Globalization, Religion and Evangelicalism

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Globalization is a major theme in both popular and academic discussion today. The purpose of this essay is to explain in accessible language a highly complex debate that is raging in books and journals, one that is likely to continue for decades to come. It also seeks to discuss in general the role of religion in a globalizing world and to evaluate in particular the future of Protestant evangelicalism in a globalized world.

The scholarly discussion of globalization is particularly difficult because it crosses a number of academic disciplines: sociology, anthropology, history, religion, economics and political science, to name a few. What is surprising about this debate is the fact that the word "globalization" is so new. The word "global" is probably four hundred years old, reflecting the fact that prior to that time many people in Europe believed in a flat earth, and hence the notion of the world being a globe is relatively modern. But the terms "globalization," "to globalize" and "globalizing" were first used in English in about 1950 and only became commonplace in the 1980s.

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1981) was the first person to popularize the idea when he coined the expression "global village" in his Understanding Media: A Study in the Extension of Man (1964). He invented this idea as a way of conveying the effects of the communications revolution brought about by the widespread use of the technology of radio and television. Commercial radio stations began in the 1920s, but radio sets were bulky and relatively expensive. The advent of the transistor radio—which was only invented in 1950s—made radio receivers much cheaper and portable and thus more accessible to people throughout the world. Almost immediately the transistor radio began impacting remote societies, and perceptive scholars like McLuhan were aware that something significant was happening. With the development of satellite television communications in the 1970s, not only were human events being listened to across the world but they were being seen and experienced by millions simultaneously. The widespread use of the personal computer and with it the popularity of the Internet and e-mail in the 1990s enabled this communications revolution to be taken to a much higher level. All of these factors have combined to shrink or compress the world, making it possible for people to be in contact with others (even many others) instantly across many miles. This is the core idea behind "globalization."

But globalization as a concept often involves far more than this. Thus how one defines globalization is important, because the definitions are often loaded with assumptions. Anthony Giddens offers the following definition: "Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." Malcolm Waters suggests a similar definition: "Globalization is a process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly. The common ground in these definitions is..."
the emphasis on rapid communication that makes geographical distance less important to how we live our lives, the availability of these means of communication to people throughout the world and the increased awareness on the part of people of other people and places in the world. The central idea again is that the world is becoming more and more a single place, a single "village."

Other definitions emphasize not so much the importance of mass communications (including travel) and the mass media (and the possibility now of an international mass popular culture) but the global reach of multinational corporations, many of which are far more powerful than individual nation-states. The dismantling of national barriers to the operation of capital markets (the flow of money), which began in the early 1980s, and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 both contributed to the apparent triumph of international capitalism in the economic domain. There have been violent protests by people whom the media have labelled as "anti-globalization" activists, and so for many the word "globalization" has become a code-word for the emerging world economic order and the instruments of that order, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In this essay "globalization" is being defined more broadly in that it includes the economic dimension but recognizes that there are other social, political, cultural and religious forces at work as well.

But globalization is more than just the idea that the world is becoming a smaller place, a worldwide village because of the technological revolution. Key to the globalization debate is the idea that Western economic, political and cultural models are increasingly influencing this global village. Some thinkers argue that globalization is a myth or lie that has been put forward to disguise the march of international capitalism, giving the impression that it is an unstoppable process, which it is useless to resist. Others argue that globalization is merely a mask for Americanization; the world is becoming homogenized as all tastes are flattened and a single, American flavor triumphs. (Globalization theorists respond by saying, "No, the result is not that people want a single flavor—globalization opens up a wide diversity of flavors to cater to individual tastes.")

Common Features

There are some common elements in scholarly thinking about globalization. Following are some important points on which scholars generally agree.

