such a situation can generate.¹¹

God Nowadays: The Return to the Triad Jerusalem, Athens, Rome

In the history of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic God is Creator, Lawgiver, Saviour, Mediator and King, and the three monotheistic religions are claiming all from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—in Judaism and Christianity; Ismael in Islam.

If we look closely at religious values or cultural history which was built on Judeo-Christian tradition, it requires an ascertainment: in Europe, the Synagogue on one hand and the Church on the other hand, have both taken the representation of and almighty God, creator, guide and savior of the world, who is revealed and intervenes in human events anytime, through those who are in this world. Amid this unfolds all European culture.

In modern times, issues such as differentiation and empowerment of values have increased continuously to create the impression of a plurality where each value becomes a purpose in itself. Many thinkers who are cultivating conceptual exercises, think that they are deprived of any moral, civic or political significance, but they feel if they do not pay attention to values of this nature.

If a number of politicians understand new democracy only as a leader selection technique or simply as a framework for their ascent to decision roles, applied in richer countries;¹² as well as some economists, cannot seize beyond the interdependence of indicators, more than formal processes sides satisfactory for themselves. It is well defined and ingrained among scientists, the conviction that what they do means isolation, without any mistake, in the search for truth.

Meanwhile, due to differentiation and empowerment of values, it was created a conscience—that passes for many people as reality—a detachment of values when under the pressure of reality, researchers realized that they meet evil purposes, when amoral

politicians feel discovered, when economists are forced to admit that their formalisms generate impoverishment, when scientific analysts are forced to admit that what they do is understood more deeply by those who oppose oversimplification.

Differentiation and autonomy of values are affirmed and promoted today as positive processes, the only way to provide any of the chosen values.

The need for a unitary consciousness of values, which we feel today, in the age of globalization, more than in previous decades cannot be restored by the simple rhetorical proclamation of interdependencies values.

“Christianity is above all not a moral but a hope, not ethics, but eschatology. Together with the word ‘God’ in our soul has been put something that deeply worries us. We should not indulge in any case, to adapt to this shorthand pragmatic benchmarks of justice.”¹³

Making from religion today—in the era of expansion unprecedented science, of multiplication unparalleled of philosophical perspectives, of the most daring intellectual initiatives, globalization sciences, trade, communications—the main foundation may seem an act of forcedly bringing in present a form of spiritual life not only ancient but also inevitably having the patina of time. The blaming on religion asynchrony can be reached by rushed people, unaware, uninformed, those without a minimum reflexivity; so the problem is not to reject this allegation, but to take it seriously. Some modern scholars, consider that there is also an asynchrony of productive nature, necessary to the contemporary period.

There is a high level regarding the difficult situations on Western countries. The Christian religion has been in existence for over two millenniums, as its asynchrony, within the meaning of another era of origin is striking; on the other hand, in social life religion is often used to decorate occasions, such as a security ideology.

Certainly, “religion is a phenomenon of asynchrony, a patina phenomenon, which still today many who consider themselves religious use it only festive and too little serious and radical.”¹⁴ On the one hand we have the “systematic lingering” in asynchrony or freezing into theologies developed sometime in the past; on the other

hand, it is trying the abolition of religious asynchrony and turning it into a kind of “civic religion,” adapted to the present time; another approach of the religious asynchrony in the contemporary theology consists of “theological attempt to retrieve and process the creator nature of religious asynchrony.”¹⁵

When we refer to contemporary asynchrony practicing Christians, this is not a backwardness but a questioning manner and oriented on the change of reality under the impact of religion. So, the future is born not just by synchrony, often superficial, of modernity, but also by its productive asynchrony, as the religion.

Missionary by its very being, religion has never neglected social implementing of its soteriological and eschatological content.

At the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, social, political, economic, cultural, etc. issues, cannot be considered to be situated in a parallel plan to ecclesial life. The role and task of religion and implicitly, the Christian religion in the new global missionary context become increasingly more difficult, but not impossible.

The concern of Christian churches and other contemporary religions, accorded to communion and social fraternity, shows that all dogmas and creeds need to emphasize and lead to the encounter between God and the world, to understanding the social-political reality by people of faith perspective and from the presence of God in the world, an explosion of values on all of its plans (social, cultural, political, economic, etc.) in a universal-human and perfect way. In this way, the social doctrine of Christianity is not only Christians, but the entire human society.

The crisis of contemporary Christianity is about the valor order, which is a result or a long-term effect of “social Hellenization.” By Hellenization we can understand taking over late Greek philosophy and its implementation in Christianity, which resulted in the universalization of Christianity and even produced a self-alienation process of Christianity. Starting in year 70 d. AD., with the overthrow of the Temple of Jerusalem and the dispersion of Jews throughout the world, the Jewish religious values began to dilute increasingly more, being replaced by Greek philosophies; Even the Bible is interpreted more Greek than Hebrew, and the center of gravity on religious values is moved from Jerusalem to Athens. It is fetched the Greek

representation of cosmos and it is implemented in the biblical act of creation according to the Hebrew thinking, it is fetched the stoic representation of unitary world, which places the man before it with his goals and the wisdom of Solomon, the man ceases to be a result of divine creation, in the biblical sense, but participates in the logos. All Greek philosophy topics are converted on Christianity's arena. The famous Cardinal Ratzinger draws attention to this Hellenization and notes that today the triangle of Jerusalem, Athens, Rome must be restored, with three sides and three angles and that no angle should be blunt, but the greek thinking has blunt other angles.

