

RELIGIONS AS ACTORS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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The significance of religion in global governance

How can the G20 Interfaith Forum contribute to global governance? This is a question that most of the leaders in the G20 Interfaith Forum seem to struggle with. However, it seems reasonable that religion deserves a place at the table in discussions of global governance.

Recently, the term “global governance” has been used to express “the complexity and dynamism of the many collective efforts by states and an increasing variety of non-state actors to identify, understand, and address various issues and problems in today’s turbulent world.”¹ The world is complex, with a variety of actors other than states,² including religious figures. The complexity arises from a mixture of informal and formal ideologies and actors such as states, international organizations and civil societies tackling global problems.³ With this definition, it seems religion can be included.

Religion is the basis for people’s identities and ethics⁴ and therefore cannot be ignored even though, from the point of politics, religion is considered “problematic and potentially dangerous.”⁵ According to Peter Mandaville, this view was created with the birth of secularism, the idea of the separation of religion and politics, which is considered as one of the characteristics of modernity.⁶ Today, it seems impossible to understand the world without considering religion. Moreover, it seems imprecise to ignore religion in global governance when dealing with various problems in the world.

Complete secularism cannot be achieved

As Mandaville maintained, religion is a strong social force, and even officially secular states are still strongly influenced by religion.⁷ The way people think and take action is closely tied with many elements, including religion, both consciously and unconsciously. With this, it can be said that complete secularism cannot be achieved. Essential understanding of secularism is “a shift away from relying on religious belief,”⁸ which cannot be achieved in complete separation of religion and politics. This might result from ignorance of the existence of the effect of religion on politics.

What would be the role of religion in global governance?

Richard Falk argued in his book that:

Many of the confusions of the present age arise out of the reversal of roles associated with politics and religion: From politics we had come to expect revolutionary challenges to the

¹ Margaret P. Karns, Karen A. Mingst, and Kendall W. Stiles, *International Organizations: The Politics and Processes of Global Governance*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015), 2.

² Ibid., 2-3.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Peter Mandaville, “How Do Religious Beliefs Affect Politics?” in *Global Politics: A New*

Introduction. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 103.

⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁸ Peter Mandaville, “How Do Religious Beliefs Affect Politics?” in *Global Politics: A New Introduction*. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 115.

established order and a mandate for far-reaching societal innovation; from religion we had expected consolation and community but no deep commitment to improving the public good of ordinary people in their everyday lives.⁹

Religion has the power to influence how people think of their place in the world and the meaning of their actions.¹⁰ In ignoring the effect of religion in politics, no improvement can be found in governance and policy-making. The problem is that religion is somehow negatively seen in the field of politics, as mentioned above.¹¹ To change the situation, religion has to promote its relevance and the role it can take in governance.

Conclusion

Since there is an idea that the mixture of religion and politics is potentially dangerous,¹² promoting the role of religion differently may be effective. One suggestion would be changing the way of looking at religion: considering it as just one of many ideologies in international affairs.¹³ In addition, gaining an understanding of the existence of the effect of religion will be important. As Fyodor Lukyanov mentioned, “[t]he desire to participate in international relations does not necessarily mean the ability to play a constructive and effective role in them.”¹⁴ Through the G20 Interfaith Forum, religion seemed to lack the experience and ability to fully engage in global governance. So far, it seems that the G20 Interfaith Forum lacks the capacity to take an important role in global governance. Given the situation, no matter how its policy leaders propose recommendations to the G20 Summit, their influence and effectiveness will be limited. Defining their fitting role in global

governance is necessary, and as important as anything.

Disclaimer: All opinions in this article are solely those of the author and do not represent any organization.

⁹ Richard Falk, *Religion and Humane Global Governance*, (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 80.

¹⁰ Peter Mandaville, “How Do Religious Beliefs Affect Politics?” in *Global Politics: A New Introduction*. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁴ Fyodor Lukyanov, “Global Governance: Challenges of Unpredictable Era.” in *G20: Perceptions and Perspectives for Global Governance*. (Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011), 110.