First, globalization is a cultural and economic phenomenon that is historically rooted in the expansion of European nations, in what has been called the Vasco da Gama era (1497-1497). Vasco da Gama was the Portuguese explorer who pioneered exploration in 1497 when he took the first Portuguese fleet across the Indian Ocean. The period is often seen as marking the beginning of the Portuguese, rather than British, approach to the Americas and the instruments of that order, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In this essay "globalization" is being defined more broadly in that it includes the economic dimension but recognizes that there are other social, political, cultural and religious forces at work as well.

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who became wealthy through their abilities to work successfully in the marketplace, with their new wealth they challenged the old ways of doing things and the old elites, whose authority was based on family status (people like monarchs) or inherited wealth or land. The old establishment was challenged by the new one. The newly rich wanted to trade (not just the old monopolies favored under the old economy) and exploration and military adventure (to expand markets abroad). In the late nineteenth century many nation-states became more powerful as they sought the power needed to control their expanding economies and provide for their workers, who were demanding more state services and a social safety net.

Third, although some theorists may disagree as to its effects, they do agree that international capitalism has triumphed (for better or ill) as an economic system that seems to be an almost unstoppable force. We now live in a world economy made possible by better communications, cheap transport, new divisions of labor and the free flow of money. All of these forces have facilitated the growth of transnational corporations, many of which are economically more powerful than many nations belonging to the United Nations.

Fourth, there is a level of agreement among theorists that globalization involves:

- a process of contraction or shrinking, or the diminishing of the importance of barriers of distance and geography;
- the disembedding of people from the perceived traditions;
- the tendency of people to move beyond their tribal allegiances in a globalized world;
- the undermining of universal claims and particular identities. All of these assertions, however, can be called into question.

Fifth, the future of the nation-state is a key issue of debate. Some theorists speculate that the nation-state is being undermined or relativized. Walterstein sees nation-states as creations of the modern era that will become obsolete or simply dissolve under global pressures. Various solvents are suggested, given the communications revolution, people (especially the poor) have rising expectations of their government that most modern states are unable adequately to fulfill: in a globalizing world national identities (and boundaries) are harder to retain given the international flows of money, people, and culture; the free flow of information means that it is more difficult for nation-states to control their people. Some think that regional alliances of states (such as the European Common Market) will be the trend of the future, leading perhaps to a unified world. But other theorists believe that nation-states have the capacity to adapt and change their functions so as to be more, rather than less, effective in the international arena.

Sixth, many globalization theorists think that a global culture will not emerge in any meaningful sense, but rather that geographical location will not be a basis on which to predict how people will act. In a globalized world, for instance, would we be the same people living in the same country, or would we be characterized by our cultural identity as a North American or a Latin American, a person of African descent, or a European? These differences in perspective are illustrated in the debates over the role of the United Nations in world affairs.

Seventh, globalization theorists argue that academic analysis now needs to operate not at the level of the nation-state but at the global level. The context for cultural, political, economic, and social analysis is now global, and discussions of the contemporary world can no longer operate within the restrictions of a single nation or continent. Unless the larger context is taken into consideration one will never be able to understand the changes occurring in the world today. It is in this context that a number of Christian historians and philosophers are calling for a rethinking of Christian history in the context of the global expansion of the faith, particularly with regard to the development of Christianity in traditional areas of Christianity.

One has to be careful, however, to distinguish between globalization as: 1) a description of what is happening, 2) the various theories advanced by scholars about why is it...
happening and 3) the impact that it may have. There are several cautions that need to be heeded:

1. I have written that we need to think of globalization in terms of what is happening, but perhaps it would be better to say in terms of what appears to be happening, because it is debatable how far the communications revolution is an elitist phenomenon. It has been pointed out that the great majority of people in the world are still so poor that they have never used a telephone; the extent of the reach of high-tech revolution is thus at least debatable. Perhaps the low-tech transistor radio has been more significant in "shrinking" the world than the Internet.

