

Religious Particularism vs. Religious Universalism

Edited by

Zoran Matevski

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
Introduction.....	viii
Chapter 1: Religious Particularism vs. Religious Universalism in Europe - Zoran Matevski, PhD, Ratko Duev, PhD	1
Chapter 2: "Be Close!" History and Activities of The Military Chaplains in Ukraine - Ella Bystrytska, PhD, Nadiia Volik, PhD. 28	28
Chapter 3: Approaches to Interfaith Relations in Turkey: Analysis of the State Policies and Challenging Interpretations Between Religious Universalism and Particularism - Alper Çakır, Mgr.....	57
Chapter 4: Surrender and Catch: An Idea for the Dialogue - Roberto Cipriani, PhD	80
Chapter 5: Religion, Politics, and Identity in American Legal Practice - Jon Mahoney, PhD	102
Chapter 6: How Contemporary Globalization Changes Religious Toleration in Western Europe - Patrick Pasture, PhD	124
Chapter 7: The Interfaith Field and its Conflicts - Enzo Pace, PhD	155
Chapter 8: Contemporary Russian Phyletism and the Decline of the Holy Rus': The Social and Political Consequences of the Attitude of the Moscow Patriarchate Towards the Russian-Ukrainian War - Marcin Skłodanowski, PhD	177

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Introduction

The content of the book derives from the papers presented at the Second European Conference for Religious Dialogue and Cooperation, held in Struga (North Macedonia) in June 2022. The theme of the conference was “Relationship Between Religion and Globalization: Religious Particularism vs. Religious Universalism”. The conference featured eminent professors and researchers from North Macedonia, United Kingdom, France, USA, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Serbia, Poland, United Arab Emirates, Czech Republic, Greece, India, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain, Republic of Ireland, Russia, Hungary and with particular pleasure, representatives of Ukraine. When we started this story three years ago (First European Conference for Religious Dialogue and Cooperation), we were in a state of uncertainty as to whether it would receive positive approval from scientific circles in Europe and the world. Today we see that we have practically established ourselves in all relevant European academic, scientific and research institutions dealing with religion. I'm very pleased that we have expanded our sphere of influence to the United States and Asia. Without false modesty, the European Conference on Religious Dialogue and Cooperation has grown into one of the most important scientific events dealing with all aspects of the complex phenomenon of religion in Europe. As the editor of this book, I have selected nine papers that best illustrate the relationship between the religious particularism and religious universalism in modern European societies, primarily from a sociological, historical, anthropological and theological point of view. We try to find solutions on how the positive aspects of religious universalism can overcome and suppress the negative effects of religious particularism.

Today, Europe is faced with a crisis of moral, religious and even civilizational values. Many have talked about the moral decadence of Europe. Furthermore, European countries are constantly faced with political crises. The European Union has not fully met the expectations of its Member States. The ethno-religious mobilization of citizens and political parties in the states in the Western Balkans is still present. In that sense, the role of religion is realized in several directions. If the religious feelings of believers are abused or if religious teachings are brutally perverted, then religion is placed in the role of an amplifier of ethnic and political conflicts. Then a certain illusion is created that those are in fact religious conflicts. Such is the conflict in Ukraine, which many call “a battle for religion”. When you analyze the conflict between the Ukrainian and Russian governmental forces and the separatists supported by Moscow in the eastern parts of the country, it becomes much harder to separate the centuries-long ideological and religious tensions from the current political and military conflict. On the other hand, perhaps the greatest source of social conflicts in contemporary Europe is the tension and violence in which participate people from minority groups of Muslim culture and Islam faith.

Processes of globalization lead us undoubtedly to the conclusion that religion in the global era is understood within the context of changes in the world in general. This is based on the assumptions that borders among societies are becoming less important and socio-cultural developments in certain societies are increasingly influenced by events from other parts of the world. Globalization imposes situations in which confessions, ethnic groups, countries, and civilizations affect each other inevitably, unlike in the past when they were more or less isolated from each other. All of this has two opposing social effects. On the one hand, there is a risk of an outbreak of clashes between different religions, which are

present within a social community. On the other, these close contacts among different religions may diminish differences among them, and thus reduce the tensions and conflicts. Global society, among other things, is characterized by the conflict between particularism and universalism. The particularism emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of particular social groups. Those differences may be ethnic, cultural, religious, and regional. Unlike particularism, universalism emphasizes the importance of similarities among people and systems of values in individual societies.

