



The Influence of Practices through Interreligious Dialogue: Types of Participations, Issues, Solutions and Effects that Arise

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Abstract

Due to technological evolution, migration, and the increasing interest in travel (business, service, health, or purely relaxing), the world is undergoing significant social, cultural, and linguistic changes. Although terms like "East," "West," and "Middle East" are still used, they have become simple "geographic" landmarks, as cultures and traditions increasingly interfere due to the formation of mixed societies. This article discusses how this "modern society"—which is forming new global cultures adapted and influenced by technology—is influenced by religious practices. It is a fact that society has been, is, and will be influenced by faith, as even the idea of unbelief is an expression of faith. Until recently, **"interreligious dialogues"** rarely mentioned the influence of practices, focusing instead on the clergy and representatives of religions and only discussing the Holy Books. The natural instinct to "defend" one's faith often led to quarrels or merely "tolerable endings." Crucially, the "representatives of beliefs" sometimes overlooked how ordinary people build bridges between beliefs through invitations to their practices. For instance, a Christian inviting their Muslim neighbour to the Christmas table, offering dishes while respecting the guest's "religious sacrifices," is a real example occurring globally today.

Keywords: society, faith, dialogue, practices, influences, values, cultures

Introduction

Sociological Theories and Ideas

As Anthony Giddens notes in *Sociology* (Giddens, 2006), we live in a deeply worrisome world that is simultaneously full of extraordinary promises for the future. It is a world constantly changing, marked by deep conflicts, social divisions, and the destructive effects of modern technology on the environment (Giddens, 2006). Despite these differences and conflicts, humans persist and change due to their ability to adapt. This capacity is influenced by mankind's history and the changes and decisions made over

time. Since humans have constantly had to learn from aspects that appeal to them, especially the spiritual part, this paper will analyze how the spiritual dimension of a person, belonging to a faith and specific practices, influences interaction with others.

Today's societies are **mixed and constantly changing**, necessitating wisdom, adaptability, and tolerance from their members. These qualities have developed through sociological, ethnic, religious, and other studies (Herbert & Albert, 2005; Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Studying the influences of religious practices on current and future society is a profound endeavor, as it relates to our own behavior as social beings.

Human beings have evolved radically, with modern social institutions and modes of life differing greatly from those of the past. The colonization efforts by Western countries from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century caused major social changes in both colonized areas and the colonizing societies. This pursuit of economic power, irrespective of its implications, led to a change in global society. Today, migration occurs for various reasons, including studies and safety (Giddens, 2006). Besides economic or safety necessity, cultural factors such as the products of religion, communication systems, and leadership also have an influence.

Religion and Society

Religion can function as both a **conservative and an innovative force** (Giddens, 2006). While some forms of religious faith and practice have hindered change, Max Weber (Giddens, 2006) mentions that religious beliefs often play an important role in mobilizing and promoting social values. The nature of communication systems is another major cultural influence affecting the character and course of change.

Sociologists define religion as a cultural system of shared beliefs and rituals that provides a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose, creating a conception of the sacred, all-encompassing, and supernatural reality (Giddens, 2006). This definition includes three key elements:

1. **Religion** is a form of **culture**, meaning that when people of different religions interact culturally, each individual contributes a part of their culture (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).
2. **Religion** involves ritualistic **practices**. These rituals and actions can often be grounds for conflict (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Individuals who try to impose their ritual without tolerance or understanding will experience and produce negative feelings.
3. **Religion most often provides a purpose in life** (Giddens, 2006). This can also lead to negative interactions if partisans lack tolerance and do not believe in the existence of a single power, named differently according to culture.

Émile Durkheim (Giddens, 2006), one of the three "classic" theorists of sociology, focused on functionalism and religious ritualism, studying small-scale religion in

traditional societies. Durkheim noted that religions are more than faith; they regularly involve ceremonial activities and rituals where believers gather as a group. Collective ceremonies assert and reinforce the feeling of **solidarity** with the group, and he considered ceremonies and rituals essential for forming bonds among group members (Giddens, 2006).

In contrast to Durkheim, Max Weber focused on **world religions**—those that attracted a large number of believers—and also examined the links between religion and social change (Giddens, 2006).

From a current perspective, there is a **mutual** connection and influence between religion **and society**. Migration, for economic, educational, or survival reasons, has led to the creation of diverse societies, with each bringing its culture, language, faith, and rituals. Whether out of curiosity or empathy, people have come into contact, "exchanging culture, tradition, ritual, etc." The positive, neutral, or negative reaction to these interactions is what produces social change (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Pure information aids social development. As Bronislaw Malinowski (Giddens, 2006) mentioned, each component of culture has a function in meeting a human need, and a social system imposes solutions to achieve stability. Society is created and maintained only through relationships and actions among the individuals that form it (Giddens, 2006). Today, the world is becoming increasingly interdependent.

