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Religion and Globalization

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Introduction

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Symposia are not supposed to be prescient; occasionally, however, they are. The papers in this volume were originally presented at the 2017 Kripke Symposium, which was organized around the theme of “Religion in Global Context.” The symposium drew its inspiration from Creighton University’s new president, Fr. Daniel Hendrickson, S.J., and his call for more engagement between our university and the worlds it inhabits – physical, local, geo-political, professional, and intellectual. Part of this call included the late 2015 launch of the Creighton Global Initiative with a mission to take more of the Creighton community out into the world and bring more of the world to Creighton:

Centered on Creighton University’s commitment to advance global learning, Creighton Global Initiative creates resources that offer opportunities for faculty, staff and students to embrace global perspectives. Through philanthropic support, we will animate a global focus for the Creighton University community, living out our mission to stimulate critical and creative

thinking and provide ethical perspectives for dealing with an increasingly complex world.

Fr. Hendrickson expressed what many other political, academic, and industry leaders also espouse – old boundaries no longer apply in the global movement of ideas, people, goods, and services. To use the expression coined by Thomas Friedman, the “world is flat.” The symposium heeded that call to explore a global perspective by probing the role of religion in the global marketplace.

The inception of the conference saw storm clouds gathering on the horizon, however, as anti-globalist sentiment rose worldwide throughout 2016 and 2017. The Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom passed in part because of the “Leave” campaign’s nationalist, anti-globalist platform. Marine Le Pen, leader of France’s nationalist National Front party, gained increasing prominence and was one of two contenders in the second round of France’s 2017 presidential election. The nationalist, anti-globalist Alternative for Germany party claimed 94 seats in the Bundestag in the 2017 elections – the first time that the party had ever won seats in the German federal elections. Apart from the rise of nationalism and the decline, in some parts, of globalism there existed a reorientation of global politics in ways that upset the Western hegemony. A prime example of this is the 2016 election of Rodrigo Duterte as president of the Philippines. President Duterte’s foreign policy shift away from the United States and toward the western Pacific demonstrated that the old hierarchies – particularly with America at the global helm – might need rethinking.

Then came the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Globalization always had its opponents, but the depth of the backlash against globalization was unexpected by most analysts and political commentators. Donald J. Trump began his presidential campaign squarely against globalization. Proclaiming an “America First” agenda, he was against free trade relationships such as the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Upon becoming president, he scrapped the TPP and is now seeking to renegotiate NAFTA, with the threat to unilaterally scrap it as well. He wants to build a wall along the U.S. southern border with Mexico to keep out undocumented immigrants; he wants to limit legal immigration based exclusively on merit; he attempted to ban – and was partially successful – Muslims from entering the U.S. He has set tariffs on some imports (washing machines and solar panels). He pulled out of the Paris Climate Accord and threatens to scrap the nuclear treaty with Iran. Trump has championed an American nationalism that puts the U.S. at odds with the forces of globalization advocated by leaders around the world, and he won a large conservative electoral base, many of whom themselves had not experienced the benefits of globalization.

Despite the setbacks from rising nationalist sentiment and realigned international alliances, globalization continues. Once the forces of globalization have been unleashed, they are not easy to suppress. The world continues to be flat, and the benefits of globalization far outweigh its drawbacks. Prescience, in these papers, derives from their fundamental assumption that globalism is an inescapable force, and that globalism deserves at least a careful consideration without the reactionary politics and processes of the late twenty-teens.

This volume explores the many and diverse roles that religion has and might play within a global context. Although religion, when mixed with nationalism, has reinforced boundaries

that separate people, religion may also function in a global context to break down such barriers. Religion may transcend national, ethnic, economic, or social boundaries. The first few papers in this volume – those by Carney, Conover, Flores, Rödlach, and Stephens – explore the role of religion in historical and contemporary contexts in which such boundaries separate people. Taking a different approach, globalization is often understood primarily in terms of economics and the free market economy. Religion, however, also plays a role here, and the papers by Coomber, McRorie, and Salzman and Lawler address religion in the global economic context. As the Paris Climate Accord – now signed by every nation but the U.S. – makes clear, environmental issues are a global concern. The climate transcends all national boundaries, and many other environmental concerns have global implications. The role of religion in this context is addressed by Feder, Simkins, and Miller. Finally, globalization raises a number of practical concerns that entail religion. Smith addresses the challenges faced by interfaith marriages – where religion itself may function as the boundary – and Kelly reflects on the utility of religiously motivated short-term mission trips.

The essays in this supplement volume arose while globalization saw the first serious challenges presented against it in decades. In a way, they presciently saw the coming storm and provide careful analyses of globalization as it relates to religion. While the basic orientation of the papers rejects the current nationalist tendencies, they do challenge some aspects of globalization. Most importantly, they demonstrate the ways that religion intersects with, bolsters, and even challenges some of the prevailing forms of globalization in an increasingly flat world.

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