Globalization involves a situation in which peoples, cultures, states, and civilizations, constantly and inevitably interacting with one another. It has two opposite effects. On the one hand, there is a growing danger of clashes between different cultures, which are now in the same society, as it can lead to misunderstanding and hostility. On the other hand, all the closer contacts between different cultures and religions can reduce the differences between them, and thus reduce the possibility of conflicts. Global society is characterized by the clash between particularism and universalism. Particularism emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of individual social groups. These differences can be national, regional, cultural or religious. Universalism emphasizes the importance of similarity between people, individual societies, and value systems. In this context, religion can go in one of three directions.

Religion as a subsystem of global society has no clearly defined role. While in the past, religious rituals were used because they were considered necessary for successful harvests, better health and military success, now this is not the case. Without a global role, religion is left with the task of dealing with personal issues and problems, such as the meaning of life. Following this path, religion loses its role in the public and privatized religion continues to

develop in countless pluralistic directions, using a range of possibilities. Individuals choose the sect, cult, denomination or one of the major world religions they want to follow. However, religion does not necessarily have to be confined to the private sphere.

A second option for religion is to play an important role in helping people deal with such problems. Individuals and social groups can reach out to religion to ensure their unique sense of identity. They can use it to confirm the superiority of an individual or a social group over others. It can mobilize social groups, with a desire to gain power and influence in a globalized society in which they feel marginalized or think it is a threat. Religions that try to emphasize the particular differences that are often closely linked to nationalism. That is why; Israel, Iran, India and Japan are examples of countries in which conservative or fundamentalist religions dominate. Religious fundamentalism is a relatively new phenomenon that was not observed until the last quarter of the 20th century. It is most commonly associated with Islam and the Middle East, and to a lesser extent with Protestantism in the United States. Religious fundamentalism often manifests itself as a complete or partial rejection of modern ideas. Religious tolerance, secularization, various achievements in science and technology are not in line with a particular religious doctrine. That is why these religions are often associated with nationalism. A cult of one's own nation, which creates a chauvinistic attitude towards other nations.

The third option is for religions to try to achieve a universal approach. In this case, religion seeks to achieve ecumenism (a movement for the rapprochement of all Christian churches, the Greek ecumenical-populated part of the world, the whole world), so it seeks to bring together and unite the various faiths and beliefs. Instead of emphasizing diversity, it emphasizes common values and beliefs, which should become global, common to the whole

world. An example is the belief in universal human rights or a particular conception of social justice. Although the theory of liberation is based on Catholicism, its interests are political and religious, caring for the poor in Latin America. Many of the problems of the poor can be attributed to the way the capitalist system works. A second example of a Universalist approach is religious environmentalism. According to this theory, human behavior is shaped solely by the influence of the environment, i.e., society and culture, and not by some innate factors. This theory was current during the Enlightenment when all people believed that *tabula rasa* and that culture is what creates the differences between the classes. This view especially referred to aggression, because they believed that bad institutions, bad upbringing and social hierarchy corrupted the good and rational man by nature. Religious environmentalism seeks to encourage different religious groups to work together in an effort to save what they call a God-created land.

Europe, especially in the early Middle Ages, was shaped by the ancient authentic values of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is interesting that even though all these religions in their essence are close to each other, they originate from a common ancient foundation in Judaism and they all preach peace as an ideal, the multi-confessional regions have always been among the most conflicting regions in the world.

Above all, it is a result of the essence of religion. Especially the great monotheistic religions derived from the so-called Abrahamic tradition are very intolerant. They have firm and unchangeable points of view of the world, a strict code of ethics, and they draw a clear distinction between those who are and those who are not true believers. Their dogmas and rules given by God are eternal truth. They cannot be subject to negotiations, compromises, and variances. When such a group meets another similar group, they

inevitably call each other heretics and apostates. They are not in a position to recognize their share in knowing the truth. Why? Because it would cast some doubt on their dogmas. Such contacts must end up with alienation and conflict. These religions are at the same time very collectivistic. They claim that believers create a special and morally superior community. Relations with them easily become a sign of political or national loyalty. The biggest danger lies in connecting the nation and religion. Moreover, if Abrahamic religions become factors in politics, because of their uncompromising points of view they lead to constant conflict with the religious others.

