

# On the Question of the Interreligious Grounds of the Global World\*

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**Abstract**—The article deals with finding common ground with the modern world within the boundaries of the opposition to "neoliberalism – interculturalism". The issue of scarcity and non-authenticity of the neoliberal world order is considered in the context of a critique of the intercultural development model. Special attention is paid to the status and role of traditional religions in the global processes, as well as to dialogue as a way to bring a fragmented world to a balanced state.

**Keywords**—*intercultural world; neoliberal globalization; dialogue of religions*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of modernization, becoming the hallmark of the West, was based on the process of the "disenchantment of the world" (M. Weber). The latter, reduced ultimately to the total penetration of the rational principle into all spheres of human existence, supposed the consistent displacement of the traditional component with its religious outlook. Macroprocesses, which emerged from the cultural-historical womb of Europe, marked the advent of Modernity – an era built by the power of reason and represented its domination. In turn, the process of secularization, once initiated by the modernization shifts, deprived the world of an objective moral order, determining the loss of an internal sense. This means that the ontological weakening and the inevitable deteleology of the world paved the way for the world and its axiological foundation to become a matter of human construction.

The movement from Modernity to Late Modernity has been accompanied by a steady change in the types of secularity. According to the scheme proposed by the philosopher C. Taylor, there was a transition from the displacement of faith from the public sphere to the loss of the individual desire to believe and further to the disappearance of the conditions under which the shared faith was possible [1]. The gradual strengthening of the secular trends stimulated the radicalization of the anthropocentric mood. A subject, not feeling any restrictions coming from the *a priori* set of values, breaks free. He switches the orientation of his

ideological intentions from "vertical" to "horizontal" ones and constitutes self with a source of resources, which can cover the needs and requirements. In the mind of a (post)modern person with the "inwards turn", the self-reference removes the need for meta-anthropological focus on existence, simultaneously forfeiting the disposition to self-actualization.

The historical consequences of these processes are reflected in the content of the (post)modern human experience. There are several concepts relevant for its description: C. Taylor's "exclusive humanism", characterized by disregard for the transcendent, and R. Fernet-Betancourt's "anthropology of the contractual subject", asserting the market/economic interpretation of an individual, receiving its conceptualization in the neoliberal ideology.

The latter, becoming a pillar of Western civilization, contributes to its design. And, having a strong potential due to the historical persistence, being secular and rational at the core, it embeds itself easily unto the global context, defining the scenarios of the development of the global processes.

In the architecture of the global world, the Western-by-origin values and ideological attitudes freely change their location zones. However, once on the national soils, they open their traditional context, reimagining its content. Cultural-historical worlds that are open to the transcendent sphere undergo the substitution of the life guidance and spiritual foundations, where the constant "it's impossible to be a non-believer" is replaced with "faith in God is not an axiom". As a response, the protest forms in their extreme versions turn into a desire to transcribe this situation as a conflict and, having archaized it, to present it either in the form of a confrontation between Faith and Reason, or a struggle between Good and Evil.

Defining the architectonics of the globalization processes, neoliberal ideology turns the world into a single whole by diffusing the penetration of economics into all spheres of human existence. Turning them into a set of economic spaces, the trend of the market expansion leads to the deformation of relations among those involved. One of its main ideas – "the others are competitors", *a priori* lays an insurmountable distance between the subjects, both winning

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and losing, corresponding to the market type of behavior free from everything humane. As a result, a reality emerges that integrates the subject as an agent into the market, isolates correlating non-economic components, and thus devalues (in the subject's consciousness) the idea of solidarity based on the recognition of cultural diversity; the value of dialogue; openness and trust in the Other; cultivating, in contrast, detachment; encouraging egocentrism; and creating the monologic imagination that causes solipsistic optics to appear. The reverse side of the economic unity of the world is the state of its cultural fragmentation. Influencing the socio-cultural processes and lining up in them, the market mechanics that are strongly associated with the logic of the development of the secular center, increase the imbalance and inequality of the traditional and (post)modern axespheres. Having occupied a privileged position, expansionist, historically mature, and advanced cultures create and implement colonialist practices, that lead to the systematic exclusion of many Others from constitutive processes showing joint intercultural character. In other words, there is an exclusion of the cultural alternatives that are generated by their own historical matrices, and hence contextualities that act a source of reflection of the Other.

