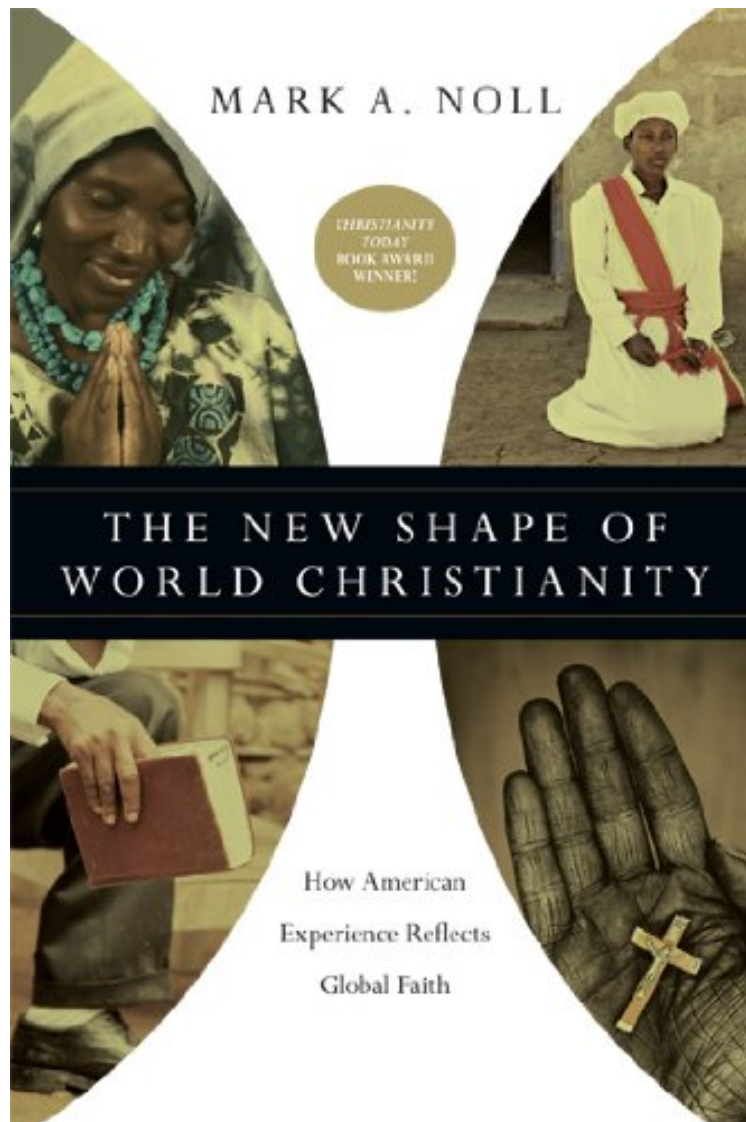


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## The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith

Mark A. Noll

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**Mark A. Noll : The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. accessible, well written and thought-provokingBy CustomerIn The