Religions and Beliefs in Romania

Religious life in Romania is conducted in accordance with the principle of **freedom of religious beliefs**, as stated in Article 29 of the Romanian Constitution (Camera Deputaților, 2018), alongside freedom of thought and opinions. Although Romania does not explicitly define itself as a secular state, it adheres to the principle of secularity: public authorities are bound to neutrality towards religious associations and cults.

Eighteen religious cults are officially recognized in Romania. The **Romanian Orthodox Church** is the main religious institution, and the majority of the population, **86.45%**, declared themselves to be Orthodox Christian according to the 2011 census (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013).

A study by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013) in October 2013, titled "What does the 2011 census about religion say?", concluded that religion is one of the most important factors in defining the identity of a nation. Information about religious affiliation, along with ethnicity and mother tongue, complements the general picture of society.

The table below shows the religious affiliation from the 2011 census (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013):

Affiliation (Romanian)	Affiliation (English)	Number Persons	of Percentage
Ortodoxă	Orthodox	16,307,004	86.45%
Romano-catolică	Roman Catholic	870,774	4.62%
Reformată	Reformed	600,932	3.19%
Penticostală	Pentecostal	362,314	1.92%
Greco-catolică	Greek-Catholic	150,593	0.80%
Baptistă	Baptist	112,850	0.60%
Adventistă de ziua a șaptea	Seventh-day Adventist	80,944	0.43%
Musulmană	Muslim	64,337	0.34%
Unitariană	Unitarian	57,686	0.31%
Martorii lui Iehova	Jehovah's Witnesses	49,820	0.26%
Creștină după evanghelie	Christian Evangelical	42,495	0.23%
Creștină de rit vechi	Old Rite Christian	32,558	0.17%
Evanghelică luterană	Evangelical Lutheran	20,168	0.11%
Atei	Atheist	20,743	0.11%
Fără religie	No Religion	18,917	0.10%
Evanghelică română	Romanian Evangelical	15,514	0.08%
Ortodoxă sârbă	Serbian Orthodox	14,385	0.08%
Altă religie	Other Religion	30,557	0.16%
Evanghelică de confesiune augustană	Evangelical Confession of Augsburg	5,399	0.03%
Mozaică	Mosaic	3,519	0.02%
Armeană	Armenian	393	0.0026%
Total		18,806,608	100.00%

(Table 1: "Religious affiliation at the 2011 census." Data compiled from the National Institute of Statistics, Romania (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013).)

The majority are Orthodox Christian (86.45%), followed by Roman Catholic (4.62%), with Muslims in eighth place (0.34%) and Mosaic representing 0.02%. Despite these statistics, many areas of Romania have mixed religious communities, a reality that has existed for hundreds of years (e.g., the Dobrogea Zone with a mix of Christianity, Islam, and Armenians).

A significant Islamic minority, composed mostly of Turks and Tartars, exists in Dobrudja. There are about 70,000 Muslim believers in Romania, with 85% living in

Constanța County, 12% in Tulcea County, and the rest in various urban centers (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013).

Types of Ritual Participation

Ritual participation is a complex phenomenon shaped by the context, the intention behind sharing the ritual, the nature of the ritual, and the religious communities involved (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). There are two main types of participants:

1. **Outer-facing:** The responsive event or the sharing of the ritual. These events can result from political initiatives supported by religious leaders attempting to foster nonviolent, pluralistic societies. An example is Pope John Paul II's initiation of the **World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi** in 1986, which involved religious leaders gathering from all over the world to pray in their own way, showing that violence in the name of religion is never justified. While such events are positive, they face difficulties, primarily **language barriers** (Martin & Nakayama, 2008), followed by issues with ritual practices, symbols, and gestures. Cultural behavior and rituality are resistant to change and influence how people engage in collective activities (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).
2. **Inner-facing:** The event where the parties are receiving the hospitality (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). This type of sharing follows a paradigm of **hospitality**. Inviting someone to visit, celebrate, or participate in a community's ritual life signifies a desire to transcend confessional barriers. This dialogue only succeeds if the invited person is willing to understand or receive the host's worship (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

In conclusion, interreligious dialogue through practices—whether outer-facing or inner-facing—requires **collaboration, openness, and tolerance** from both sides: the host and guest, or participants from different cultures and religions (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

Reasons for Ritual Participation

A person may choose to participate in someone else's religious practices for many reasons, such as an **invitation** by family members, friends, colleagues, or neighbors.