2. We have to be careful to identify assumptions that people import into discussions about globalization. For instance, theories often imply that globalization is an inevitable and irreversible process. Sometimes the word "globalization" is a code word used by writers to suggest that there is an emerging global culture that cannot be resisted, and that this process of globalization involves both Westernization and the inevitable triumph of capitalism. (It may, on the other hand, be the case that Western values and international capitalism are only incidental to this stage of the development of globalization and that further down the line, the dominant "globalized" values will be quite different.)

3. We need to distinguish between description and prediction. People writing about globalization often move from description to prediction without distinguishing between the two. Observing the impact that globalization has had in one area of the world does not mean that a similar impact will be felt in another area. It is easy to generate generalizations about the impact of globalization and create scary scenarios about the future, so we have to be very careful to distinguish between what is happening, why these things are happening, and theories about globalism may lead.

4. There is a range of views among those who theorize about globalization. There are three main schools of globalization theorists. One group (including Masters, Giddens and Robertson) emphasizes the cultural aspects of globalization (although they disagree on a number of points of interpretation). Because Robertson has taught at the University of Pittsburgh for many years, he and his followers are often labelled the Pittsburgh School. Another group (dateline: economic factors) (the key figure here on the "left" of the political spectrum is Emmanuel Wallerstein, who has developed his World System theory) and on the dominance and impact of international capitalism. Another school offers a socio-political explanation that centres on the impact of globalization on international relations. Again, it is important to acknowledge that there is a wide variety of scholarly opinion concerning both the nature of globalization and its effects upon the world.

5. It is important to realize that scholars are very aware that globalization can produce powerful counter tendencies. Talk of globalization often brings to mind: a local reaction against it. While there may be tendencies working towards a single global identity, these frequently produce or heightened the desire of some to retain a separate, often exclusive identity. People who feel threatened that impersonal forces (as implied by the term "globalization") are robbing them of important aspects of their identity may react negatively and reverse the process. Local reactions could take the forms of rentier nationalism or an exclusive ethnic identity, religious extremism, sexism, racism or other specific forms of social exclusion.

6. There is an acknowledgement on the part of some that globalization may allow for some local differences—that global trends may be adapted in different ways in different places. Roland Robertson has invented the concept of "globalization." This word combines "global" with "local" to convey the idea that global outlooks can be adapted to local conditions. The word originally referred to a business strategy developed in Japan that took a global business plan but adapted its expression to different locations.

7. It is important to recognize that the concept of globalization and globalized are both often related to the concept of postmodernism, which is a broad term to characterize the cultural shifts associated with the proliferation of cultural contacts that lead to a questioning of traditional ways of doing things. Boundaries (religions, political and cultural) are blurred or marginalized as ideas, people and commodities travel the whole world at will. The key assumption of postmodernism is that there is no ultimate universal truth to be attained; all one can hope for is a particular set of "truths" that work for me, and it is the individual's responsibility to determine what these "truths" are for them.

Likely Implications of Globalization

Whichever school of theorists one is impressed by, there are some likely implications that many can agree upon. Some of them are:

1. International migration is likely to continue—people will continue to cross borders, some to emigrate, others to live abroad for part of their lives, whether to study or work. Permanent residence in other countries may (but will not necessarily) result from these migrations. This means that unexpected people will keep turning up in unexpected places. A Muslim man from Turkey marries a lapsed Christian Korean from Seattle in an American marriage that combines Turkish and Korean traditions following a Christian ceremony. An Christian missionaries from (Muslim) Indonesia turn up in Pakistan (a fellow Muslim nation) and end up working with Chinese engineers who have embraced Christianity under a nominally-Maoist regime, and their efforts are encouraged by Christian-speaking missionaries whose sermons are translated into English and Urdu.