New Shape of World Christianity, historian of North American Christianity, Mark Noll, writes a book for his "fellow evangelicals," in which he argues that due to the massive changes in the landscape of Christianity throughout the world during the last century, a new history is required. This is not, Noll insists, to discount previous histories, but to punctuate the importance of re-narrating Christian history in light of the recent movements and developments that have reverberated throughout the world in reshaping Christianity. In this way, Noll's book seeks to mediate between old and new histories of Christianity, while drawing points of connection between the American Christian experience and the recent transformations of world Christianity. In so doing, Noll argues that although American Christianity has been influential upon Christianity throughout the world, American Christianity is important for the world not because of direct influence, but because of "how Americans have come to practice Christian faith." To be clear: Noll is not denying America's influence on the various forms and expressions of Christianity in the world today. In fact, Noll suggests to ignore American Christianity's influence on the rest of the world would be "foolish." Instead, Noll simply believes that America's influence cannot provide the sole explanation for the reality that world Christianity increasingly reflects non-denominational, evangelical, and Pentecostal forms of Christianity. As support for this claim Noll highlights the role of local initiative and the local exercise of power and control in the development of Christianity in specific contexts. In other words, the notion of direct American influence on world Christianity obscures "local appropriation of Christianity by local agents for local reasons and in the context of local cultural realities." As an example, Noll examines the influence and impact of Campus Crusade's Jesus Film, which has been translated into 1,005 different languages as of mid-2007, in addition to being viewed by nearly six billion people in 229 countries, according to Noll's research. Noll describes the Jesus Film as offering an account of Christianity that emphasizes the importance of making "a personal choice for Jesus Christ, followed by a life of dedicated personal service guided by Christian norms and oriented toward Christian goals." So, while notes that the Jesus Film represents the genuine impact of American Christianity, he also suggests that the way in which the film is either accepted or disregarded demands local agency. Moreover, Noll suggests that not only do locals choose to observe the film, but that in several instances locals have also distributed the film of their own volition. In reflecting on this phenomenon, Noll argues that the Jesus Film does not simply highlight American influence or local agency and initiative as mutually exclusive interpretations of the situation. For Noll, the impact and popular reception of film is also illustrative of a particular kind of appeal that connects with the rapidly changing contemporary circumstances. As such, Noll argues that there is a connection between the film's appeal and the current social and cultural circumstances occurring in the non-Western world today. Thus, Noll wants to highlight his observation that the non-Western world is, in many ways, beginning to approximate the social conditions of 19th century America. That is, through "global economic forces," many regions and locales outside of the West are developing characteristics that in a similar manner parallel the social context in which distinct expressions of American Christianity emerged. More specifically, the non-Western world through global processes is developing into places that are amenable to "social fluidity, personal choice, the need for innovation and a search for anchorage in the face of vanishing traditions," Noll contends. As such, Noll believes that these non-Western societies are inclined "to be competitive and not deferential, open to Christian witness but not officially Christian, allowing space for entrepreneurial activity while not restricting religious expression too drastically. To the extent that these conditions have developed, it is not surprising that style of Christianity that flourished in North America's competitive, market-oriented, rapidly changing and initiative-rewarding environment would also flourish when other environments begin to look more like nineteenth-century America than fifteenth-century Europe." Thus, for Noll, American Christianity is most important for the world, because it provides the world with a form or template in similar social conditions. Therefore, Noll argues, "the way that Christianity developed in the American environment helps to explain the way Christianity is developing in many parts of the world." However, Noll cautions the reader: "correlation is not causation." Given the broad nature of Noll's argument (i.e., how the American experience is reflected in Christianity throughout the world), Noll astutely develops a broad thesis and broad conclusions. In other words, Noll recognizes that it is one thing to build a strong case that demonstrates a strong correlation, but it is another thing to establish causation. In this way, Noll's thesis is well supported by the end of his book. Nevertheless, I have a few questions and working critiques of his book. First, much of Noll's thesis hinges on American Christianity being an "influence," but not a "direct influence" on the rest of the world. Yet, Noll never articulates what he has in mind by "direct" influence as opposed to general influence. That is, what exactly would constitute as "direct influence," according to Noll? Moreover, I wonder if there are certain regions or locations in which American Christianity appears to have direct influence and others simply indirect. Finally, I wish Noll had mentioned the importance of Rick Warren, who is arguably the most well known American Evangelical in world Christianity during the past few years.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not what I expected. By heatherlea17I expected this to be a book about how the American experience shaped Christianity as a whole. Instead, its about evangelical missionaries. Disappointed. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The State of the Faith By John Knapp Mark Noll, the long-engaged scholar/believer, is the single best person to describe the presence, or face, of Christianity as it is practiced in the 21st century. Where the real action--not just frenzied emotion--of Christian faith actually is, who's doing what where, may come as a surprise to many who identify themselves as

Christians. English wasn't around in the 1st century, and it's hardly the first language of active Christians today. A very readable "must read," with just enough documentation. The centers of real Christian faith and practice have changed dramatically in the past one hundred years. If you've moaned and groaned about the losses of true Christianity outside (as well as inside) the doors of where you live, this book can bring you some refreshing understanding.