The rise in migration has led to **mixed families** from cultural and religious perspectives (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). In these cases, partners or their families may feel a "need" to participate in the other's rituals to show support and understanding for the new intercultural couple. The impact is even greater when these couples have children, as sharing religious rituals differently forms the bonds between grandparents, grandchildren, and parents (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). However, these situations can be accompanied by rejection or misunderstanding, with language, symbols, and gestures playing a crucial role (Martin & Nakayama, 2008; Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

The couple's choices are vital: some choose to harvest only one partner's traditions and present the others informatively to the child, while others practice both, allowing the child to choose later (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Both options have positive and negative aspects, but they should be viewed as phenomena of **social evolution**, with the goal of finding solutions to positively contribute to the formation of future generations.

Ritual participation is also becoming an important pedagogical issue due to the high number of migrations leading to **mixed classes** and complex educational environments (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Participation in a society's religious rituals can have negative effects if subjects are unfamiliar with them, making it necessary for teachers to be prepared to manage crisis situations.

Intention and Intuition

When people enter the space or practice of a religious 'other,' they often experience an **inner repugnance or discomfort** that may precede or contradict any conscious objection (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Jonathan Haidt's model (Haidt, 2012) identifies six categories of moral intuition related to concerns: care/harm, fairness/cheating, liberty/oppression, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation.

Besides invitations and family ties, other reasons for participation include **curiosity, a study opportunity, tolerance, motivation** to understand the newer community, or a religious expression of seeking the ineffable (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

Interfaith Prayer

Interfaith prayer is both a phenomenon in its own right and encompasses interfaith worship. People of different faiths occasionally join in prayer acts, such as prayers for world peace or community prayer in response to a shared trauma (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). From an interreligious perspective, participation in others' rituals and practices or multi-religious prayer actions is a way to achieve dialogue through **experimentation** and experience (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

"Dialogue through practice" actions have increased due to unfavorable events caused by people claiming to belong to a faith but acting against its rules, such as in cases of religious extremism. Gatherings in public areas to bring flowers, light candles, and hold moments of silence are examples of interreligious dialogue and interfaith prayer, which involve interaction, responsiveness, and hospitality (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

Ritual as Identity Marker

Rituality is formal, repetitive, and stable, tending to **resist change** (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Ritual performance implies conformity to traditional rules rather than creativity. Rituals instill the idea of collective and individual identity and can emphasize the idea of "the person from the inside and the person from the outside" (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). This can, negatively, induce the need to be different and

lead to the idea of being "superior to the outside," creating difficult bridges for dialogue.

Participation in the rites of another faith can only go so far, as differences in language, practice, and understanding become barriers at some point (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Accepting others' participation in one's own rites demonstrates **tolerance and knowledge** of the other, breaking religious and cultural borders.

Changing Patterns of Religion

Today, the standard understanding of monoreligious worship is being challenged, especially in the West, where societies are mixed (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Sociologists of religion observe processes of **detraditionalization**, leading to a more reflexive approach to tradition, commitment, and identity, with people speaking of 'flexible believers' and their 'fluid affiliations' (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Religious identity formation is increasingly freed from the rule of conformity. As religious borders become more permeable, religious identities multiply, and ritual participation becomes a possibility (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

At the social level, people are forming connections, dialogues, and new family forms (mixed marriages in terms of culture, ethnicity, and religion), rapidly contributing to the formation of societies with totally different values (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). The dialogue at the societal level is arguably much stronger and faster than at the academic or representative level of beliefs (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

Academic literature needs to evolve by addressing how the involvement of people from various backgrounds is impacting social rites. Specialized literature must improve by searching for ways to sustain rapid social changes (Pickering, 2008) and how they will be passed on. Theological approaches to interreligious dialogue should shift focus from high tradition, myths, dogmas, and creeds to **progression** and how interreligious practice can foster better dialogue and relations between believers. The lack of interest in the practical dimension of religion (rituals, prayers, prohibitions) by interreligious theologians, liturgical theologians, and ritual scholars suggests that "inter-riting" is currently a blind spot (Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015).

The Question of Language

Language plays a vital, primordial role in life, including religious life (Martin & Nakayama, 2008; Herbert & Albert, 2005). It can function as a bridge, enabling communication, but it can also form a boundary, quickly leading to confusion and misunderstandings if the context is not fully appreciated (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Since prayer involves words, gestures, and actions, language must be managed carefully so it doesn't impede those involved in interreligious prayers. Any linguistic misunderstanding can have profound consequences for interfaith dialogue, highlighting the need for a focus on intercultural communication.