The requirement to call into question the authenticity of the existing world order has a special meaning in the projection of the intercultural world, which offers alternatives to the neoliberal model strategies of the development of the global processes. The conceptual constructions of the Cuban philosopher Raúl Fornet-Betancourt are particularly interesting in this respect. He links the possibility of creating a "world in balance" to the necessary reimagining and revalorization of the status of tradition/religion in the global processes and the search for the ways of its actualization.

## II. DISCOVERING INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Interculturality as a theory and practice of liberation is an alternative to the neoliberal strategic program of globalization. In contrast to the trends of standardization and homogenization, interculturality asserts the idea that cultural and religious diversity should not be reduced to a single beginning, from which an adequate interpretation of plurality could be derived. This idea becomes a pillar for the desire to create a model of a pluralistic world, where the principle of solidarity among the different participating worlds forms the basis of "unity" and/or "universality". According to R. Fornet-Betancourt, interculturality relies on cultural and religious diversity, and on the open future of a pluralistic world.

The top priority task is the search of the possible ways for the liberation of diversity that are under threat of extinction, and methods necessary "to shake the world (...) from time to time (...)", in the words of José Martí [2]. These worlds of the "Apostle of Independence" have not lost their relevance and, transferred to the intercultural context by R. Fornet-Betancourt, take the form of a demand-call: "to shake the modernity" in different forms of its hegemony that is trying to conceal its imperial structure, manifesting itself under different masks, planting fetishes for worship.

According to R. Fornet-Betancourt, interculturality demands the support of religion to fulfill the demand-appeal.

Despite the prevailing belief in the modern world that the decline in the authority of religion correlates with the growth of the (social) well-being, and various predictions about the end of history, utopias, and the traditional cultures and religions, interculturality aims via a collaborative dialogue to "resurrect (...) their memories and see them as tricks not of the modernity but as living forces capable of shaking an asymmetrical exclusive world" [3] [4]. In its quest to balance a heterogeneous world, as opposed to the neoliberal model that forgets and buries traditions in oblivion— the topoi of concentration and the preservation of cultural and/or religious memories – it brings them closer, calling on the carriers of diversity to development based on mutual enrichment.

The liberation project moved to the deontologized plane, turning to interculturality for one of the grounds, upon which the balanced model of the pluralistic world is built. Necessarily emerging in this model, a new cultural-anthropological type of a person and a society leading to the appearance of a (new) religion, corresponding to the new world order. If one proceeds on the assumption that the pluralistic cultural world implies religious pluralism, the issue of the development of a religion, transferred to the global context, receives a different character. It is an issue of a "new relationship among the religions of the mankind" [5]. It should be taken into account that, while in the neoliberal model of the world, the so-called traditional religions are subject to exclusion and isolation, and their image becoming distorted, in the intercultural model, the religions receive relevance and the ability to interact, which also means the deepening of their understanding and the revelation of the true essence.

In the intercultural perspective, the relationship among the religions is understood as new in the sense that it is relevant to the situation where a "qualitative leap" (J. Dupuit) is made. Subsequently, leaving aside the doctrinal disputes about dogmas or belief systems, religions transcend the horizon of their mission, i.e. the extreme task, understood as testimony, aimed at transferring the experience of communion with God, in order to "tune in to the movement of the endless experiments of the accumulation of the experience" of the communication by dialogue [6].

The parts involved, based on *a priori* recognition of each other as values-in-themselves do not exalt their own (*lo propio*) and do not diminish another's (*lo ajeno*) value. The accumulation of experience is not quantifiable. It is not calculated in the sense that (anything) is "added or subtracted" [7]. The only thing happening is the search for and creation of ways leading to mutual discovery and interaction. In this relationship, what may be called "the quality of interculturality and interreligiosity" is nurtured, and that quality determines the relationship's novelty.

