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## Essay: Religion and Globalization

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**Religion and Globalization**

Jim Spickard, University of Redlands

Popular images of "globalization" stress its economic and political character, especially the global reach of transnational corporations that are shifting power away from states'— and thus from citizens'— efforts to control their own fates. In these images, religious organizations respond to globalization, sometimes by supporting anti-global movements (e.g., anti-WTO protests, North/South economic justice efforts, neo-fundamentalisms, etc.) and sometimes by piggybacking their mission efforts on new technologies and new market penetrations (e.g., the Protestant evangelization of Latin America). A second commonly noted attribute of globalization is increased migration, which has also had religious consequences. As proponents of the supply-side approach to religion have noted, at least part of the growth of new religious movements in the U.S. since the 1960s can be traced to changes in immigration laws that admitted Eastern "missionaries" to the heathen Americans. There has also been considerable research on "new immigrant congregations," which appear to serve both as a means of assimilation and as a way of deepening community in a new land.

These stories of religious response to globalization are not false, and we can learn much by seeing how religious groups accommodate themselves to such changed economic, social, and technological surroundings. Yet, to focus only on response leaves important aspects aside.

One: Globalization is as much a fact of consciousness as it is an economic fact; people everywhere, now, see themselves as individuals, possess an image of humanity-at-large, think of the world as a collection of sovereign nation-states, and so on. World-historically speaking, these ideas are new. The growth of worldwide markets as much depends on this consciousness as shapes it. The Weberian question – How have religions helped bring about this development? – is still worth pursuing.

Two: Despite fears of cultural homogenization, localism has not died in a globalized age. Roland Robertson uses the term "glocalization" to describe a globalized world's increasing heterogeneity. How is contemporary religious heterogeneity both global and local, and what is the balance between the two? Is Mama Lola – to take just one example – Haiti in Brooklyn, Brooklyn in Haiti, or all of us everywhere? Religions are at the forefront of the "glocalization" process.

Three: Globalization fundamentally alters power relationships, both religious and scholarly. Pentecostals in Africa and Brazil share resources with those in the United States, creating transnational networks that support their mystical universe. Swedish Charismatics use anthropological methods, alongside business ones, to understand their mission possibilities. The lines between things have shifted, and many observers doubt that they will ever have new fixed configurations.

Four: Globalization highlights "religious" processes that extend far beyond church life. One can, for example, analyze human rights in light of the Durkheimian notion that religion gives us a symbolic image of social life. Few symbols are more sacred today, and the three "generations" of those rights – civil/political, economic/social, and group – symbolically represent three conflicting social processes: individuation, the growth of worldwide economic and social networks, and increased localism. What can such non-church "religions" tell us about contemporary social life, that the sociology of religion's traditional emphasis on church doctrines and organizations (belief and belonging) misses? These are but a few of the possible research agendas for the sociology of religion in a globalized age.