

## Understanding Globalization and Christianity, Challenges, Prospects and Solutions

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**Abstract.** Globalization is the most current ideology in contemporary world which is now becoming or is already a global village. This coming together of the entire world does not only cover the economics, political, social and cultural realm but, also the religious spheres of life with its attendant benefits, challenges and prospects. Hence, this paper sets out not only to examine the benefits, challenges and prospects of globalization and Christianity but, also to proffer solution or recommend the way forward in the issue of globalization and Christianity.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Christianity, Challenges, Prospects, Solutions

### 1. Introduction

The saying that ‘no man is an island’ can rightly be justified through globalization. Globalization as a concept has emerged as a defining process of our time. In almost all the leading core industrialized economies, the opportunities and gains of this process have been publicized by its opponents and supporters (Ezeanyika & Oruebor, 2001:78). It has also come to be accepted as the big idea of the late twentieth century. This however has not changed the fact that it lacks a precise definition.

The above opening statement notwithstanding, the term globalization succinctly explains elements of a widespread perception, that there is a broadening and spreading up of international interconnectedness and interrelationships in all aspects of life, religion inclusive. The bone of contention in globalization seems to be a global shift that is, a world presumably being shaped, by economic and technological forces into a shared economic, cultural, religious, and political arena.

### 2. Meaning and Definition of Globalization

Globalization constitutes a great hope for some people and nations, and a great threat for others. This is so because, for the defenders of free-market economies and non-Christian extremists, it is sort of panacea for expanding the opportunities for increased wealth, employment, and liberty worldwide. Others including the Christian extremists however, see it as an expression of an unjust system that favours the rich and marginalizes the poor, distorts the politics of social aid, and destroys local cultures.

Globalization can usefully be conceived as a process (or set processes), which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transactional or interrogational flows and net works of activities, interaction and power. Four major types of change generally characterize it.

It involves a stretching of social, political, economic, religious and cultural activities across political frontiers, regions and continents. It suggests the intensification, or the growing magnitude of connectedness and flows of trade, investment, finance, migration culture etc.

The growing extensity and intensity of global interconnectedness and interrelationship can be linked to a speeding up of global interactions and processes, as the evolution of international systems of transport and communication increases the velocity of the diffusion of ideas, information capital and people. The growing extensity and velocity of interactions can be associated with their deepening impact such that the effects of distant events can be highly significant elsewhere and even the most local developments may come to have enormous global consequences. In this sense, the boundaries between domestic matters and global affairs can become increasingly blurred (Ezeanyika, 2004:127)

Based on the above, (Ezeanyika, 2004:127) defined globalization as the widening, intensifying spreading up and growing impact of international inter-connectedness interrelationships. Kiely (1995:207) defines globalization as “a world in which societies cultures, politics, and economics have in some sense, come closer together”. He further states that the concept can be seen “intensification of worldwide social relation which link distant localities in such a way that the local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa. The implication of this view is that more and more parts of the world are brought together in global system and are so affected by happenings elsewhere such that all components of life are each brought into compartment of one single system.

Geoffrey Peterson and Peter Gill (1993:8 1) see globalization as dealing with increasing globalization scope of a wide range of issue affecting the welfare of citizens of nation states and the consequent reduction in the autonomy of individual nation states.

According to Anthony Giddins as quoted by G. Peterson and P. Gill (1993:91), globalization is the increasing integration of world economic activities made possible by improvement in technology and improved means of communication resulting in the situation in which the national state becomes increasingly weakened and subsumed under the forces of the market.

Inferred from the above, globalization can be seen as a movement towards a global economy in which national boundaries cease to matter. It corresponds to an unprecedented concentration of space and time through the development of new means of communication and information technologies across the globe (world).

It is aimed at creating new avenues for the regulation and functioning of a social order that goes beyond that of the nation-state.

### 3. The Concept of Christianity

William, H. Harris and Judith S. (1978:551) Ed. defined Christianity as a religion founded in Palestine by Jesus Christ and his followers. It has become one of the world’s major religions predominating Europe and America where it has been a powerful historical force and cultural influence, but which also claims adherents in virtually every country of the world.

Similarly, the new Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia Vol. 4 (1768:5 19) sees Christianity as a

religion founded in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D. by Jesus Christ of Nazareth, which has become the largest of the religions with a membership of over 1,000,000,000, its largest group being the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern orthodox churches and the Protestant churches.

The central teaching of traditional Christianity is that, Jesus is the Son of God. The second person of the Holy Trinity of God the father, God the son, and God the spirit; that his life on earth, his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into heaven are proofs of God’s love for man and forgiveness of man’s sin; and that by faith in Christ, man attains salvation and eternal life; its guiding principles are contained in the Holy Bible.