2. Key cities or global cities (notably London, New York and Tokyo) that are multiethnic and multicultural will continue to be central to the emerging world economy. These cities host the headquarters of important transnational corporations and feed their needs for access to advertising, legal expertise, financial markets, multilingual staff and political decision-makers. Within these global cities, there are often huge numbers of temporary foreign residents. (In London, for instance, there are reportedly some 90,000 Japanese nationals who work in
Globalization, Religion and Evangelicalism

Britain's capital but live, move and have their being in a Japanese cultural enclave of their own. This pattern is repeated throughout the world. Large multicultural cities are crucial centres of transnational corporate power, global transport (especially of air routes) and international communications. The key cities are in turn closely linked into one another and come to resemble each other in terms of having high concentrations of professionals, business people, bankers, media and information personnel, leaders of the fashion industry and among them a high number of privileged foreigners.

3. Reactions against perceived threats related to globalization seem inevitable. When local identities (whether ethnic, racial, national or religious) are eroded or marginalized, people experience identity crises. Identity crises can produce strong reactions that are difficult to predict or control. New leaders could emerge to express the rage and frustration of those who feel powerless in the face of forces that they believe are overwhelming them, and these leaders might articulate new visions of society that are exclusive and reactionary.

Religion and Globalization

Many globalization theorists are virtually silent about the role of religion in globalization. Others argue that the idea that the world was created by a single God and that all people share a common humanity who are related to God has a "primary long-run driving force" in the direction of globalization. The two most effective globalizing religions are acknowledged to be Christianity and Islam, both of which are rooted in Judaism. In the period following the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century, Christianity became closely entangled with the politics of Western Europe. From the seventeenth century, Christianity became hemmed in by the rise of Islam as Islam came to dominate North Africa and much of the Middle East, thereby isolating Christian Europe from India and the East. Only in the sixteenth century did European Catholicism become expansive again with the rise of the Portuguese and Spanish colonial empires.

Protestantism's emphasis on the direct relationship of individuals to God through personal faith created the conditions in which personal faith and not membership in a state church came to be seen as vital. This eventually led to the separation of the church from the state (most notably in America but eventually in most of Western Europe).

Roland Robertson, who is widely regarded as the most important and creative globalization theorist, has argued that the "take-off phase" of globalization actually comes in the fifty-year period between 1875 and 1925, when two factors combined to spread European values throughout the world. Expansive Western capitalism pushed European merchants and traders to all corners of the globe in the search of new markets and raw materials. Alongside them (sometimes preceding them, sometimes following in their wake) were Christian missionaries (the nineteenth century has been called "the Great Century of Protestant missions"). Robertson argues that the missionaries—and not just merchants—were important to this phase of globalization, because wherever the missionaries went they sought to establish schools that helped to create Western educational systems in nations that had never known them and sought to educate people (including females) to read and write. The long-term cultural impact of these Christian educational efforts is still being felt. Even today many of the Christian schools that were founded in the late nineteenth century are still important in many countries that only have small Christian minorities. Some of those who attended these schools went on to receive their university educations in Western countries. Another factor, Robertson reasons, is that the elites in many non-Western countries now function with Western European assumptions and worldviews that are now widespread throughout the world, and they are in effect global citizens.

Perhaps, as noted above, it was only a coincidence that globalization occurred at a continent that was once Christian. Some (like Weber, the father of modern sociology) have speculated that there is historically a close link between the rise of modern capitalism and Calvinist forms of Protestantism. Weber argued that Calvinism helped to focus people on this world rather than on the world to come, on material things rather than spiritual ones. Calvinism (in Weber's view) reinforced and ignited capitalism as an expansive, international force. Crucial to Weber's view is his argument that Calvinism produced both character and anxiety—people worked hard and, anxious to demonstrate to themselves that they were among God's chosen people, they accumulated wealth as a sign, which reassured them that they were among the elect. Closely linked with this was their concept of "calling" or "vocation." Being good Calvinists they did not believe that God spoke to people directly (as did the Anabaptists—the charismatics of their day); rather they came to equate the idea of "calling" with a "career." It was in one's career (calling) that one brought glory to God.