2010 Christianity Today Book Award winner! With characteristic rigor and insight, in this book Mark Noll revisits the history of the American church in the context of world events. He makes the compelling case that how Americans have come to practice the Christian faith is just as globally important as what the American church has done in the world. Noll backs up this substantial claim with the scholarly attentiveness we've come to expect from him, lucidly explaining the relationship between the development of Christianity in North America and the development of Christianity in the rest of the world, with attention to recent transfigurations in world Christianity. Here is a book that will challenge your assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the American church and the global church in the past and predict what world Christianity may look like.

"Noll remains one of the most important observers of the American evangelical scene." (Alan D. Strange, *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, October 2010)"Noll offers a deft overview, filled with fascinating examples of world Christianity today. This book will help American readers begin to understand Christianity as a world religion and to examine the claims that it is a mere export of American evangelicalism." (Joel A. Carpenter, *The Journal of American History*, June 2010)"I heartily recommend *The New Shape of World Christianity*, especially to those who are not conversant with contemporary missiology. Noll opens for readers a door into an important discussion about mission practices and theology that could be of great consequence in an academic or congregational setting." (Benjamin T. Conner, *Interpretation*, July 2010)"This lively, readable narrative is highly recommended for students of global Christianity, indigeneity and contextualization, recent church history and missiology." (Roger E. Hedlund, *Dharma Deepika*, January-June 2010)"This is an important and engaging book, not only for the serious question that Noll poses and explores, but also because it offers a richly textured look at global Christianity through an assortment of sources and from a variety of angles." (Kurt Selles, *Calvin Theological Journal*, April 2010)"Noll argues for a new historical perspective. With convincing interpretations of recent scholarship, he argues that the 'template' of American Christianity rather than its direct influence has been the main American contribution to world Christianity, especially in its evangelical and Pentacostal forms. Recommended." (W.B. Bedford, *Choice*, November 2009)"Noll has offered both a remarkable picture and a challenge. He offers keen insight into the new shape of world Christianity. And he has challenged others to tell the rest of the story." (Robert Bruce Mullin, *First Things*, December 2009)"Noll's mix of interpretive insight and survey information makes this both an important book for church historians and a helpful book for Christians wanting to grow in their knowledge of the worldwide body of Christ." (Mark Rogers, *Themelios*, November 2009)"What happens when a superb scholar who studies both North American religious history and global Christianity decides to bring those fields together, to understand how each informs the other? The answer is *The New Shape of World Christianity*." (Phillip Jenkins, *Christian Century*, October 20, 2009)"A valuable contribution for those who would like an excellent introduction to a growing area of historical scholarship." (Benjamin L. Hartley, *PRISM*, 2009)"With insightful research and poignant historical observation, Noll effectively demonstrates that American individualism, voluntarism, and anti-institutionalism have had a much greater impact on the global church than have money, resources, or power. Noll adds an innovative thesis to our understanding of the contribution of U.S. churches to the amazing growth of the non-Western church." (The 2010 Christianity Today Book Awards, Missions/Global Affairs Category Winner, February 2010)"The author is a masterful story teller, so that while the text is well documented, the selection, brevity, and clarity of the illustrations make the volume a welcome introduction to the vast literature on the global inculturation of Christianity and the transformation of the intent and content of what missionaries presented through the linguistic and cultural translation that is characteristic of the growth of Christianity through the ages." (Jeffrey Gros, *Missiology*, January 2010)Listed in the article *Ten Theology Books for Your Beach Bag*. (Collin Hansen, *Christianity Today Online* ([christianitytoday.com](http://christianitytoday.com)), June 15, 2009)"The best teachers are also learners, and this book is eloquent testimony to Mark Noll's stature as both wise teacher and continuing student. His thesis is simple: that similarity of historical conditions, rather than direct influence, is what links (white) American evangelicalism with much of non-Western Christianity today. One need not agree with all his arguments to recognize that Noll's nuanced approach is a very important counter to ideologues of both the left and the right." (Vinoth Ramachandra, author of *Subverting Global Myths*)"Why does much of Christian worship and witness today in Africa, Asia and Latin America resemble American Christianity? Mark Noll argues that the rising churches of the Global South and East develop 'American' forms because the social forces they encounter resemble those that shaped American Christianity. Even though thousands of American missionaries have served in these lands, local trends and needs influence the churches far more than Americans do. In making his case, Noll offers a deft overview, filled with fascinating examples, of world Christianity today. For Americans who want to learn something about Christianity as a world religion, this book is a fine place to start." (Joel Carpenter, *Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity*,

