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## Social Policy and Religion in a Globalizing Era

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**Abstract.** Our paper critically analyses the well-known and old partnership between religious actors and social policy agencies undertaking interventions in the public sphere aimed at influencing redistributive measures (social welfare, distributive justice) and development. Starting from a typology of religious welfare and classic welfare regime the paper underlines the necessity of rising up further the "social mission of religion" in a globalized world increasingly exposed to social, economic and political turbulence, as a link between state and community.

**Keywords.** welfare, social policy, globalization, partnership, religious institutions, state and community

### Introduction

Religion and its institutions represent a fundamental aspect of our social life tackling sensitive social problems by developing and implementing actions in order to alleviate the human welfare conditions. Our paper critically analyses the well-known and old partnership between religious actors and social policy agencies undertaking interventions in the public sphere aimed at influencing redistributive measures (social welfare, distributive justice) and development. In the last 30 years the mankind witnessed key dynamics and massive transformations of social policy under globalizing forces. Starting from a typology of religious welfare (Jawad R., Yakut-Cakar B., 2010) and classic welfare regime typologies (R. Titmuss, G. Esping-Andersen, R. Mishra, G. Thernborn) the paper underlines the necessity of rising up further the "social mission of religion" in a globalized world increasingly exposed to social, economic and political turbulence, as a link between state and community. Starting from the idea that economic development is necessary but not sufficient for social development, we argue that in the era of globalization and age of intelligent machines: 1) the relationship between religion and social policies must be reconsidered, in the sense of increasing the contribution of religious institutions in (re)distribution of (more) equitable of social welfare through a new type of social partnership; 2) individual and community empowerment processes must be emphasized through such social partnerships for enabling (in the sense of CA Approach – see. A. Sen, M. Nussbaum) social actors and generate self-sufficiency; 3) old arguments must be re-strengthened and new ones provided regarding how the future of social policies can be positively influenced by religious ideas and values.

### **Discussion**

Religion and its institutions represent a fundamental aspect of our social life tackling sensitive social problems by developing and implementing actions in order to alleviate the human welfare conditions. Christianity is one of the major religions in the world that has played a significant role in shaping social welfare systems, even in the globalized world of XX-XXI centuries the secularism has gained significant importance. The idea of secularism, that promotes reason, science, and individualism over traditional values and religious dogma, gained momentum in the 20th century with the rise of democratic nations that sought to ensure the separation of religion and state. Today, secularism has become an essential aspect of modern democratic societies, where people from diverse religious backgrounds coexist peacefully. Christianity, as a religion, has played a significant role in shaping social welfare systems globally (M. Horsburgh, 1988; J. Atherton, 2012). The Christian doctrine emphasizes the importance of charity and social justice, and Christians believe that it is their duty to help the less fortunate in society. This has led to the establishment of various Christian charities and non-profit organizations that work to alleviate poverty and promote social welfare. In a globalized world, secularism and Christianity have intersected in various ways. While secularism emphasizes the importance of the separation of religion and state, it does not necessarily mean the exclusion of religious values from public life. In fact, many social welfare systems in secular democracies have been influenced by Christian values and principles. For example, in many European countries, social welfare systems are based on the principle of solidarity, which is derived from Christian teachings on social justice. However, the relationship between secularism, Christianity, and social welfare has not been without its challenges (G. Bowpitt, 1998). In some cases, there have been conflicts between religious beliefs and secular laws. Additionally, some critics argue that the influence of religion on social welfare systems can lead to discrimination against non-Christians or those who do not adhere to traditional Christian values.

In a globalizing era, the relationship between social policy and religion has become more complex, as societies become more diverse and interconnected. Religious organizations often have a significant influence on social policy, particularly in areas such as education, health care, and welfare (F.G. Castles, 1994). In some cases, religious organizations are directly involved in the provision of social services, such as hospitals, schools, and charitable organizations. In other cases, they may lobby governments to enact policies that align with their beliefs and values. The impact of religion on social policy is particularly significant in countries with a strong religious identity, such as many countries in the Middle East and South Asia (S. Heyneman, 2004). For example, Islamic law (Sharia) influences social policy in many Muslim-majority countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. In these countries, social policies related to family law, gender relations, and morality are heavily influenced by Islamic principles (A. Tajmazinani, 2021).