Zoran Matevski

Chapter 1

Religious Particularism vs. Religious Universalism in Europe

Zoran Matevski, PhD¹

Ratko Duev, PhD²

Abstract: Europe, especially in the early Middle Ages, was shaped by the ancient authentic values of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is interesting that despite the fact that all these religions are essentially close to each other, originating from a common ancient foundation in Judaism and all preaching peace as an ideal, Europe has always been among the most conflicted regions in the world. First of all, it results from the essence of religion, especially the great monotheistic religions derived from the so-called Abrahamic tradition, which are very intolerant. They have fixed and unchanging world views, strict codes of ethics, and draw a clear line between those who are and those who are not true believers. Their dogmas and rules are said to be given by God and are eternal truth. They cannot be subject to negotiations, compromises and concessions. When such a group meets another similar group, they will inevitably declare each other heretics and apostates. They are unable to acknowledge together their part in knowing the truth. Why? Because if they did, they would cast doubt on their dogmas.

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Such contacts must end in alienation and conflict. These religions are also very collectivistic. They claim that their believers form a separate and morally superior community. Relations with them easily become a sign of political or national loyalty. The greatest danger lies in connecting nation and religion. Moreover, if Abrahamic religions become factors in politics, they, because of their uncompromising views, essentially lead to constant conflict with religious others. Global society, among other things, is characterized by the conflict between particularism and universalism. The particularism emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of particular social groups. Those differences may be ethnic, cultural, religious, and regional. Unlike particularism, universalism emphasizes the importance of similarities among people and systems of values in individual societies.

Keywords: Abrahamic religions; religious conflicts; religious particularism; religious universalism

Introduction

The theory of globalization leads to the conclusion that religion in different societies should be understood in the context of changes in the world as a whole. But they are all based on the assumption that the boundaries between societies are becoming less important, and that social life in individual societies is increasingly influenced by events in other parts of the world, and that certain changes are evident throughout the world and not limited just to certain places. Globalization involves a situation in which peoples, cultures, states and civilizations that used to be more or less isolated from each other now constantly and inevitably interact with each other. It has two opposite effects. On one hand, there is an increasing danger of clashes between different cultures, which are now in the same society, because it can lead to misunderstanding and hostility. On the other hand, all the closer contacts between different cultures

and religions can reduce the differences between them, thus reducing the possibility of conflict (Beyer, 2014)

The interaction between peoples and great world civilizations is getting stronger. They also intensify the awareness of the importance of civilizations. More intense contacts between different groups can sometimes result in a strong emphasis on differences rather than bringing those groups closer together. The value systems of different civilizations are in irreconcilable opposition. Groups are civilizations, not nation states or religions. In contrast, there is often a very close relationship between religion and civilization (Samuel Huntington). In the modern world, sources of identity that are not religious or grounded in civilization are losing importance. The end of the cold war period and the fall of communism mark the period when people are less divided by political differences. Economic changes, the more developed communication system, travels and intensive migrations have weakened the state and the nation. On the other hand, regional economic cooperation (e.g. the EU) strengthens the awareness of civilization. In most of the world, religion tries to fill that gap, and this is very often in the form of movements that we call fundamentalist. We find them in Western Christian countries, in the countries of Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism as well as in the countries of Islam. The world is not becoming more secular, but on the contrary, desecularized (Berger, 2014).

This leads to the realization of the second scenario concerning the role of religion in the modern world, in which it seeks to achieve a maximum universal approach. In this scenario, religion tries to implement ecumenism and neo-ecumenism in practice, trying to unite different religions and beliefs. Rather than pointing out the differences, it points out the common values and beliefs, which are supposed to become global and common around the world. An

example of this is the belief in universal human rights or certain concepts of social justice. Nevertheless, regardless of the aspect of observation, the relationship between religion and globalization is a topic that will be prevalent for a long time.

1. The role of religion in global society

Global society is characterized by the clash between particularism and universalism. Particularism emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of individual social groups. Those differences can be national, regional, cultural or religious. Universalism emphasizes the importance of similarity between people, individual societies and value systems. In that context, religion can go in one of three directions. First, religion may play a relatively marginal role in global society. Since it cannot offer a universal set of values and beliefs that would be common to all members of society, it sometimes retreats into the private sphere and has a privatized role. Precisely because the world capitalist economy functions in the direction of money, the global political system in the sense of a bureaucratic organization of power, the scientific system in search of verifiable truth. The goal of all those systems is to achieve the greatest possible efficiency and rational realization of the goals (Beyer, 2006).

