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Human Rights and Religion in the Context of Globalization. The Case of Christianity

Abstract

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Abstract

This thesis is integrated in the general topic of political and religious studies and it focuses on the relationship established between human rights and religion on the whole, with particular emphasis on Christianity. In addition, it also tackled the role of Christianity in the process of development, drafting and enforcement of this paradigm on the international stage.

The query concerning the relationship between *global ethics* and *human rights*, on the one hand and *religion*, on the other hand, has become increasingly articulated and substantive in the political discourse inasmuch the exposure of recent conflicts has been made in a rather simplistic manner, based on principles like "religion versus democracy". Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been a vast spectrum of political views as to the role and the relationship established between religion and democracy, varying from their integration to their complete separation. The common perception of the majority is that religion is at the most tolerated by democracy. Nevertheless, more often than not, religion is depicted as an enemy of human rights.

Globalization, religion and human rights are among the most employed concepts in the contemporary political scheme. This thesis aimed at analysing the relationship between the two concepts and to explore the resources of the Judeo-Christian tradition in view of understanding, drafting and enforcing human rights. This context engendered the following **research questions**: Does religion in general have the potential to legitimize and support the human rights paradigm? Can religion have a positive role in the advancement of human rights? Is the Judeo-Christian tradition entrusted with sources and resources to make human rights legitimate and to promote them on a global scale? For someone who is familiar with the contemporary literature regarding human rights, the answer to these questions may be expressed in a rather intuitive manner, namely, that there certainly must be a common aspect uniting all perspectives, approaches and theories regarding human rights. The concept of human rights was born in Europe and, thus, it must be associated with the Christian religious phenomenon which has shaped the European culture. However, this joint aspect needs to be articulated beyond intuition, in a clear and comprehensive manner.

Therefore, the **main objective** of this research was to understand and explain uniformly the heterogeneous sphere of human rights preoccupations in the context of international relations. We first and foremost explored the role of Christianity in the development, drafting and advancement of the human rights paradigm.

In our attempt to provide an answer to the previous questions, we started from the **hypothesis** that human rights is not a mere element within the diversity of international relations, but rather a "paradigm" in the political theory that cannot be employed religion-independent as religion is the main factor in the configuration of human identity.

Based on this hypothesis, the initial problem (how can we systematize a study field which is apparently so heterogeneous?) led us to **secondary objectives** in our research. In the first place, we need to explain the global resurgence of religion and its return to the political scene. In the second place, we need to elucidate the origins, the content, the meaning and the challenges of the human rights paradigm in the political theory. Based on the assumption that we can offer a comprehensive description of this paradigm within the political theory, we should thus clarify the relationship established between religion and human right, both theoretically and practically. In this PhD thesis, we analysed all these elements and we concluded with a vast **case study** on Christianity - sources and resources for the legitimization, expression and enforcement of human rights.

The structure of this paper abides by the *objective* of our research and it is organized in *five main parts*, each with due chapters and conclusions at which we added the final conclusion and the bibliography.

In the *first part* of this thesis we defined and portrayed the phenomena of globalization, religion and human rights, focusing on the relationship between them. The deep changes of nowadays, present in the entire world, requires from us to start exploring and examining religion from new perspectives, considering it to be one of the main agents for social transformation. Current circumstances call for a reconsideration of the relationship between religion and human rights, in the sense that the two realities are synergic and interdependent.

In the second part of the thesis, *Religion and Secularization in the Context of Globalization*, we analysed the historical perspective of the European secularization that led to the first real drafts of some human rights declarations. The religious and

historic path of Europe should also be of particular interest for the simple fact that the West is the chief promoter of globalization, democracy and human rights.

In the following chapters of part I, we tackled the phenomenon of the return of religion to the public square. The resurgence of religion, both from the political and civic point of view is a reality that must be taken into consideration in international policies. In the latter part, we dealt with the transformations religion had to undergo due to the forces of globalization.

In the third part of the thesis, *Human Rights in the Context of Globalization*, we noticed the Dickensian paradox that characterizes the international political scene, a time of bewildering contrasts between the victories achieved by the constitutional democracies and the most violent and maddening violations of human rights. In the first chapter, we analysed the relevance of the contemporary debate regarding human rights. The second chapter dealt with the modern origins of the concept of human rights – therefore we tracked its transformations, starting with the Age of Enlightenment, going through the Industrial Age and reaching 1948, the year of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In the third chapter we continued the analysis, searching for earlier roots of the concept of human rights, thus proving its intimate links with the European religious traditions and the existence of an old relationship between the two. The following three chapters examined the problem and the challenges of the human rights paradigm at international level, leading us to the conclusion that a secular foundation of the rights hasn't got any chances to succeed in their process of advancement and enforcement at a global level.

The fourth part of this paper, *Religion and Human Rights*, tries to prove the need for a symbiosis between religion and human rights. From their religious perspective, the contemporary paradoxes suggest that there is a need for a deeper symbiosis between the two – religion and human rights. This form of existence, mutually beneficial, stems from the knowledge regarding the justification of the human rights paradigm. In the first chapter we proved the value of transcendence in the process of drafting and justification of the concept of human rights. Chapter II and Chapter III dealt with the issues and the perspectives of human rights within the world's major religions. Chapter IV depicted the ecumenical attempt (Hans Kung's Global Ethic Project) to merge different religious perspectives regarding the concept into one global ethic. The fourth part closed with the relationship and the role of

religion in the human rights paradigm, emphasizing the fact that maximalist approaches do not have a beneficial input to the concept of human rights, but they rather try to find a middle way to reformatify the project of rights. Therefore, on the one hand, religion, with all its denominational facets, must play an active role in the modern revolution of human rights; on the other hand, human rights must have the final word in the theological discourse of modern religions.

In the fifth part of the thesis, we approached Christianity as source and resource, as ferment in the drafting and advancement of human rights. After we analysed the diversity of Christian approaches regarding the human rights paradigm in Chapter I, in Chapter II we continued to stress on the Christian contributions to the culture of human rights by means of pursuing the influence of the sacred books in the process of shaping political thought, the contributions of Christian churches and Christian activists in the advancement and execution of the idea of human rights.

The Biblical revelation, Christianity, provides a solid ground for the observance of human dignity and for the inherent rights of men, associated nonetheless with corresponding responsibilities. Consequently, contrary to the common opinion spread at the beginning of this century, in Europe, Christianity is not against human rights, but on the contrary, it has a beneficial input from this point of view.

Based on the entire analysis, the latter part of the paper presents the conclusions to the suggested interpretation and the results that derive from the model of analysis used.

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