

Religious Convergence in the Age of Globalization

Point of Departure: Globalization & religious convergence

In his influential book “Religions in global society” Peter Beyer has proposed the idea of a global religious field or system emerging in the course of general processes of globalization. According to Beyer, the emergence of a global religious field can best be understood as the result of intra- as well as inter-religious convergence (99). Such convergence may occur in terms of organization or social structure (108) or as a “convergence of vision” or semantics (216). In spite of his emphasis on the significance of convergence for the globalization of religion, Beyer has not offered a systematic conceptual framework to grasp the ever shifting tension between convergence and divergence in a dynamic longitudinal perspective. In RF IV we want to take Beyer’s ideas as a point of departure and to explore how far the theory of a converging religious field can carry us, as which new insights may be gained by pursuing it to its limits. To this end, we will attempt to systematize phenomena of religious convergence by distinguishing between general *types* of convergence (delta- and sigma-convergence), *conditions/mechanisms* of convergence (e. g. colonization, mission and migration), and *forms or results* of convergence, and relating these different aspects of convergence to each other.

Types of Convergence: Delta- and Sigma-Convergence

In social scientific debates about convergence and divergence it has become common to distinguish between sigma- and delta-convergence. Sigma-convergence refers to the algebraic notion for variance: In its classic form, a decreasing coefficient of variance indicates convergence. For more qualitative studies sigma-convergence may indicate the general degree of mutual approximation or "growing together". However, sigma-convergence does not necessarily imply a particular direction of convergence in a teleological sense. This fact is better captured by a second measurement of convergence, the so-called delta-convergence. Delta-convergence is based on the decreasing distance of units of analysis towards an exemplary model.

Conditions, Mechanisms & Forms of Convergence

While Beyer has examined the global religious field as a prominent result of religious convergence, ThF IV aims at exploring the process of converging (and diverging) of religious traditions in the age of globalization. To do so, we will elaborate a typology of a) conditions, b) mechanisms and c) forms or results of religious convergence. Following Beyer, we regard phenomena of migration, mission and renewal as important *conditions* and *mechanisms* of convergence. While issues of religious encounter and renewal were crucial in the first working period of the thematic field, we will focus on the impact of mission and migration on religious encounter and convergence in the second working period. Besides from these conditions and mechanisms, religious convergence may also be triggered by political or juridical action, e.g. by laws of religious freedom or association or by overall processes of rationalization or bureaucratization. Apart from the question whether a global religious field is being formed at all, it seems fruitful from a cultural and religious studies point of view to examine how such convergence actually takes place. Hence, we will explore and systematize the variety of forms or *results* of convergence, such as spiritualization, commodification, universalization, hybridization, folklorization and transnationalization. The following table consists of three lists that are by no means exhaustive; no causal relationship between neighboring categories is implied, even where it might look like that. Terms in the right column are always to be understood as „... of religion“.

(general socio-political) Conditions	Mechanisms/Modes (religious actors)	Results (within religious traditions)
Migration	Renewal	Spiritualization
Mission	Mission (?)	Commodification
Political Framework	Political Action	Universalization
(Political) Ideologies and Movements	Politicization	Hybridization
Rationalization (of life)		Folklorization
...	...	Transnationalization