Closely linked with this idea is the suggestion (again from Weber) that the basic assumptions of modern capitalism are the legacy of this Calvinistic impact. Weber's summary word for these processes is "rationalization." Rationalization involves the de-personalization of relationships (people are viewed as consumers or mere barcodes); the refining of techniques of calculation (as in the Vietnam War during which the Pentagon issued "kill-ratios" as a means of assessing the effectiveness of battles); the enhancement of the importance of specialized knowledge (a person who invests without a financial advisor may know about this); and the extension of technically rational control over nature (chicken farms where the chickens never see the light of day), as well as social processes (statisticians decide who will or will not receive public health care depending on their mathematical calculations).

All of this leads in Weber's view to a de-mystifying of the universe—the magical mindset that had prevailed in the middle ages was overthrown and the world became "disenchanted"—the magic was taken out of it. In time, this "disenchanted universe" came to be replaced with a lonely universe, one in which humans become locked into an "iron cage" of rationalism. For Weber, "rationalization" is the solvent that dissolves borders and homogenizes culture. Weber, however, did not think that this process would affect all societies, because he believed that societies with strong religious traditions (India and China, for instance) would resist the Western trend and thus did not think globalization was a real possibility.

Other social theorists have come up with their own explanations of the impact of modern capitalism: Emile Durkheim used the term "differentiation," and Karl Marx developed his own deterministic economic explanation. Unlike Weber and current globalization theorists, these think Weber was wrong and that the social and economic processes at work throughout the world are likely to affect all societies.

"Modernization" is a specialized term used to describe the social processes involved in capitalist development (with its end, the creation of a global consumer culture). Theorists like Robertson see globalization as making global the key features of this process. Many sociologists have linked the process of modernization with that of secularization, arguing that the "this worldly" focus of capitalism marginalizes religion and inevitably leads to a decline of the importance and practice of religion. Many social scientists have taken the view that religion is irrational and would be replaced by enlightened modernity. However, neither Weber nor Robertson agrees that religion can be so domesticated. Both have argued that there may be a new period in which important religious movements may rise again.
Globalization and Evangelicalism

Surprisingly little attention has been given by scholars (including Robertson) to what has actually been happening to Christianity in the past few decades, and in particular to evangelical Christianity. Scholarly theories about globalization need to be referred to facts on the ground. Theologists seem to give more attention to Islam, especially in its radical forms, and even to small sects, than to what has been happening within Christianity. Yet surprising what portion of Christians could be considered evangelical is highly problematic and depends greatly on what definition one uses—if one includes Roman Catholic charismatics, the figure could well be over 10% of the world’s population. According to Barrett’s Christian Encyclopedia, independent Pentecostals and charismatics unaffiliated with any church constitute 554 million or 27.7% of global Christians (about 10.02% of the global population).

Clearly much of Christianity’s growth in the first half of the twentieth century was due to the expansion of evangelicalism in its Pentecostal or charismatic forms in the non-Western world. While Christianity in Europe and North America suffers defections at a rate of about 2 million a year, Latin and South America have seen a rapid expansion of Pentecostalism, largely at the cost of nominal Roman Catholicism, and sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia (China, India and Korea) now boast considerable numbers of evangelicals. It is important to distinguish between Protestant fundamentalism and evangelicalism. While some evangelicals may be fundamentalists, many are not. Evangelicalism began in the eighteenth century, fundamentalism in the early twentieth. Evangelicalism is conversionist and empowers the laity; fundamentalism tends to be static in terms of growth; it relies heavily on winning over nominal Christians and strengthening those who already are Christians. Evangelicalism’s ability to harness lay initiative is probably the single most important factor behind the amazing statistic that 79% of the 2.3 million Christian congregations in the world today are Protestant, although Protestants only represent about a third of global Christians. This multi-centred form of Protestantism probably makes evangelism much better placed for expansion in the twenty-first century.