Religion as a subsystem of global society does not have a clearly defined role. While in the past religious rituals were used because they were considered necessary for successful harvests, better health and military success, this is not the case now. Without a global role, religion is left only with the task of confronting personal questions and problems, such as the meaning of life. Following such a path, religion loses its public role and privatized religion continues to develop in countless pluralistic directions, using a range of possibilities. Individuals choose the sect, cult, denomination, or one of the major world religions they wish to

follow. However, religion need not necessarily be confined to the private sphere.

Second, the major subsystems of modernity and globalization create problems. The global economy, global science, and global political system can offer very little to the individual or to social groups for identity confirmation. Identities are increasingly relativized: people lack a clear definition of who they really are. They have a range of individual roles (e.g. in the workplace or in the family) but lack a single sense of identity. In a pluralistic world, in which different cultures and religions are tightly intertwined and in closer contact, it is difficult to declare that a particular culture is better than another.

Religion can play important role in helping people cope with such problems. Individuals and social groups can turn to religion to secure their unique sense of identity. They can use it to confirm the superiority of the individual or the social group over others. It can mobilize (make mobile) social groups, with the desire to exercise power and influence in a globalized society in which they feel marginalized or think that it is a threat to them. Religions that try to emphasize particular differences are often closely related to nationalism. Israel, Iran, India and Japan are examples of countries in which conservative (one who is against news, with outdated beliefs) or fundamentalist religions (religious fundamentalism is a name for the various political ideologies and movements that try to harmonize the entire social life with a consistent interpretation of a certain religious doctrine (teaching)). Religious fundamentalism is a relatively new phenomenon that has only been observed in the last quarter of the 20th century. It is most often associated with Islam and the countries of the Middle East, and to a lesser extent with Protestantism in the United States. Religious fundamentalism often manifests itself as a complete or partial rejection of modern ideas,

be it religious tolerance, secularization, various achievements in science and technology that for various reasons are not compatible with a certain religious doctrine). This is why these religions are often associated with nationalism (a cult towards one's own nation, which creates a chauvinistic attitude (spreading hatred) towards other nations).

A third option is for religions to try to achieve a more universal approach. In this case, religion tries to achieve ecumenism (a movement to bring together all Christian churches, from the Greek ecumena - the populated part of the world, the whole world), so it tries to bring closer and unite different faiths and beliefs. Instead of starting from emphasizing diversity, it emphasizes common values and beliefs, which should become global, common to the whole world. Belief in universal human rights or a certain conception of social justice can serve as an example. Liberation theology as a good example of development. Although liberation theory is rooted in Catholicism, its interests are political and religious, with a concern for the poor in Latin America. Many of the problems of the poor can be attributed to the way the capitalist system works. A second example of a universalist approach is religious environmentalism (according to this theory, human behavior is shaped exclusively by the influence of the environment, i.e. society and culture, and not by some innate factors. This theory was current during the Enlightenment when there was a belief that all people are *tabula rasa* and that it is culture that creates the differences between the classes. This opinion especially applied to aggression, because they believed that bad institutions, bad upbringing and social hierarchy corrupted the naturally good and rational men). Religious environmentalism seeks to encourage different religious groups to act together in an attempt to save what they call God's created Earth. Globalization will not lead to the weakening and destruction of religion, but it will limit its influence. Religion is no longer an integral part of powerful

subsystems such as the global economy, political systems, and science. It will still remain important as a communication system, it will be able to influence world events to a certain extent, but it will not shape them directly.

Spatial proximity increases the likelihood of clashes. That is why intense clashes often break out along the borders between civilizations. In the former Yugoslavia, clashes broke out in the area where the Orthodox Christian and Muslim civilizations met. In the Middle East, the conflicts were and are between Islam, Judaism and Western Christianity. The Gulf War was a conflict between Iraq and coalition forces under the mandate of the United Nations and the leadership of the United States. Five days after the Iraqi attack on Kuwait, the United States deployed its forces on the border of Saudi Arabia and Iraq under the pretext that they were called by Saudi King Fahd fearing for the security of his country. Then the conflict between Muslims and Hindus in the Indian subcontinent, and China is repressing the Buddhists in Tibet and the Muslim minorities in China itself.