Being the bearer of the spirit of liberation, interculturality requires the dialogue experience to open at the same time as the experience of cooperation of religions: Contractors, advocates of different ideals, and the experience of their

mutual calls and responses for the included religions, subjected to the revision of their traditions, sought to discern whether the latest means of liberation, by which it is possible to make a pilgrimage to the perfect pluralistic world of “living more abundantly”, is appropriate [8]. It is not about overcoming or the deconstruction of tradition but about its re-opening with the purpose of the detection or recognition of the possible signs or barriers obstructing the engagement strategies and determining the trajectory of value-semantic inter-development in a non-equilibrium state. Thus, interculturality creates the preconditions for the in-depth comprehension of knowledge which (previously) excluded the need to confirm it with its own experience of cognition.

R. Fornet-Betancourt understands interculturality as a prospect that neither predicts the death of traditional religions, nor prophesizes the emergence of a new decentralized religion in the contemporary world, but discovers and reveals the religious traditions in their “actual presence” stemming from the depths of ages. In contrast to the modus of alienation, which hinders the implementation of the dialogue experience among the religions, interculturality develops and maintains their relations in the modes of “aimed at co-existence” and “disposition for each other”.

On the question of the future of religions, R. Fornet-Betancourt does not support the liberal standpoint, according to which the religions in the contemporary world are nothing more than island formations. By asserting them a necessary and legitimate component of humanity's pluralistic future, the philosopher sees them as an effective and viable strategy in the construction. The creative and transforming (life) power, inherent in religious traditions, is realized both at the universal and discrete levels in the sense that the religious traditions are accomplices in the creation of the future, and transform themselves by transforming the world order.

As for the point of dialogue, in acting as a constitutional principle of the sphere of relations, it disrupts the “staying-in-themselves” traditions, making them open to each other by using the “appeal-to-self” principle. Explicating the relationship of the religious traditions by the Self, the Other relations, and taking into account that dialogue is always mutual, it becomes clear that, without an “appeal-to-self” principle, Self can neither understand nor become itself. If the neoliberal world order model, centered on a monologue, excludes the opportunity to accept the Other as a productive co-participant, then, on the contrary, in the intercultural world which is oriented toward dialogue, the Others determine the possibility of Self. The practice of intercultural interaction starts with the attitude that “only through copresence and collaboration of the Others, the Self becomes possible”.

### III. ON THE WAY TO THE NEW WORLD

R. Fornet-Betancourt imagines interculturality as a way of development that aims to embody in religions the “poetry of the world to come” (J. Martí). As Martí's metaphor is used by R. Fornet-Betancourt as the definition of the telos of the way, there is a concentrated value-semantic core, around

which currents and mechanisms are formed, aimed at the transformation of non-equilibrium socio-cultural processes of our time. At the bottom of the changes that the religious traditions undergo, are their rebirth, due to which they become open and able to respond to the demands of the period – i.e., to make up for the lost spirituality. The latter should incorporate the ideas of solidarity - the recognition of each other, the harmony between all human beings - to overcome the oppositions and contrasts between “Us” and “Them”, to act as a basis of the processes that complete the world. By becoming the conduit of solidarity, religions will help to rebuild the real world in order to “become fatefully related with the poor of the earth” [9].

Religions are poetry in the sense that, following the thoughts of J. Martí, every one of them carries the “poetic ideal of the future happiness”, i.e., the belief in the future. Religion as the poetry of the “spirituality, architectonics of love, solidarity, and justice, based on the situation of the poor of the earth” will lead to equilibrium in the non-equilibrium historical world, will transform the world by turning it into an open space, in which human creativity and creation in the genuine human nature will become an act of the spiritual revival [10]. In this transformed world, reductionist views will give way to a holistic model: the development of the strategies and practices of assigning the world to an individual “Self” will replace the development of the relations with their own kind and the universe in such a way that the understanding of “Us” will expand as much as possible. Reasoning from such positions, R. Fornet-Betancourt defines religion as the poetry of human existence transformed by the new experiences of relations and dialogue, which leads to the realization that the experiments (historical and existential) are implemented from a certain perspective, that is called its origin (*su origen*) in the ontological order, and which has its own localization and contextualization in religious and/or cultural tradition.