The way that evangelism has grown has led one scholar to speak of its expansion as an instance of “globalization from below,” because it has not depended primarily on Western missionaries nor has it benefited from close association with the West’s economic advances. Rather it has grown rapidly because it has been embraced by many of the world’s poorest as their own and been adapted to their settings and needs; the growing edge of Christianity has been among poor, non-white urban dwellers attracted to

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### Percentages of followers of major religions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>5.981 billion¹</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1.155 billion</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>.799 billion</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.936 billion</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3. The figures add up to more than 100% because many of the “others” have dual allegiance to both traditional denominations and new independent churches.
Pentecostal and charismatic versions of evangelism. Evangelicalism is arguably an example of unplanned religious globalization—it is a global religious movement that has managed time and again to adapt to local situations and develop independent, indigenous leadership. It has created a form of popular Christianity that is culturally diverse and centered on an infinite number of localities (in sociological language, it is "culturally diverse and polycorncentric").

This inter-cultural dynamic is important in understanding the amazing growth of Pentecostalism which first emerged among America’s underclass—notably among poor blacks and women—and was carried abroad as often as not by immigrants, artists and others associated with counter-establishment religion. These carriers bypassed the wealth and power of traditional religion and created their own informal but highly effective networks to communicate their message. As in the early church, it was those on the periphery, those whom the world regarded as powerless who turned the world upside down. This confirms Weber’s observation that new religious perceptions usually emerge among those on the periphery of civilizations, as they are the people who have the capacity to be unbound by events and to question received ways of doing things.

Past results similar to what has happened several times in the history of Christianity: the faith is undergoing both a major expansion while at the same time virtually re-inventing itself in new forms. Unlike Islam, Christianity has not spread from one geographical center to another from a central heartland, and its scriptures are translated into every language known to humankind. Islam’s spread, on the other hand, has been limited by its reliance on a holy text, which is understood to have been dictated directly by Allah in seventh-century Arabia; it cannot be translated, and the text must be memorized in its original language. Further, “localizing” Islam is the Arab, the cradle, the cradle that the faithful are to undertake to Mecca, the holiest site of Islam, located in modern Saudi Arabia. The lack of a single holy language and a specific holy space may be key factors in enabling the globalization of Christianity over other faiths.

Following from this, Christianity’s attitude to indigenous cultures has differed significantly from Islam. Indigenous names for God found in tribal cultures have been embraced by Christians but rejected by Muslims, who insist that all must worship God as “Allah.” In Africa it has been found that in areas where the indigenous names for God have been forgotten or displaced, Islam has prospered. In areas where indigenous names have survived, these areas have welcomed forms of Christianity that embraced the use of these names, thereby enabling people to incorporate their religious traditions into Christianity. Thus in the twentieth century, Islam grew ten-fold in Africa while Christianity grew thirty-eight fold.

Unlike Islam, which has a linear history of growth and spread, Christianity has grown and flourished in different civilizations at different times, sometimes eventually declining and virtually dying out, only to spring up in a new culture in various forms. Thus it shifted from a Jewish, Jerusalem-centric religion to a Greco-Roman culture (focused on Constantinople and Rome) and then to the barbarian tribes of Northern Europe who had little in common with either the Jewish world or the Greco-Roman world. In the last two centuries its heartland shifted again—this time to the non-Western world, particularly to the south and east, where the majority of its adherents now live. For many the word “misionary” still conjures up pictures of nineteenth-century white Westerners going from Britain or the United States to share their faith with people of colour in Africa or Asia. This popular understanding obscures the fact that a large percentage—probably the majority—of Protestant missionaries today come from the non-Western churches and go to non-Western countries.

Evanegelicalism’s Future in a Globalizing World

We have discussed above three trends that may well continue due to globalization. We will now look at these three in relation to evangelism.

