

GLOBALIZATION101.ORG
UNIT ON RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

Introduction

This unit focuses on religious perspectives on globalization. In the introductory discussion, students will discuss the role of values in shaping perspectives about globalization, through consideration of an article on globalization written by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a Globalization101.org “Ask the Experts” interview. Then, students will consider how religious values generally may conflict with both economic and cultural globalization. Next, they will learn about the specific responses to globalization of certain religions. Finally, they will learn about how some religions have benefited from globalization.

NOTE: Since this unit covers religion, it may not be appropriate for public schools. We advise that teachers exercise careful judgment in discussing these matters. Avoid judgments. Keep discussions to statements of fact, and away from the discussing the validity of particular religious claims. Avoid stereotyping. Emphasize that religions are not monolithic, and that individuals of the same faith often disagree on important details. Make students aware of the need for sensitivity toward religious traditions and the obstacle that stereotyping presents for academic inquiry in comparative religion.

Student Objectives

At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Understand the reactions of religious believers to globalization.
2. Differentiate between the attitudes of different religious traditions toward globalization.
3. Recognize how globalization has helped spread religious movements.

Note that the concepts discussed in this lesson are challenging. We recommend that it be used for advanced classes.

Resources

Required

- Globalization101.org interview with Ira Rifkin, “Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization”: <http://www.Globalization101.org/ask/>
- Globalization101.org, Unit on Culture and Globalization: <http://www.globalization101.org/issue/culture>

- International Monetary Fund (IMF), “Globalization: Threat or Opportunity,” <http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200.htm>

Suggested

- Cardinal Francis George, “Globalization: Challenges to the Church’s Mission,” <http://www.omiusa.org/fran-george.htm>
- The Bahá’í International Community, “The Prosperity of Humankind,” <http://www.bahai.org/article-1-7-4-1.html>
- Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir, "The Jewish Ethicist: The Risks and Benefits of a Worldwide Marketplace," <http://besr.org/ethicist/globalization.html>.
- World Council of Churches: “Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Churches Response to the Policies of International Financial Institutions”: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/temptation.html>
- David Frawley, “The Hindu Response to Globalization,” in *Hinduism and the Clash of Civilizations*, <http://www.bharatvani.org/books/civilization/partI9.htm>
- Chandra Muzaffar, “Globalization and Religion”: <http://www.islamonline.net/english/views/2002/03/article16.shtml>
- James Kurth, “Religion and Globalization”: <http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/0707.199905.kurth.religionglobalization.html>
- Alfred Bloom, "Globalization and Buddhism," <http://www.shindharmanet.com/writings/globalization.htm>
- David Loy, “Religion and the Market”: <http://www.religiousconsultation.org/loy.htm>
- Philip Jenkins, “The Next Christianity,” <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/10/jenkins.htm>
- Vinay Lal, "Reflections on the Indian Diaspora," <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Diaspora/reflect.html>

Time Required

4-5 classes

Procedure

Introductory Discussion—Values and Globalization (2 class periods)

1. Begin a discussion of religious perspective on globalization by discussing the role of religion generally in shaping the values, beliefs, and policies of both societies and individuals. Note that religious influences can be conscious and unconscious, overtime merge into broader cultural values, and are often more influential in non-Western, traditional societies than in the more secular West.
2. Have students watch the Globalization101.org *Ask the Experts* interview with Ira Rifkin. Based on the comments in the video, discuss why the students think

- religion might be important in shaping societies' and individuals' perspectives on globalization.
3. Next, describe briefly what the International Monetary Fund is and its role in globalization, based on the Globalization101.org Issue Brief on *What is the IMF? and What is the World Bank?* Then have students read the IMF paper, "Globalization: Threat or Opportunity."
 4. Ask students to identify the values that underlie the IMF's generally positive view of globalization. For example, ask them if free markets are values-free, or do they carry implied values expressed through lifestyle choices? What values are inherent in a consumerist orientation? Does globalization prioritize the belief in the efficiency of free markets over social, cultural, and environmental concerns? Ask students to think of any criticisms they have of the values of the IMF.
 5. Then, discuss why the values of some religions may conflict with some of the values underlying the IMF's view of globalization. Some issues to consider are the following: How do values associated with a high degree of personal freedom conflict with the values associated with communal responsibility? How do values that stress individual choice challenge religious values? Does consumerism contradict religious values?
 6. Finally, have students read the section on pop culture in the Globalization101.com Issue Brief on *Culture*, <http://www.globalization101.org/issue/culture/28.asp>. Discuss how international media spread Western consumer preferences to local cultures via advertising and a focus on "pop culture." How might this conflict with religiously derived values in more traditional societies?

Religions' Various Perspectives on Globalization (2-3 class periods)

7. Have students read some of the articles on various religious traditions and their approaches to globalization listed above. You may also assign individual students to read single articles and be prepared to discuss them in class, rather than assigning all students to read all the articles.
8. Lead the students in a discussion of the specific approaches of various religions to globalization. Suggested ways to do so include the following:
 - Contrast the core teachings of the Abrahamic traditions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism—as presented by Cardinal George, Rabbi Meir, and Chandra Muzaffar in "Globalization and Religion" with the Buddhist perspective presented by David Loy and Alfred Bloom.
 - Discuss James Kurth's equating of economic and cultural globalization with Calvinist Protestantism, primarily as it developed in the United States.
 - Discuss the "social justice" Protestant perspective toward globalized free-markets presented in the World Council of Churches' article. How does it compare to the Catholic perspective on globalization as explained by Cardinal George?
 - What is it about the values implied by cultural globalization that are offensive to traditional Muslims (refer to James Kurth and Chandra Muzaffar)?

- As shown in the article, “The Prosperity of Humankind,” the Baha’i Faith believes in the eventual unity of all of humanity. How does that fit in with the growth in influence of multinational corporations?
9. Have students read the articles on “global Christianity” and the Indian diaspora. Discuss how religions have spread as a result of globalization, ranging from the spread of Christianity by European explorers to the contemporary spread via immigration of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in the West.

Concluding Assignment

10. In order to assess students’ assimilation of the material, assign them to answer the following essay question: “Is religion a force for opposition to globalization or is it a force for alternative views of globalization? Make specific references to the beliefs of at least three of the religions we have studied.”