A language is seen as a "flash of the human spirit by which the soul of a culture reaches into the material world" (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** (Martin & Nakayama, 2008) suggests that language not only expresses but also shapes ideas and perceptions of the world; in other words, language defines experience and demonstrates culture and lifestyle.

Learning another language (language acquisition) is almost impossible if a person dislikes the culture or people speaking it (Păuș, 2010), but learning a language leads to respecting its culture. The phenomenon of **interlanguage**, where native speakers of one language speak in another, is common due to technology and migration (Păuș, 2010).

Nonverbal communication—facial expressions, personal space, eye contact, use of time, conversation silence—is also an important part of communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Nonverbal cues can reinforce, substitute for, or contradict verbal behaviors and often communicate relational messages about how one truly feels and how one sees the interlocutor (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural interaction is a fact of life, influencing the increasing cultural diversity in many contexts, a change accelerated by the internet and social media (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). However, these rapid changes do not inherently explain how people who differ in gender, age, nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical ability can get along better (Goleman, 2007; Martin & Nakayama, 2008). This is where the academic world must step in to research the facts, problems, solutions, and effects of the new, rapid social changes (Pickering, 2008), providing statistics and research to find answers for problems like tolerance and interaction. The question remains as to why some intercultural interactions lead to cultural tolerance while others result in violence.

Economically, cultural interaction (globalization) is often a good index of profit growth (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Making a culture known facilitates product sales, and migration makes companies (both home and newly-known societies) profitable by "selling the culture abroad." Many companies employ cross-cultural trainers to help bridge the cultural gap by providing information and strategies for dealing with cultural differences for those going abroad (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

Technological changes have significantly influenced how we view and approach intercultural connections. The growth of the internet brings language challenges, and global businesses, needing to adapt to local languages, are moving toward **multilingualism** rather than a global English internet (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Language thus holds an important place in intercultural relations globally and locally.

The process of learning and research in intercultural and interreligious dialogue involves learning about patterns and identities. Four skills are important in this

process: **practicing self-reflexivity, learning about others, listening to the voices of others, and developing a sense of social justice** (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

Identity is our self-concept and plays a key role in intercultural communication, serving as a bridge between culture and communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Identities are formed through communication with others (Locke, 1959), but societal forces like history, economics, politics, and religion have a strong influence (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). **Religious identity** is a common source of intercultural conflict.

A growing number of people today lack a clear ethnic, racial, or national identity, living "on the borders" of cultural groups (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). These individuals develop a **multicultural identity**, feeling equally at home in several cultures. This can occur from being born or raised in a multiracial home, or from being "global nomads"—children whose parents moved to different countries for business, missionary work, diplomacy, or military service (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

Benefits and Challenges of Intercultural Relationships

Popular culture significantly influences perceptions of the world. Most people have a variety of intercultural relationships spanning differences in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, and nationality (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). The benefits of these relationships include **breaking stereotypes, acquiring new skills, and learning about the world** (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

However, intercultural relationships also present challenges, such as: motivation, differences in communication styles, values, perceptions, negative stereotypes, anxiety, affirming another's cultural identity, and the need for explanations (Martin & Nakayama, 2008).

Conclusion

Societies have always shown a tendency for dialogue and knowledge for various reasons (business, diplomatic, economic, travel), but today they are far more dynamic and complex (Giddens, 2006; Martin & Nakayama, 2008). This is primarily due to technological evolution and migration for education, employment, and especially social security. Knowing the person next to you is becoming prominent, helping to ensure social harmony.

We must consider social change and its evolution, working to foster better collaboration among members regardless of social status, nationality, or religion. This requires **openness and collaboration** (Goleman, 2007). Curiosity also has a positive side: the drive to know the other, without judging them, makes society safer. Understanding one another without seeking out weaknesses provides better social understanding over time and positively influences future generations. The model we create today will lead us tomorrow.

Dialogue at all levels—social, educational, institutional, religious—will help stop the social crises the world faces. Trying to find solutions for living together, regardless of

background, will influence society in many ways, including the environment. Promoting a dialogue of knowledge and taking one another into account will make people more attentive to the environment and how we "share" it and leave it to those who come after us (Giddens, 2006).

While mixed societies promote positive aspects like the lack of stereotypes and increased tolerance, they still present barriers, including linguistic, cultural, ritual, and practice differences (Martin & Nakayama, 2008; Moyaert & Geldhof, 2015). Potential solutions include the review and introduction of laws to help maintain social harmony, and the organization of social activities where individuals can participate and learn about the cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions that surround them.

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