The effects of alienation from Judaism to Christianity was felt most strongly in the occurrence of the Jewish Holocaust. The association between the reaction of Christianity to Judaism and the pagan reaction to hebrews Christian was the background of mutual alienation, in which each contributed in time. Most contemporary thinkers advocates for a recovery of this triangle and I could show you some of their arguments in favor of this triangle, Jerusalem, Athens, Rome:¹⁶

- It could enable better responses to the fundamental issues of Christianity in today's crisis of values, to the need to reaffirm the potential of Judeo-Christian tradition where is based the Euro-American civilization, to the need of Judeo-Christian-Muslim trialogue, etc.
- It would allow the reaffirmation of the native Christian commitment and would trigger certain needs or matters of faith which today are just pure formalisms.
- It would bring the basic intellectual structures, under the ethics of justice and love of your neighbor, which is otherwise the main source of moral renewal.
- It would re-edify strength to the Western values, so outdated today, uniting the too dispersed resources of the grandiose Judeo-Christian traditions.
- It would provide the ground for theological research and solutions that enable the trialogue to completely come out from the parallel monologues stage and go into the point where it would realize common origins.

- It would provide a better basis for formulating appropriate articles religious affiliation in Europe without reducing its Western component and without reducing the spiritual disclosure of European culture.
- It would provide a basis for making the solidarity Europe–U.S., an effective spiritual force, of which today’s world, marked by individualism and relativism, needs.

Conclusion

Migration has existed since ancient times, recording, however, different intensities from one historical stage to another and developing new forms. In the European Union, free movement of workers was one of the first citizens’ rights recognized by Community law. However, EU Member States have experienced similar situations in terms of migration, adopting different positions and policies on the immigrants.

As a result, the European Union, establishing a common policy on migration remains an ambitious goal. It is likely, however, that the demographic decline in the European Union, whose consequences will arise in the future, to change attitudes on migration in the Member States. The link between demographic change and migration policies will be an important issue in the near future. Economic migration has an important role to meet the needs of the European labor market. In addition, the developed regions of the world compete in attracting immigrants to cover economic needs. For these reasons, it needs a policy on economic migration worldwide. A joint management of economic migration and the harmonization of migration policies of the Member States is one of the most important challenges of migration in contemporary society.¹⁷

When referring to the term “terrorism”, we automatically think of Islamic international terrorism, but we ignore very much all criminal acts and all aspects of domestic terrorism, found in all European countries. It is enough to open any newspaper and see all forms of social violence: vandalism, hooliganism, skinhead attacks, racism, neo-Nazi groups and even acts such as armed

attacks in schools.¹⁸ Islam came to promote the principles of freedom; freedom of religion, thought, expression, etc. Islam rejected people's enforcement to believe even in its message. The Qur'an says regarding freedom of religion, "Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth be seen clearly from error." (Al-Baqarah: 256).¹⁹

The idea of modernity in the Islamic world has entered with the following characteristics: separation of spiritual and temporal authorities, promoting individualism and social and political pluralism. The individualism opposes social values promoted by Islam, which emphasizes the idea of community. The principle of freedom did not come as a result of a revolution or social evolution, but it came from above. While Islam has affirmed the principle of freedom also wanted to avoid tampering with religion.²⁰

Another major type of freedom is freedom of thought. The Islam urged people to think about the universe and recognize the wisdom behind creation. Islam promotes the responsible freedom: a kind of freedom which respects other societies, religions, etc.

After the fall of communism, traditions and religious communities acquires a new political, social, legal significance with fundamentalist religious manifestations, with specific manifestations not only for the Middle East but also countries of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. They sometimes overlap the national and ethnic conflicts favorable circumstances for a global terrorism seeking to avenge the frustrations caused by Western civilization.

Religious tolerance attitudes have greatly expanded communication among states, regions, individuals with different religious affiliations. Also, globalization has broken the ethnic, social, religious barriers bringing humanity into a "brotherhood unanimity" and imposing a particular set of values, global values. As a result, traditional, national, regional and even individual values disappeared and will disappear, all amid a social, political, religious "ecumenism" which tends to flatten and shape even the last form of awake conscience on the whole planet.

The challenge of the contemporary religious man is, as the Saviour says, "to understand the times" and to take up his cross daily "Matthew 16:24 (faith, the Bible, prayer, etc.)—typical values

pertaining to religion ready to follow Him in society, bringing the message of life, love and truth (moral-religious values) to a world which is being prey ideologues of any kind which makes you lose your individuality.

Personally, as I watch these current trends (pluralism, secularism, atheism, secularization)²¹ and their effects on religion and social life, I firmly believe that a reform and even a theological, social or ideological reformulation, at the level of interpretation of the religious phenomenon, it is stringency imposed. Also, I agree that this triad Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, is of a paramount importance; but I think it is imposed a new conversion of Christianity to the initial values, a return to the true queen—Biblical thinking, not just some traditional values found irrelevant in the face of a globalized society in all aspects, but returning to the universal, eternal and even fixed values updated to contemporary man's concepts; a return to the eternal trinity: Father–Son–Holy Spirit.

NOTES:

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