

***Personhood* as “Glocal Citizenship”: Its Christian roots and the challenge of the
immigrant crisis**

An Eastern Orthodox reflection

Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis

Volos Academy for Theological Studies

Abstract

In the midst of the dominant globalization process, as experienced in various areas of life, such as the economy, politics, new modes of communication, technology, or common dangers such as terrorism, environmental catastrophes, continuous fragmentation of the world, , an ongoing debate takes place around the meaning and the content of the concept of “global citizenship”. Although a concept deeply rooted in the history of philosophy (eg., Diogenes of Sinope, Stoicism) with various cognates or synonyms (world citizen, cosmopolitan etc) that give nuances to its meaning, the definition of global citizenship is still under discussion in the sense that it is quite often met with suspicion or “skepticism”, considered thus as a sort of “metaphor” that does not account for real life. Furthermore, while it is conceived as almost “incoherent since it seems to presuppose a more or less homogenous universal political order”, at the same time globalization by modifying the very context of political action as well as the conditions and the parameters of the overall human life, leads to a new understanding of citizenship that seeks to go beyond any particular, national or cultural bonds. Based on its inherent tendency of a voluntary or involuntary de-territorialising and de-historizing stand of the citizen’s ties, globalization provides modern citizen with freedom from a specific place, territory, highlighting the primary need for interdependence between the people all around the world, without however necessarily denouncing altogether the importance of local, national identities. The concept of global citizenship then naturally emerges as a striving, initially at least, for a proper balance between the global community and a particular state nation, between global and local, between the universal and the

particular, albeit not always evident since it often gives a second place to the particular identity.

Given this reality, what is the role that religion in general and Eastern Orthodox Christianity in particular is committed to play? It is widely recognized by historians of ideas and theologians that the concept of *personhood* is both historically and existentially the most important contribution of the eastern Orthodox Christian tradition to contemporary thought. By attempting to simultaneously reconcile communion and otherness, individuality and catholicity, personhood emerges as an important opportunity, seeking to overcome the tension or often conflict between local and global. Insofar as one of the most interesting characteristics of globalization is that “while the world is being internationalized, at the same time it is also localized”, personhood seems to provide the desired solution to a tension that dominates the debates between sociologists, political theorists. In its theological understanding personhood is being perceived as a concept that mediates between the local and the global, expressing in a more nuanced way what I would define here by a neo-logism as “glocal citizenship”. When the Christian perception of personhood is politically translated as *glocal citizenship*, it could provide a conceptual tool of successfully addressing on the one hand the tension between local and global as indicated in the highly contested concept of “global citizenship”, while on the other the gradually increasing problem of the immigrant crisis that south-European countries especially, such as Greece, face during the last years.