Calvin College)"Here is a book that both critics and supporters of missions must read. Noll helps us move beyond the simple praise and blame associated with Western missions to see the complexity and glory of the growth of Christianity, and, in the process, opens up new frontiers of understanding and new lines of research." (William Dyrness, professor of theology and culture, Fuller Theological Seminary)"This book provides deep insight into the relationship between American evangelicalism and the growth of Christianity around the world. Master historian Mark Noll argues that American experience provides the template for much of world Christianity today. Readers will enjoy these thoughtful reflections written with Noll's typical clarity and creativity." (Dana L. Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Mission, Boston University)"This fine book is one more in a long list of insightful and thought-provoking works by Mark Noll, although it gets him into new territory, that of world Christianity. Here once again is Noll's gift for deftly summarizing other scholars' findings and adding his own creative analysis to make for a stimulating product. This book is a fine antidote to the tendency toward either extreme triumphalism or self-flagellation on the issue of America's place on the world Christian scene." (Daniel H. Bays, professor of history and Asian studies, Calvin College)"Mark Noll's novel thesis is that the real influence of American Christianity lies in its principle of voluntarism, which global Christianity has also found to be the most effective means to spread the gospel with or without American aid. This modest account of American influence should give pause for thought to both advocates and opponents of American hegemony in contemporary global Christian mission." (Simon Chan, Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Theological College, Singapore)"The United States has emerged as a crucial frontier of the worldwide Christian awakening, in part because of America's role as a global power but in large part because of similar experiences rooted in history and civil society. From his own evangelical background, Mark Noll has explored these connections with lucid sensitivity and lively attentiveness, and in so doing has offered a welcome and valuable contribution to the literature on world Christianity and its critical interface with American religious history." (Lamin Sanneh, professor of world Christianity, professor of history and professor of international and area studies, Yale University, and director, World Christianity Initiative at Yale Divinity School)"Scholars have become increasingly attentive to the changing tides of world Christianity and the implications for historiography, doing theology and understanding contemporary patterns of mission. Mark Noll looks back into the nineteenth century when America appropriated and transformed inherited European Christian traditions. The startling conclusions are that the contemporary currents in the Global South resemble the American Christianity at the turn of the century, that it is this emergent form that America shared with the world, and that neither money nor military power and influence could explain the American contribution to world Christianity. This refreshing and robust profile of American Christian influence has many implications: it explains why, among the industrialized nations, Christianity has remained resilient in the American public space; it counters the discourses in which Americanization appears as a negative epithet, a sign of hegemony and negative, extravenous influence. This lucid account has introduced a new dimension that will certainly stimulate the debate on the encounter between the local and global processes in the interpretation of contemporary Christianity." (Ogbu U. Kalu, Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Mission, McCormick Theological Seminary, and director, Chicago Center for Global Ministries)"Christians around the world rely on intellectual leaders such as Mark Noll to synthesize, challenge and propose. This book synthesizes the rising literature on global Christianity, challenges received conceptions about the American role and proposes new ways of seeing which take the issues of global reflexivity seriously. Wrapped in Noll's measured, insightful prose, this is a book which should be read by thoughtful Christians seeking to understand the most significant questions of our day." (Mark Hutchinson, associate professor and dean of academic advancement, Southern Cross College, Sydney, Australia) "Scholars have become increasingly attentive to the changing tides of world Christianity and the implications for historiography, doing theology and understanding contemporary patterns of mission. Mark Noll looks back into the nineteenth century when America appropriated and transformed inherited European Christian traditions. 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About the Author Mark A. Noll (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University) is Francis McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is advisory editor for *Books Culture* and subeditor for the new *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Noll's main academic interests concern the interaction of Christianity and culture in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-American societies. He has published articles and reviews on a wide variety of subjects involving Christianity in modern history. Some of his many books include *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, *Is the Reformation Over?*, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* and

The Old Religion in a New World.