

Review - Global Institutions of Religion

Written by Jeffrey Haynes

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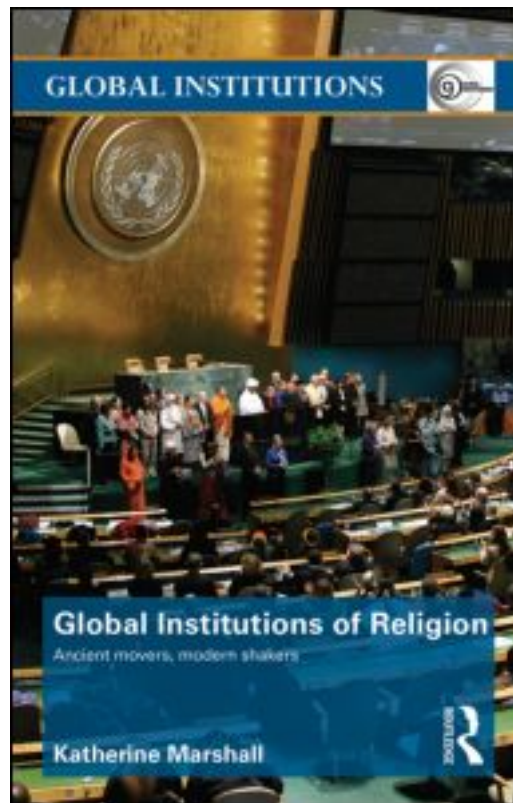
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JEFFREY HAYNES, DEC 3 2013

Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers

By: Katherine Marshall

London: Routledge, 2013



The Catholic Church is a major actor in international relations. It is perhaps the best available example of a 'global institution of religion', the subject of Katherine Marshall's book. The general aim of the book is to provide a 'concise introduction to religious institutions and an insightful analysis of their role in world affairs' (back cover blurb). Marshall's goal is to provide as comprehensive an overview as possible of what she refers to as 'global institutions of religion' in this short book (fewer than 200 pages of text). Her approach is primarily to identify key examples of such institutions from among the five world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism), including both national and transnationally focused actors, and to tell the reader what they do and why they do it. As a result, the book is mainly a descriptive overview of various kinds of religious actors from the world religions. The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is concerned with presenting a picture of the global presence of religion, including where specific religious faiths are represented in various parts of the world. Chapter two presents a 'global institutional map of religious institutions [which] is deeply complex and infinitely varied' (p. 92). The purpose of

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chapter three is to examine 'religious movements in a globalized world,' while chapter four examines what the author calls 'interfaith encounters.' The penultimate chapter, chapter five, looks at 'faith-inspired organizations at work.' The final chapter is concerned with 'emerging issues and future directions'.

The overall impression of the faith-inspired organisations (FIOs) with which Marshall is concerned in the book, is of their almost infinite variety and organisational diversity. It is also the case, however, that the recent past, what might be called the 'post-Cold War era of globalisation,' has seen notable growth and development of both national and transnational examples of FIOs. This recent development contrasts with what might be called 'the historical era of globalisation', the period before the modern era during which, for hundreds of years, several of the world religions (notably, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) became widely geographically spread. In this context, the Catholic Church, founded over 2,000 years ago, is one of the oldest extant examples of an FIO. Marshall focuses on the Church in some detail in the book. What becomes clear is that the term - 'Catholic Church' - is generic, which gives no hint of the complexity and variety of Catholic-inspired entities which, as FIOs, engage in contemporary international relations. Marshall examines, *inter alia*, the Catholic Church as multi-level institution, the governance of the Church, Catholic movements and organisations, various popes, Catholic religious orders, and, in particular, the Church's concerns with social justice and development.

Marshall explains that in recent decades both the papacy and the Church have taken increased interest in social justice issues, especially development and human rights, a focus which developed from the mid-1960s following the end of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1965 (pp. 63, 140). This was in the midst of a momentous period for international relations, with major potential and actual significance for international order concerns. First, there was the transition from colonial to post-colonial rule in Africa and the aftermath of decolonisation in Asia. Second, it was also the period of the rise of radical liberation theology not only in Latin America - especially in Brazil - but also in several other developing countries, including the Philippines and South Africa (where it was known as 'Black Theology'). However, it was not the case that Catholic Church officials from such developing regions and countries were necessarily championing liberation theology against the wishes of the Church's senior figures: in fact, it was often the case that Catholic Church officials in Latin America, Africa and East Asia were strongly opposed to the socially progressive articulations emanating from Vatican II, and, at least initially, did little or nothing concrete to further their progress. A few years later, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015), were announced, which were significantly informed by the Church's social justice concerns. Large Catholic-inspired development agencies, such as Caritas, were important in developing the MDGs (pp. 158-160).

Perhaps the most significant political intervention of the Church in international relations in recent decades was the central involvement of Pope John Paul II, the Vatican ('the Holy See'), and the Polish national church in the events which led to the demise of Soviet rule in Poland. This was an emblematic event which helped to stimulate the rapid dismantling of the entire Soviet empire. Increased articulation of an institutional Catholic concern with social justice issues from the 1960s was followed, in the 1980s and 1990s, by a period of momentous change at the global level, a shift from the 'old' order to a new global one; and the Church was important in these changes. In particular, the Church was heavily involved in the breakdown of Communism in Eastern Europe, especially in the emblematic case of Poland. The Church was a key player in encouraging Poland's fundamental political reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this regard, policies had an important transnational element, especially in relation to the institutional role of the Vatican and the personal leadership of the then-pope, John Paul II, a Pole. Especially encouraged by John Paul II's expressions of support, Polish Catholics increasingly represented both a counter-culture and alternative social space to the official Communist ideology and channels. This led, in 1980, to the creation of the Solidarity movement that both articulated and expressed Catholic social ethics as a counter-statement to those of Communism. This reflected not only a significant convergence between national and religious identity in Poland, but also, just as importantly, it symbolised the failure of Communist (secular) identity fundamentally to implant itself in the hearts and minds of most Poles, a people whose cultural heritage was firmly based in their Catholic traditions and history.

In sum, the Catholic heritage and traditions were a vital resource in helping create and then sustain resistance to Communism not only in Poland but also more widely in Eastern Europe. Note, however, that the key role of the Church in Poland's democratisation is but one example of a much wider trend observable during the 1980s and 1990s. As Samuel Huntington noted two decades ago, the third wave of democratisation was in an important way a

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Catholic wave of democratisation.[1] In the two decades from the mid-1970s, more than two-thirds of new democracies were predominantly Roman Catholic in confession, including those in: the Philippines, South Korea, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and various Latin American countries, including Brazil, Chili, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

The book is a useful in two ways. First, it provides an authoritative, if necessarily partial, global survey of what the author calls faith-inspired organisations. Second, it is an impressive survey of the increasingly complex world of FIOs, and gives a good flavour of what they are interested in and what they seek to achieve. Overall, I recommend the book to anyone interested in finding out why FIOs are also important 'global institutions' in today's globalised world.

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[1] Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

About the author:

Jeff Haynes is Emeritus Professor of Politics at London Metropolitan University. He recently completed a book on the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and is now writing another on *Twenty-Five Years of the 'Clash of Civilizations'*. He is book series editor of 'Routledge Studies in Religion & Politics'. He is also co-editor of the journal, *Democratization*, and its book series 'Special Issues and Virtual Special Issues'.