Most of the conflicts in the world could be attributed to religious rather than political divisions. For example, during the Civil War in Spain in the thirties of the last century, countries that were politically close to fascism, communism and democracy intervened. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is a conflict in which the current Second Spanish Republic and left-wing groups fought against right-wing fascist rebellions led by Francisco Franco, who succeeded in overthrowing the republican government and establishing a dictatorship. Although the dominance of Western civilization is felt at the moment, changes have already occurred. China, for example, already has nuclear weapons, and Islamic countries such as Pakistan, India, Iraq, Iran are working on the development of nuclear weapons. There is the possibility of a more

intense arms race between Eastern civilizations based on the Islamic and Confucian religions. Given the low probability that a world or global civilization will emerge, different civilizations must learn to live together.

Religious pluralism has serious consequences both institutionally and at the level of individual consciousness. At the institutional level, religious pluralism suggests that any religious monopoly will be undermined and possibly greatly modified or abolished. Religious organizations cannot expect a certain population to passively submit to their authority. Instead, people will have to be persuaded to accept such authority. In other words, something like a religious marketplace is emerging, where individuals now have a choice. Today, individuals on the basis of their rational thinking accept or not accept the religious tradition into which they were born. It does not necessarily change what they practice, but it changes how they believe and accept religious practice. Even when individuals decide to accept the conservative version of tradition, they are aware that they have made that decision themselves and that that decision can be undone at some future point. Therefore, there is a big difference between traditionalism and neo-traditionalism, or fundamentalism (Berger and Huntington, 2002).

But Islam and Christianity are part of the Eastern faiths that are not mutually exclusive. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have different names for one God. It was probably done to show and prove their difference. But they also allow believers from all three religious denominations to pray and confess in the same temple of God. However, the problem arises when mutual misunderstandings and conflicts arise within each of the mentioned ethnic and religious communities. For example, ethnic group in Europe are essentially closed. In them, misunderstandings and problems of an economic, social, political and cultural nature arise that cannot be resolved within the communities. From that moment, as per some rule, a

duty culprit is required. And who would that be? Of course, the scapegoat is sought in the members of the ethnic group closest to you. In this way, the real reasons for the social crisis of their own ethnic community are very successfully concealed and the attention of its members is diverted from the real culprits who should either be expelled or punished. Because of that, the maxim that one who cannot hold a human conversation with a member of his own faith, much less can do so with a member of a different faith, is much more acceptable.

In this sense, Durkheim's sociological thesis is very relevant. If we paraphrase it, it would look like this: if in a social community there is negative and destructive energy that can completely disintegrate the community, then that negative energy is directed towards the neighboring social community. In that case, "my community" is free from disintegration and internal conflicts. In order to save one's own tribe, it is best to attack the neighboring tribe (Durkheim, 1995).

2. Fundamentalism and ecumenism

The claims of universalist religions that the world was created by one God do not lead us to the conclusion that God is the primary long-term driving force in globalization. It leads to proving that humanity constitutes a single community regardless of geographical space and political territories. Among the universalist religions, Christianity and Islam have proven to be the most effective globalizers because of their conversion missions. It is most explicit in Islam. The world goal of Islam is the establishment of a community of believers (Ummah) in which the practices outlined in the Qur'an will be followed literally and which will engage in a holy war (Jihad) against the infidels. The expansion of the Arab and Ottoman empires from the XII to the XV centuries, under the

auspices of this ideology, led to the unification of nations under a single cultural system.³

The rapid demographic growth of Muslims already suggests that Islam could be the religion of globalization. Other authors consider that fundamentalism is an Islamic version of globalization. But the fundamentalists are only one force (consisting of a smaller number of believers), which we also find in other religions and not only in Islam. Fundamentalism is only a response to the challenge of globalization. The idea is to establish a moral system, but on traditional values. What is dangerous about fundamentalism is that only one tradition is acceptable (of course its own), and all other traditions, religions, worldviews are unacceptable (Hood Ralph Jr., Hill Peter and Williamson Paul, 2005).

In the world today there are about 1.3 billion Muslims living in more than 70 countries. Islam was never just a religion. It is at the same time a complex way of life with detailed instructions for the moral, economic and political behavior of individuals and social groups. The essential characteristic of Islamic fundamentalism is the idea that Islamic religious principles should at the same time be the main principles of the social, moral and political life of a state. From here follows the intention for the primacy of religion over politics. In practice, this means that an "Islamic state" should be established on theocratic principles, instead of a secular state in which religion is separated from politics. In the theocratic state there is an overlap of religion and politics. It is ruled by a spiritual authority instead of a worldly one that applies the principles of theocratic law as a code of legal and righteous behavior, with a system of punishments for all those who violate Sharia law. The