Continued International Migration

International migrations have also been important for the globalization of evangelicalism. (There are some ethnic groups that have sided its spread, such as West Indians in Britain and Europe, Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia, and Latin Americans in the United States.) However, diasporas in the twentieth century tend to be to traditionally Christian areas of the world (Europe and America) and diasporas of non-Christians had little impact in terms of conversion to other religions. Thus while there are many Muslims in Europe, there have been few conversions to Islam among the Europeans. Evangelical growth, by contrast, has occurred in many parts of the world that are not traditionally Christian: it now exists in virtually every region where religious freedom is allowed and has done well even in some areas where it is has been actively suppressed (as in China under Mao). Diasporic globalization is not the same as conversionist globalization, and it is the latter rather than the former that has been most important to evangelical growth. That said, continued international migration is likely to be a significant factor in evangelism’s spread.

Global Cities

Global cities may well see the growth of ethnically based evangelical congregations, but if evangelism’s strength is among the underclass of the world, these churches are likely to be strongest amongst marginalized minorities within these cities.

Reactions Against Globalization

Reactions against the impact of globalization may well occur, and anti-Western sentiments may be mixed with anti-Christian sentiments, making life more difficult for evangelicals in parts of the world where this occurs. This consideration, however, has to be put alongside the actual experience of religious freedom in the world today. Evangelicalism has probably benefited from the growing attention to human rights that has made evangelism much easier in areas where a single religion was approved of and promoted within a particular society. For instance, Latin American evangelical growth only really "took off" following the Declaration of Human Rights, which the Roman Catholic Church endorsed in 1965 as part of the Second Vatican Council. Political realities in many other parts of the world still hinder evangelical growth, particularly in Muslim countries and in some strongly centralized societies, such as China. Similarly in Eastern Europe, the demise of Marxist regimes that sought to exercise strict control over religion has in many cases enabled significant evangelical growth. It is, however, important to realize that in spite of the growth of human rights, and an awareness on the part of many that there are in theory different religious options, perhaps half of the world’s people live in societies in which traditional forms of authority (paternal, family or societal) are such that choices beyond reach. A leading expert on religious freedom has argued that in the late twentieth century the global trend was away from, rather than toward, religious liberty. So what the globalization theorists have been saying—that globalization leads to de-territorialization and increased freedom of the individual—has not been true in the area of religious liberty. If globalization does eventually lead to increased freedom of choice in religion and more openness to individual initiative, then it is likely that evangelism will grow in societies that have traditionally shut it down.

Other factors also need to be highlighted when considering the future. For instance, the strongly indigenous flavour of evangelism has been a great secret of its strength, but scholars have been very reluctant to acknowledge this and have devotedly sought to portray evangelical growth outside the West as the product of globalization from above. Time and again the charge is made that evangelism’s strength in the non-Western world is the result of an alliance with American power and culture. The difficulty
with this is that it cannot be supported by the experience of many in numerous parts of the world. Indeed, there is evidence that in Brazil close association with Western culture and even with Western missions has been counterproductive of evangelical growth. Within popular evangelicalism there is a globalizing tendency—but this is more related to what evangelicals in various countries desire than with what their supposed American masters do.

For some, however, globalization has made them aware of new choices open to them—including the possibility of changing their religion. Some scholars have assumed that having a lot of choices leads to confusion, consternation and religious relativism—or, on the other hand, to religious fundamentalism. Some may experience confusion and consternation, but others may welcome the new choices open to them. Such choices may help them to clarify who they are and who they want to be. In other words, they might convert to a new religion. At a personal level then, globalization may lead to more clarity rather than to confusion. At the level of society, it might well encourage the emergence of a host of new religions and a reinvigoration of old ones. In this way globalization may well promote the growth of evangelicalism as one of a host of new religious options.

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, its purpose has been to introduce the academic debate concerning the concept of globalization and to discuss some of its implications for religion in general and for evangelicalism in particular. It is hoped that an understanding of the complexity of the debate will make readers wary of generalizations about the impact of globalization and will lead them to be cautious when evaluating arguments asserting any “inevitable outcomes” associated with such a widely discussed but highly disputed concept as globalization.