### 4. Globalization and Christianity

The term globalization of Christianity has some religious connotations. For it was the Lord’s command for people to go out to the world to preach the gospel. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matt.28: 19) Globalization in itself is the joining of all the people, the planets over into a single interrelated system of economic, political and cultural ties, increasingly mediated by the computer and above all internet (Victor Ferkiss 200:14)

Christianity as a religion is greatly rooted in, if not interwoven with, globalization. For Christianity to survive and travel to other parts of the world (i.e. the great commission), it becomes inseparable from globalization. Through globalization, the ideas of Christianity and culture of the Jews are being sold across the world. Globalization therefore aids the spread of Christianity. According to Thomas L. Friedman (1999:378) globalization is rooted in the idea of library, which is rightly understood as the offspring of Christianity.

From the above, it is clear that Christianity has been interested in globalization from the earliest days of the faith. We inherited from Israel a story about the whole world. So we have understood ourselves in the context of global history. And with the implantation of the Christian churches in almost all countries of the world, Christianity has become a global religion. We have emphasized the importance of the indigenization of Christianity in many cultural contexts in which it now exists. We have developed a world council of churches in which younger churches have equal place with the older ones, more importantly, perhaps since the world parliament of

religion in 1984, emphasis shifted from proselytizing to dialogue and cooperation.

In the same vein, through globalization, Christianity has come to recognize that it has to learn from other religious traditions. All these attempts could be seen as “ecclesiastical globalization”.

Christianity has concern for the whole world. It opposes parochialism. In Christianity, we believe that people everywhere are just as precious in God’s sight as our next-door neighbours. We are convinced that our concern for the well being of others should extend to all of them. Economic globalization scores quite well in this regard. It brings people all over the world into contact with one another. Ethnic prejudices decline. People from various parts of the world are treated more or less equally.

More so, Christianity affirms the enjoyment of economic goods. Good food, fresh water, adequate clothing, comfortable homes, reliable health and other goods and services produced by the economy are positive values: the global economy is producing a vast increase in goods and services. In this respect, Christians support the goal of supplying more goods and services, and the global economy is doing this.

In essence, therefore, globalization as it appears to be at first sight, a movement resulting from the daily need of people in general to deal with an advanced, integrated and all-inclusive economy is possible only through advanced technology. This liberal economy and free trade without any old restrictions accepted or imposed will bring about a new way of dealing with each other, among people; countries or nationalities. It will not only affect the economy but the people’s lives and their relationships. Globalization with its modern technological means does not intend at all to limit those international relationships only in the field of buying and selling, for the buyer and the seller are always connected to other. Economic matters are the factors that give life its taste for man; not only in its economic dimensions, but also in the spiritual forms.

##### **5. The Challenges of Globalization and Christianity**

Thomas Friedman (1999:320) states that deliberate planning and massive human efforts have created the present system of globalization. This system exploits the poor and enriches the wealthy. Christianity on the other hand cares about the world’s poor’. We all live on one planet, and technology has brought us much closer together. To this end Christianity sees

inevitable the scientific, economic, and social development (i.e, globalization).

However, in spite of the interwoven and interrelatedness of globalization and Christianity, there still abound some challenges. Christianity seeks the value of man as well as to preserve man as a person. Considering profit (Globalization) a reason, and a goal of the universal economy is a destructive starting point at the expense of people’s lives.

According to Paul Yazigi (2004:173) profit cares for the self-interests but does not care for human relationships. Profit does not look for the value of man other than from the side of what man owns. Also, it is hoped that economic globalization will bring about more jobs opportunities and a fair and humane distribution of gifts, with no ethnic, skin colour, or religious limitations. However, it is inevitable to point out here that, globalization has put all the international stock exchange business in the hand of six nation (i.e. America, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, and China). Globalization is therefore not development where wealth does not become global but people and the world become an arena under the tyranny of a few. Furthermore, contemporary man lives in the smallest village and is following in details, the events happening in the largest cities of the world. Man is following the development of thought, and even clothing. The problem here is, what then becomes the future of local matters? Does it mean that it will not attack them but will cease to compete against them? May be norm of life that whatever is weak dies away and whatever is strong remains, according to its strength is applicable here.

Considering the above question, Yazigi observed that there are some habits we may call “stupid” in economic terms (i.e. globalization) but which have a precious ‘humane’ value, such as generosity and forgiveness, and like the presence of social and moral rules that are not focused on gaining profit or self-interest.

Globalization therefore invades the consuming mind at the expense of Christian values of sacrifices, Charity, and respect for others. A quick glance at the advertisements and universal television programme show that Christian values such as love, Chastity, obedience to the divine world, spiritual meekness, etc. have been replaced by the tools of globalization with self interest, desires and luxuries.

Kawall, Jason (2003:37), Nathan Rosenberg and L.E Birdzell (2003: 3 -7) see globalization as the agent of impoverishment and inexorable slow agent of

enrichment; globalization has also destroyed a lot of old ways of knowledge. Christianity on the other hand instead of enriching and empowering people does the opposite. It weakens people's ability to think rationally. It conditions them to believe that they are sinful depraved people living in a state of sin without Jesus in their lives. This is a controlling spirit of fear because they are led to believe that without Jesus they will be punished in the everlasting eternal fires of hell. It is this fear of hell that keeps a Christian in bondage to the church.