Religion also plays a significant role in shaping social policy in Western societies, albeit to a lesser extent (Pavolini & al., 2020). In Western EU countries, but also the United States, religious organizations have significant political influence, particularly in areas such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia (M. Minkenberg, 2002). Religious organizations may lobby lawmakers to enact policies that align with their beliefs and values, often leading to contentious debates and political polarization.

Globalization has led to increased migration, cultural exchange, and the emergence of new social movements that challenge traditional religious and social norms (Milani & Laniado, 2007). As a result, policymakers must navigate complex social and cultural dynamics to create

policies that are inclusive and effective. One of the main challenges facing policymakers in a globalizing era is how to balance the values and beliefs of different religious and cultural groups. In many cases, religious and cultural differences can lead to tensions and conflict, particularly in areas such as immigration, human rights, and gender equality. Policymakers must navigate these tensions carefully, balancing the rights and needs of different groups while also promoting social cohesion and inclusivity. Another challenge is how to promote social policies that are culturally sensitive and respectful of diverse religious beliefs and practices. This requires policymakers to engage with religious and cultural communities, understand their perspectives, and develop policies that are responsive to their needs. This approach requires policymakers to adopt a multicultural perspective, recognizing the diversity of cultures and religions in society and promoting policies that are inclusive and responsive.

The classic typologies of the welfare state (R. Titmuss, G. Esping-Andersen, R. Mishra, G. Thernborn etc.) tried to introduce various factors to help classify different countries and their belonging to one or another type of welfare state. For example, R. Titmuss (1974) identifies 5 main factors (the level of social solidarity, decommodification, social stratification and economic development, and the role of the market) in shaping the 3 types of welfare states (residual, institutional, universal), but without taking into account the contribution of religious institutions. Esping-Andersen's (1990) categorizes welfare states into three types: liberal, conservative, and social democratic. While religion is not explicitly included as a variable, Esping-Andersen does note that conservative welfare states are more likely to have a strong connection between church and state, and may rely on religious institutions to provide social welfare. Maurizio Ferrera 1996 proposed a typology that explicitly incorporates the role of religion into the classification of welfare states. Ferrera argues that there are four types of welfare regimes: secular, Christian democratic, Islamic, and Confucian. These regimes differ in terms of the dominant religious tradition and the extent to which religious institutions are involved in the provision of social welfare. Van Kersbergen and Manow's (2009) proposes a typology that categorizes welfare states based on the dominant religious tradition in the country. The authors identify four types: Protestant, Catholic, Lutheran, and secular. They argue that the religious tradition of a country can impacts the way in which social welfare is organized and provided, such as through the role of church-based charities or the emphasis on family support.

Jawad and Yakut-Cakar (2010) have proposed a typology of religious welfare that categorizes the ways in which religion can provide for people's material and spiritual needs. The four types of religious welfare identified by Jawad and Yakut-Cakar are:

1. Traditional religious welfare is based on traditional religious practices, such as charity and almsgiving, that have been established in religious communities for centuries, provided by religious institutions, such as mosques or churches, and is often focused on meeting the basic needs of individuals and families.
2. Spiritual religious welfare is dedicated on providing individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. It is often provided by religious leaders or teachers and can take the form of spiritual counseling, guidance, or mentoring.
3. Activist religious welfare is focused on promoting social justice and addressing social issues, such as poverty, inequality, or discrimination. It often involves advocacy, activism, and community organizing and is provided by religious institutions or organizations that work to advance social justice causes.
4. Mystical religious welfare is centred on promoting inner peace and spiritual growth. It involves practices such as meditation, prayer, and contemplation and is often

provided by spiritual leaders or communities that emphasize personal growth and transformation.