³ The main problem is the political interpretation of religion for the sake of the interests of certain elites, who turn the belief of the "Kingdom of Heaven" into the "Kingdom of Earth". With such an ideology, they mislead the masses that they must fight to create God's kingdom on earth, which is against the philosophy of religions.

term Sharia is much broader than any western concept of law because it covers all areas of life. Later in the XIX century, the power of Sharia weakened, primarily due to the European influence to soften the strict family laws. The process of adapting to the new era is slowly felt, but also the pressure of Western countries that they run big campaigns especially when it comes to the treatment of women, and the customs and laws of punishment by stoning which still happens in some countries in Africa. A typical example of this was Iran where in 1979 the people's revolution brought to power the Iranian cleric and political leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. With this, Iran declared itself an Islamic Republic. With this, Iran becomes a symbol of political Islam. It then spread to Sudan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries (Methenitis Dimitrios, 2019).

Christianity is one of the most numerous religions with about 2 billion believers. In terms of Western civilization, it can be stated that the United States has the largest number of believers who regularly go to church. It is precisely in the USA that the "New Christian Right" appears as a typical example of Christian fundamentalism. This movement is primarily concerned with moral and social issues, aimed at maintaining or renewing all that Christian culture means. Since it appeared in the seventies of the 20th century, the New Christian Right stands for the restoration of forgotten traditional family values, but at the same time it fights against abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia and some other modern moral challenges. It must be pointed out that this coalition of religious groups has a negative attitude towards the black question and feminism. The broad coalition of religious groups known as the New Religious Right is strengthening its influence especially after September 11, 2001.

Against the exclusivity of fundamentalism that mandates solutions once and for all, ecumenism proposes a plan by which tolerance and dialogue can be guided by universal values. The ideal of connecting people in one human community-ecumene was set by ancient thinkers. During the 1960s and 1970s, Christianity experienced an ecumenical movement in which dialogue between its churches and denominations increased in an effort to discover common principles and commitments in terms of unity. In this case, religion seeks to achieve ecumenism (a movement for the rapprochement of all Christian churches, the Greek ecumenical-populated part of the world, the whole world), so it seeks to bring together and unite the various faiths and beliefs. Instead of emphasizing diversity, it emphasizes common values and beliefs, which should become global, common to the whole world. An example is the belief in universal human rights or a particular conception of social justice. Although the theory of liberation is based on Catholicism, its interests are political and religious, caring for the poor in Latin America. Many of the problems of the poor can be attributed to the way the capitalist system works. A second example of a Universalist approach is religious environmentalism. According to this theory, human behavior is shaped solely by the influence of the environment, i.e., society and culture, and not by some innate factors. This theory was current during the Enlightenment when all people believed that *tabula rasa* and that culture is what creates the differences between the classes. This view especially referred to aggression, because they believed that bad institutions, bad upbringing and social hierarchy corrupted the good and rational man by nature. Religious environmentalism seeks to encourage different religious groups to work together in an effort to save what they call a God-created land (Wahba Mourad, 2022).

3. Religious aspects of the conflicts in Europe

Today, Europe is faced with a crisis of moral, religious and even civilizational values. Many have talked about the moral decadence of Europe. Furthermore, European countries are constantly faced with political crises. The European Union has not fully fulfilled the expectations of its Member States. The ethno-religious mobilization of citizens and political parties in the states in the Western Balkans is still present. In that sense, the role of religion is realized in several directions. If the religious feelings of believers are abused or if religious teachings are brutally perverted, then religion is placed in the role of an amplifier of ethnic and political conflicts. Then a certain illusion is created that those are in fact religious conflicts. Such is the conflict in Ukraine, which many call “a battle for religion”. When you analyze the conflict between the Ukrainian and Russian governmental forces and the separatists supported by Moscow in the eastern part of the country, it becomes much harder to separate the centuries-long ideological and religious tensions from the current political and military conflict. On the other hand, perhaps the greatest source of social conflicts in contemporary Europe is the tension and violence in which participate people from minority groups of Muslim culture and Islam faith (Jevtić Miroljub, 2008).