Therefore, we may say that globalization in itself is self-centered with its economic motives and destroys human communities as well as devastates the natural world. While Christianity has respect for man, it does not allow one to think rationally. It also negates local culture since it tends to overshadow traditional aspects of life. However, both globalization and Christianity are a threat to the local matters e.g. dress, language etc. nevertheless while globalization emphasizes rational thinking, Christianity talks about faith in God thereby restricting man's rationality or thinking.

Furthermore, while globalization emphasizes the coming together of the whole world to maximize profit, Christianity emphasizes the universality and oneness of man. The two ideas when viewed together become contradictory but inseparable. For globalization is part and parcel of Christianity. The problem of Christianity in the current globalization is that, it falls in the trap of theory and speculation of globalization. This is because, it uses the mind to talk about the ways of life. It is therefore always in danger of becoming speculation in the language of specialists, thus remaining separate from practical life. Even though the church (Christianity) has earlier played a large role in the early development of the scientific method (Globalization) but today due to the rapidity of scientific and technological advances it cannot react quickly enough to give sound moral advice to those who are looking for guidance.

Similarly John B. Cobb (2006:7) observes that through globalization and Christianity, we have confused the gospel with North Atlantic culture. We have linked missions with colonialism. We have disrupted traditional cultures. And we have failed to appreciate the wisdom of other traditions from which we sought converts.

## **6. The Prospects of Globalization and Christianity**

It is true that man is both a social and religious being. As a social being, he tends to interact and relate with other people. He is therefore not an island to himself

neither is he dependent only on himself hence, the need for globalization. As a religious being, he places high regard to the value of man and considers all people as one before the Supreme Being (Christianity). Thus in spite of the inherent challenges of globalization and Christianity the future is still clear for its continuity.

We can be reasonably confident that globalization and Christianity will affect the future because of two reasons. First because, it is already here and second, because the forces by which it was decreed promise to make its mandate even more enforceable in the foreseeable future. Its most salient attributes manifest themselves in commodity trade, exchange of technology and intellectual property as well as religious ideas i.e. Christianity.

Furthermore, since man was in the image of God the creator, he is always trying to create new things. With these innovations, technology transfer and technology change and Christianity, more and more people of the world are coming together as one people. Globalization and Christianity according to Baumil Willian J. (2002:85) have revolutionized transportation and communication. They have facilitated communication around the world or globe from a period of months to a day or two in the case of transport of physical products, and virtually to an instant in the case of information.

We must therefore not forget that until the middle of the 18th century, travel by land was an excruciatingly daunting and difficult activity. And until near the middle of the nineteenth century, information ordinarily could not be delivered more rapidly than a horse could gallop. Landes (1999:745) observed that, globalization and Christianity through innovation has reduced the real cost of transportation to a small fraction of its previous levels, and has changed the activity from one that was incredibly perilous to one that is among the economy's safest. It has also changed the old local cultures that were so dreadful and dehumanizing. For example, travel by legs and horses has been substituted with cars, planes, ships etc face to face communication with telephones, computers etc, the killing of twins has been stopped among other things.

In conclusion, one could say that with promises of globalization and Christianity alongside with their advantages it will continue to show-case even in the future. Above all, with man's interdependent nature as well as his respect for his value which continues to exist, globalization and Christianity will have a brighter prospect.

## 7. Panacea to the Challenges of Globalization and Christianity

It has earlier on been established that globalization and Christianity pose some challenges to the human race. It is therefore our intention here to suggest ways by which these challenges could be solved or eliminated.

Globalization should be substituted with the ecumenical movement. The former is based on or primarily motivated by the desire to enlarge the market and to merge different cultures into a new one, in accordance with the conviction of those who are in a position to influence the world wide public. While the latter is that primarily based on love for one's brother and sister and respect of the human person whom it seeks to serve as well as unity or oneness of the Christians worldwide.

According to Anthony Giddens (1990:64) it will help proclaim the fact that, the highest pursuit of humanity is not economic enrichment or expansion but respect for human value. This becomes clear when we consider the gospel saying "Man shall not live by bread alone". (Mt. 4:4). This should be broadly understood. We cannot live by economic development alone, but must seek the "word that proceeds from the mouth of God". We should stress the values and principles that transcend economic concerns. Once we accept this, the economy becomes a servant of humanity, not its master (<http://www.org>). The logic of this therefore is that we should seek an alternative way for the new global village. One that works for a world cultural community which respects the human person, the environment and seeks a value rather than a profit oriented standard for global integration.

Christianity instead of conditioning our mind to look helpless without Christ should make a provision for man to think and explore the world to his advantage. Until this is done we cannot be said to be the real image of God.

In summary, globalization and Christianity should shift its emphasis from material needs to the human person and primarily of human matters over material needs. Social and moral rules should also be emphasized.

## 8. Conclusion

Globalization and Christianity are two separable instruments that aim at bringing the whole of the human race as a single family. Each helps the other in achieving its distinctive goals and at the same time each contradicts the other, each has its unique

challenges. All these notwithstanding, both has the possibility of surviving the future and above all when Christianity and globalization accepts each other, modifies its approaches and strategies, then, it will become the best institutions ever in the society.

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