### **Outcomes**

In our vision the relationship between religion and social policies must be reconsidered, in the sense of increasing the contribution of religious institutions in (re)distribution of (more) equitable of social welfare through a new type of social partnership. While some argue that religious institutions can play an important role in promoting social welfare, others are skeptical about the appropriateness of religious organizations in providing public services. However, there are certainly examples of successful partnerships between religious institutions and the state in the provision of social welfare. For instance, in some countries, faith-based organizations are involved in the delivery of social services such as health care, education, and community development. These partnerships may be based on a shared commitment to social justice and the common good, and can result in more efficient and effective delivery of services to those in need. There is also evidence to suggest that religious organizations can help to build social capital and promote civic engagement, which can in turn lead to stronger and more cohesive communities. Religious institutions may be able to mobilize volunteers and resources in ways that are not possible for the state or secular organizations. However, there are also concerns about the potential for religious institutions to promote particularistic agendas, discriminate against certain groups, or fail to provide services that are not in line with their beliefs. There is also the risk of blurring the boundaries between church and state, which could have negative implications for democracy and individual rights. Therefore, any new type of social partnership between religious institutions and the state should be approached with caution and care. It is important to ensure that such partnerships are transparent, accountable, and respectful of individual rights and freedoms. Any partnership must also be based on shared goals and values, with a commitment to promoting the common good and achieving more equitable distribution of social welfare.

Individual and community empowerment processes should be emphasized in any social partnership between religious institutions and the state. This is in line with the capabilities approach developed by A. Sen and M. Nussbaum (1993), which emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities in order to achieve well-being and lead fulfilling lives. Empowerment processes can involve a range of activities, including education and training, access to resources and opportunities, and the creation of supportive networks and communities. By empowering individuals and communities, social partnerships can help to generate self-sufficiency and promote long-term sustainability. For example, a social partnership between a faith-based organization and the state might involve providing job training and mentorship programs to unemployed individuals, or offering microfinance loans to entrepreneurs who lack access to traditional financing. By providing these types of resources and support, the partnership can help to create pathways to economic self-sufficiency and promote individual and community empowerment. In addition, social partnerships can also help to promote social inclusion and reduce stigma and discrimination against marginalized communities. For instance, a partnership might involve working with religious leaders to promote tolerance and understanding of different cultures and religions, or collaborating with community groups to address issues of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Overall, by emphasizing individual and community empowerment processes and promoting self-sufficiency, social partnerships between religious institutions and the state can help to create more inclusive and equitable societies, in line with the capabilities approach.

The old arguments must be re-strengthened and new ones provided regarding how the future of social policies can be positively influenced by religious ideas and values. There are several arguments that can be made regarding how the future of social policies can be positively influenced by religious ideas and values, due to the fact that many religious traditions and communities:

- ... offer *moral and ethical frameworks* that can guide social policies and promote values such as compassion, justice, and solidarity. For example, religious teachings on the dignity of the human person and the common good can inform policies related to human rights, poverty reduction, and social welfare.
- ... can contribute to *social capital* by fostering trust, cooperation, and civic engagement among their members. This can help to build more resilient and connected communities and promote social cohesion, which can in turn support the development and implementation of effective social policies.
- ... often have a strong tradition of *volunteerism and philanthropy*, which can provide additional resources and support for social policies. By mobilizing volunteers and encouraging charitable giving, religious institutions can help to address social needs and supplement public services.
- ... can provide spaces for *innovation and creativity* in the development of social policies. For example, faith-based organizations may be better equipped to respond to the specific needs and challenges of marginalized communities, and may be able to provide culturally sensitive services that are not available through mainstream providers.
- ... can also promote *interfaith dialogue and cooperation*, which can help to build bridges between different communities and promote understanding and tolerance. This can in turn support the development of more inclusive and equitable social policies that take into account the needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

### **Conclusions**

In order to re-strengthen these arguments and provide new ones, it will be important to engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection between religious institutions, policymakers, and civil society organizations. This can help to identify areas of common interest and build collaborative partnerships that are grounded in shared values and goals. Additionally, research and evaluation can help to identify best practices and effective strategies for integrating religious ideas and values into social policies.

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