The interest in the concept of the “origin”, derived from the philosophy of M. Heidegger, is not accidental in the intercultural discourse. This interest is formed in the quest to answer the challenge of modernity, in which the humane, separated from the ontological roots, is condemned for “double orphancy” in the form of despiritualization and the lack of compassion, and is doomed to oblivion and wandering. Proceeding from the statement that the origin is what makes humans existent, the future that is to be created will be the return to humane. Taking advantage of it as the beginning of self-creation, humanity will restore the lost unity and thus will manifest itself as its heir and debtor. By transferring M. Heidegger's idea of “origin remaining always the future” to the religious grounds, R. Fornet-Betancourt brings it to the concept of beginning, interpreting it as a “continuously ascending kinship line (*ascendencia procedente*), that leads us beyond the limits of reality given (*más allá*) and connects with the descendants (*la descendencia*) and the things to come (*lo advenimiento*)” [11] [12]. In addressing the origin as topos of the beginning of the new one – that is, what awakens life and interculturality clearly stands in its position before the future, as a form of readiness and a conscious choice for a harmonious and

authentic world – “the choice that throws us into the future for a new creation of that eternal, from which we come” [13].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

R. Fernet-Betancourt’s projection of the intercultural world emerges as a response to the prevention and reduction of the dehumanization processes of the neoliberal globalization. The tension between religious and secular attitudes, begotten by these processes, leads to the question of whether traditions/religions may survive under the specific conditions and/or do they lose the right to exist? The acuteness of the question is appreciated when it comes to the traditions/religions in their relation to the cultural inheritance, and to “meanings and identities” rather than to the changes of consumer brands and new religious lifestyles, which are “packed (...) in such a way that they can easily be consumed and then discarded” [14].

The problem of the future global world and the maintenance of its equilibrium make it necessary to search for the binding principles, value centers. In this regard, it is necessary to consider as productive the idea proposed by R. Fernet-Betancourt to design the model of the intercultural world around the process of introducing the “re-mundanity” (*la remundanicación*) of the religious traditions and knowledge. In opposition to the prevailing trends contributing to their own displacement, the process of re-mundanity is aimed at their return [15]. However, this does not imply the “enchantment of the world”, but rather the release of the projects of alternative worlds and daily practices so as to enable the development of knowledge and the reproduction of the beliefs, embedded in the traditions that are devoid of real life power due to their marginalization or colonization by the existing set of values and interpretative schemes.

The discovery (by the world) of the concealed phenomena occurs in the meeting of the dialogue of religious traditions. Those engaged in this dialogue, are positioned to understand and are therefore able to hear one another. In such a context, the hearing as a practical realization of the desire “not to distance oneself” acts simultaneously as a way of insertion, i.e., of the attainment of the previously unknown traditions that one desires to learn through a dialogue. The mutual cognition turns into the search (and discovery) of the original connections that hold and concentrate the unity of experiments and human traditions. Defined by the concept of “relation” (R. Panikkar), they are the ultimate goal of the dialogue.

In the intercultural model, the dialogue practices verify in the traditions the features that bring them closer to each other but not what causes their divergence. As a result, the path to the universal integrating unity is discovered. Yet the intercultural ideology doesn’t eliminate the loyalty of traditions to themselves. Instead, it sets the task of developing in them the abilities of “reconfiguration”, self-correction, and the desire to maintain in a constantly actualized state the value priorities contributing to the equilibrium of the modern world. In this model, the new, coming world is the outward projection of the inner unity of

traditions, carrying a positive meaning and creative power for a global existence of a variety of cultural worlds.

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