

2018

Review of Flourishing: Why we need religion in a globalized world by Miroslav Volf.

Jon Armajani
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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Recommended Citation

Armajani, Jon (2018) "Review of Flourishing: Why we need religion in a globalized world by Miroslav Volf.," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, 93-95.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol2/iss1/8

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***Flourishing: Why we need religion in a globalized world.* Miroslav Volf. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. Hardcover, \$28.00, ISBN: 9780300186536. Paperback, \$18.00, ISBN: 9780300227130.**

Dr. Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale University and the Founding Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. His works have spanned several subfields within the discipline of theology -- from a book, published in 1988, on Karl Marx's concept of labor and its theological value, to a book published in 1996, which is a theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation, to a book published in 2012 on Jews, Christian, and Muslims in dialogue. In Volf's *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*, he attempts to shed light on how religions and globalization have historically interacted, and he argues for ways of constructing and construing their relationships.

In this vein, in the book's introduction, Volf states,

This book would be the document I would bring to the discussion at the global common table – my construal of the features of my own Christian faith and of corresponding features of other world religions that underpin a vision of how world religions can constructively relate to globalization and to one another in a single interconnected and interdependent world. I hope that adherents of other religions will come up with their own analogous proposals (p. 20).

Volf also expresses several of his goals, which include:

1. shedding “light on how religions and globalization have interacted . . . and suggest[ing] what their relationship ought to be in the future” (p. 2);
2. arguing “that a vision of flourishing found in the quarreling family of world religions is essential to individual thriving and global common good” (p. 2); and
3. expressing a dual proposal, which relates to “how people with Christian convictions should relate to other religions and to globalization *as well as* how adherents of other world religions should relate to one another and globalization” (p. 19).

Volf's main thesis, however, seems to be that in order for a socially just and cohesive world to come into being, visions of flourishing must come from the great religious traditions of the world, since they promote visions that go beyond the simple reduction of the world to materialism or to mere “mundane realities” (p. 22). Thus, a main thesis of the book emerges in Chapter 1, where Volf states globalization is “a thing of promise and peril” that produces both benefit and hardship, and globalization needs “world religions to deliver it from its shadows” (p. 55).

Volf provides a number of beneficial and insightful ideas regarding globalization as well as its promises and perils. He also provides several beneficial theological insightful ideas regarding the ways which religions of the world could potentially address these promises and perils. In this vein, there has been at least one excellent book review of Volf's *Flourishing*, which provides an overview of virtually the entire book, and a critique of various aspects of it (Gustafson, 2017). Given the publication of such comprehensive book reviews and the limitations on space for this review, this analysis will focus on one crucial set of ideas in *Flourishing*, which that book did not develop as fully as one may hope. That aspect relates to the book's articulation of Christian

theological approaches to non-Christian religions, which is one important foundation for Christians' responses to globalization in the context of religion, especially given Volf's desire, as a Christian theologian, to bring *Flourishing* "to the discussion at the global common table" (p. 20).

While Christian theologians have articulated a variety of theological approaches to non-Christian religions, it can be argued that there are primarily three such approaches, and variations within each approach. Broadly speaking, these three Christian approaches, on a continuum from conservative to liberal, are usually called (1) exclusivism; (2) inclusivism; and (3) pluralism (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). Christian exclusivists typically believe that Christianity is the only correct religion and that the only way human beings can be granted eternal life in heaven is through Jesus Christ and/or Christianity (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). Christian exclusivists want everyone, who is not Christian, to convert to Christianity, so that all people can enter eternal life in heaven, after they die. Thus, while Christian exclusivists believe that only Christians will go to heaven, these same exclusivists include all human beings in their universal desire that all people will be saved by being Christian (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). However, typically according to this Christian exclusivist position, non-Christians will be excluded from heaven and will go to hell.

Christian inclusivists believe that Christianity has a distinctive character with respect to non-Christian religions (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). Some Christian inclusivists may state that Christianity is better than other religions. At the same time, one characteristic, which many Christian inclusivists share, is the idea that Christians should try to learn from non-Christian religions and/or non-religious ideologies in such a way, which could strengthen their Christian faith (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). Many Christian inclusivists believe that God may grant salvation to non-Christians.

For their part, many Christian pluralists believe that all religions, including Christianity, contain the same truth or similar truths, although different religions may express those similar truths in different ways. Christian pluralists believe it would be beneficial for people to understand those similar truths, because that understanding could create a greater level of peace between and among persons of various religions (Race, 1982; Knitter, 2003). Many Christian pluralists believe that different kinds of persons of various religions, and even many people who are not religious, are granted eternal life in heaven.

In the fourth chapter of *Flourishing*, Volf focuses on Christian exclusivism and Christian pluralism. In that chapter, he addresses the question of "whether exclusivist versions of world religions are compatible with the affirmation of political pluralism," and he responds to that matter in the affirmative (p. 137). Volf also accounts for religious pluralism by suggesting that its perspectives are naturally compatible with, for example, democratic states which, in principle, have a tendency to honor, as Volf states it "freedom of religion, equal voice in the public sphere, and the impartiality of the state" (p. 141). In line with these ideas, Volf gives examples of Christian exclusivists who operate effectively for their goals within a politically pluralistic context. One salient example of such a group, which he provides, are evangelical and fundamentalist Christians in the United States, who have used the pluralistic democratic processes in the United States to achieve some of their objectives.

In light of these ideas, one area that would be worth further exploration, which may not have received the attention it may have deserved in *Flourishing*, would be the beliefs of Christian inclusivists, who seem to comprise a substantial percentage of Christians. There are also certain *non-Christians*, who may have inclusivist ideas, in that they may perceive their own non-Christian religion as distinctive or superior to other religions. Yet, those non-Christian inclusivists may be interested in the ways which ideas outside their own religion could have a positive impact on their own non-Christian religious beliefs. Given the seeming popularity of Christian inclusivism and forms of inclusivism in non-Christian religions, these ideas could constitute a significant set of considerations. Yet, among other ideas which Volf presents in his book, his analysis of the history of Christian exclusivism in the American colonies and the United States, and the contributions, which those kinds of Christians have made -- and continue to make -- to that country, is thought-provoking.

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Jon Armajani, Ph.D.
College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University