

*The Invisible Hand in the Wilderness* a worthwhile addition to the ongoing debate about solutions to ecological problems in the world.

—Andrew J. Spencer  
*Oklahoma Baptist University*

## Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition

**Victor Roudometof**

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In *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity*, sociologist Victor Roudometof aims to contribute to the scholarly shift in the study of religion from secularization to globalization. His study of Orthodox Christianity is meant to be paradigmatic for future studies of other religious traditions. In the process, he also seeks to dispel common, cliché, and Western-centric concepts of the public role of Orthodoxy and the various Orthodox hierarchical centers and institutions. The goals of the book are thus diverse but limited in scope by its focus on a single religious tradition, Orthodox Christianity. Additionally, it is important to note that the study only marginally touches on the economic aspects of globalization; expanded treatment might have helped to further problematize the sociological analysis.

Key to Roudometof's study is the argument that globalization, unlike secularization, is not a purely modern phenomenon. This gives him the justification, in chapters 2 and 3, for surveying history from the Emperors Constantine and Justinian in the Christian East, to the rise of the Carolingian dynasty in the West and concurrent theological controversies, to the era of the Crusades and the 1204 sack of Constantinople, to the late Byzantine Empire and its downfall to the Ottomans in 1453, to the rise of the Russian Empire. Rather than simply presuming Orthodox Christianity in its modern form, he avoids the pitfall of anachronism by tracing its historical development while, at the same time, demonstrating key themes of his overall study, including one overarching thesis: Orthodoxy has responded and adapted to globalization in a variety of ways all throughout its history, rather than being an adversarial, ossified artifact of the past (as it can sometimes be portrayed from the point of view of secularization). He does not, for that, deny Orthodoxy's traditional and conservative nature, but he adeptly demonstrates that this characteristic has not been a barrier to adaptation and should not be an excuse for sloppy oversimplification by scholars.

The rest of the book examines the early modern era of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, the modern era of the nineteenth century to 1945, and the current global age post-1945. In the course of the study, he highlights how the church-nation link found so commonly in Eastern Europe is itself a modernization of institutional and cultural relations rather than a simple resistance to modernity. In addition, this model is not the only one present and active today. To demonstrate this, four concepts recur throughout the study, offering a nuanced picture of the historical, institutional development of this

religious tradition and its various ways of adapting to globalization: vernacularization, indigenization, nationalization, and transnationalization. He offers an excellent overview in his final and concluding chapter, which actually might have been better placed in the first, introductory one.

“Vernacularization,” writes Roudometof, “blends religious universalism with specific languages, which are endowed with the privileged ability to offer communication with the sacred.” Unlike Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy has historically been much more open to translating liturgy and other religious texts into various languages, though Roudometof admits that it was “far more common in premodern or preliterate cultures.” Nevertheless there are modern examples as well.

Next, Roudometof explains, “Indigenization blends religious universalism with local particularism by adopting religious ritual, expression and hierarchies into the specifics of a particular ethnicity.” This is not the same as nationalization since, of course, ethnicity and nationality are distinct, if often related, concepts. “Although pre-modern kingdoms and principalities have made regular use of this process to bolster their rulers’ legitimacy, the ties thus constructed have endured far beyond the specific regimes or states,” he notes. Additionally, “such indigenization has persisted for centuries in the absence of political authority.” It thus cannot be reduced to state appropriation of religion for political ends.

“Nationalization,” Roudometof continues, “is another form of blending universal religion and local, national particularism. Its principal difference from the previous forms is that the nation serves as the foundation for the religious institutions’ claim to legitimacy.” In a sense, this might be described as the opposite of political uses of indigenization, because through nationalization the religion uses national identity to justify itself, whereas political appropriation of indigenization more often involves appeals to religious identity in order to establish the legitimacy of a political regime (e.g., ceremonies in which the patriarch ordains an emperor or czar). Nationalization, by contrast, is distinctly modern: “a nation involves politically active citizens who confer legitimacy on the government but remain the ultimate source of authority. This form of democratic legitimacy was not present before the 1776 American and the 1789 French revolutions.” Corresponding to nationalization, and representative of the negative side of this phenomenon, Roudometof tells the story of a Bulgarian taxi driver who says that he does not believe in God but that he is a Christian because he’s Bulgarian. There is a presumed causal relationship from nationality to religion, without necessary regard for the fundamental content of that religion.

Finally, “Transnationalization,” Roudometof writes, “is the counterfacet of nationalization: the global construction of nation-states and the nationalization of their citizens necessarily created the category of ‘transnationals,’ that is, all those currently residing within a host state.” As an example, he highlights, “Eastern European Orthodox immigrants in the United States, Australia, and Canada,” who often, through their religious identities and local religious bodies, retain strong ties to their nations of origin. At the same time, this also necessarily brings out an emphasis on how their religion transcends national boundaries and lives on in the new context of their host countries, often further complicated as younger generations become more and more assimilated to the culture in which they now live.

Overall, the book succeeds in its major aims: not only to study Orthodox Christianity in a more detailed light but also to offer an example of such nuanced sociological analysis as paradigmatic for studies of other religious traditions. As such, my criticisms are all minor.

One of the book's goals is to be accessible to scholars of other fields. However, at times the text becomes clouded by jargon lacking sufficient explanation. To use an example from my own field (theology), Roudometof rightly notes the importance for Orthodoxy of the Hesychast controversy in the fourteenth century, correctly explaining that the Byzantine theologian St. Gregory Palamas taught that "although the uncreated essence of God remains unknowable to humans both in this life and the next one, humans in this life can share in God through the uncreated energies bestowed by deifying grace." However, what is meant by "essence" and "energies" (one's nature or being and one's actions or operative power, respectively) is never explained. Yet this was the key issue under dispute. Even many Western theologians might not understand this distinction, and I worry that the lack of explanation will give the impression that the case is merely some obscure and exotic "Oriental" theological issue, rather than demonstrating why this is important beyond the medieval East.

There is also a faux pas, which surely must just be a typo. In his otherwise helpful appendix on "The Hierarchical Order of Orthodox Christianity," he writes, "Orthodox and Catholics alike recognize the first five ecumenical councils of Christianity." This is true but misleading in the same way that one could say that Jesus had nine apostles. In fact, they both recognize the first *seven* ecumenical councils (Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople II, Constantinople III, and Nicaea II). Although other councils are highly regarded, especially the one on Mt. Athos that decided the Hesychast controversy in favor of the Palamites, these seven councils form the bedrock of Orthodox dogma.

Finally, in a study otherwise so comprehensive, I was disappointed that no detailed treatment was given to similar transformations in the Orthodox patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria and their unique histories, especially in relation to parallel developments in the dominant forms of Islam (and later in Israel, Judaism) within which they continue to form a sizable and important minority. No doubt including them would have made for a longer book; they could, perhaps, be the subjects of entire monograph themselves. Nonetheless, their neglect means that the book falls short of being a singular resource for the sociological study of any modern expression of Orthodoxy amid the phenomenon of globalization.

None of these criticisms amount to any reason to dismiss such an important work, however. For both those looking to study the historical development of Orthodox Christianity *vis-à-vis* globalization and those interested in how to frame the interaction of any religious tradition with the same phenomenon, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity* is essential reading.

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