Processes of globalization lead us undoubtedly to the conclusion that religion in the global era is understood within the context of changes in the world in general. This is based on the assumptions that borders among societies are becoming less important and socio-cultural developments in certain societies are increasingly influenced by events from other parts of the world. Globalization imposes situations in which confessions, ethnic groups, countries, and civilizations affect each other inevitably, unlike in the past when they were more or less isolated from each other. All of this

has two opposing social effects. On the one hand, there is a risk of an outbreak of clashes between different religions, which are present within a social community. On the other hand, these close contacts among different religions may diminish differences among them, and thus reduce the tensions and conflicts.

The XXI century offers opportunities for showing the authentic contribution of spirituality to the globalizing world. While some Muslims are opposing the world of “Disney” and “Nike”, as a decadent one, a large number of Christians have accepted consumer habits without being aware of it. Although large corporations tend to steer globalization, they cannot do that if they do not convince the citizens of the world to believe in consumption as a road to pleasure. As we have pointed out, deepens the gap between the rich and the poor, and stirs up the Christian and Islamic fundamentalism. It is indisputable that Christians could go back to the Gospels to find in them the model by which to live. That model does not send the people back in the world of forests, oceans, and cities, but presents them as spiritual beings with material experience. People do not only require an answer to the question: “Who am I?”, but also to the question: “Who is the other one?”, and they do not believe that satisfaction could be achieved by the introduction of various devices and appliances, but it stems from a sincere striving for justice and care for others.

The pseudo-democratic processes in Europe are a means of ruling the majority, wherein the leaders of those processes succeed in manipulating the unthinking masses using Christian scripture. Through the religious worldview, the masses mobilized in the European society’s, in which Christian and Islamic values become simple commodities in neoliberal capitalism. Does denying the right of others to be different from you means you are moving into the space of open and concealed violence? This problem arises when a so-called overlap between right-winged political forces and

their ideologies is established. The problem is that original Christianity and Islam were falsified and used by the political right in the European states. They define society as an organic national, ethnic, and racial whole, which is primarily oriented towards national and patriarchal values. In the case of Europe, the division of people between “religious us” and “religious them”; Europeans and Non-Europeans; believers and atheists, breeds violence which is founded on a totalitarian understanding of faith. The idea that God is one, and the belief in Him differently placed in different religions, can lead some individuals, religious and political organizations to the false notion that we are “us” because we are not “them” and the only way to remain “us” is to exterminate “them”. Because of this, religious exclusivism leads to a violent ideology and religious extremism.

If we wish to define religious exclusivity according to the example of Christianity, we can do it in this way. Christianity is a religion which, excludes when it calls for its believers to dedicate all of their lives towards God, and not to the polytheistic gods. On the other hand, Christianity does not exclude when it urges its followers that if they cannot accept the God of their neighbors, then they should accept their neighbors. If they cannot accept their faith, they can accept that they are faithful. However, religious institutions frequently endeavor to exclude other believers from Earth and Heaven because they are different from them. They have distorted history for this purpose. Their ideas are clear: we have an exclusive historical right to a certain religion, which is unavailable to you.

From then on, this has been the rule, rather than the exception. Because of this, religious exclusivity, without undermining other forms of exclusivity, has generated the biggest problems in the Europe. Faced with this, religious leaders have tried to overcome this state, which at worst can lead to bloody conflict. In one

interview, Pope Francis said: "A secular state, unlike other states where religion is imposed on everyone, can allow any believer a chance to believe in his God. All people are equal as God's sons and daughters, and creators of their own dignity. Everyone has to have the freedom to practice his or her religion, within the religion belongs to".

When we are talking about religious pluralism, I would like to refer to the differences between the religious varieties.

They testify to the existence of many different religions. Religious pluralism, meaning a relatively peaceful coexistence and cooperation of different religions. It is not aimed at creating a single world religion as a syncretism of different religions. Nor it is a simple existence of one next to the others (following the principle "separate boot equal"), which was a way of finding an excuse and "covering" the racial segregation in the United States until the '50s of the last century. Nowadays, in European countries, religious freedom is interpreted as the simple existence of one next to the others, without mutual dialogue and meetings. Meeting here would be mostly a violent meeting.

The best soil for introducing religious and ethnic tolerance, as well as the idea of ecumenism and neo-ecumenism, is civil society. It is a supra-national society where the primary criterion is citizenship. Such kind of society generalizes basic human values. The generalization of values and norms goes to the creation of universal human rights and values. With this, inherited ethnic rights and linked habits, moral and legal norms fall. Universal values and norms, accompanied by human rights and freedoms, are wider than the values of the particular ethnic community. However, the system of values and norms should and has to rise to a universal level. As there is a separation of the state from the