



Mark Shaw is the director of the World Christianity program at Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya. He has studied world Christianity at the University of Edinburgh (M.Th.) and the history of Christianity at Westminster Theological Seminary (Th.D.). Mark is the author of a number of books, including *Ten Great Ideas from Church History* (InterVarsity Press) and *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity*. He and his wife, Lois, reside in Kenya where they have lived and worked for twenty-five years.

Revivals Key to Christianity's Growth: An Interview with Mark Shaw

"Mark Shaw's bold thesis about the ongoing importance of revivals in the modern world is a treasure for many reasons. . . . It opens edifying vistas for Christian believers of all sorts who have become aware of momentous shifts in the nature of Christianity around the world, but who have needed a solid theological guide for understanding what is taking place. Along with Michael McClymond's Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America, this book is the most impressive study of worldwide Christian revival to have appeared in a very long time." —**Mark Noll**, Notre Dame University

Christianity has become a truly world religion in the last century. What has triggered the emergence of this new global faith?

There are lots of key factors. Missionaries were everywhere on the ground. The Bible was translated into local languages. The Spirit of God moved in the Global South. Independent and indigenous churches popped up all over the place. Christianity became linked with the quest for freedom and progress in many lands. The modern world threatened traditional cultures and religions and created a market for a global faith that could withstand modernity. Christianity was seen as that global faith that was also rooted in the local. And on and on. What I argue in *Global Awakening* is that revivals were the delivery system that unleashed the power of these various factors and produced the new world Christianity.

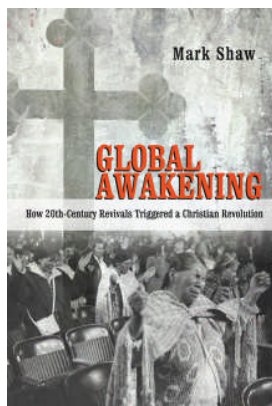
What informs your work on global revivals?

I come from New England where a very powerful theology of revival was developed by Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century. I have spent twenty-five years working in Africa where I have seen explosive Christian growth all around me. I have studied new Christian movements in places like Brazil and Argentina. My interest has been in combining these studies with insights from history and the social sciences. A year of intensive research at the Center for the Study of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh helped me move toward a more unified theory of revivals and revivalism.

You quip, "The news of revivalism's death has been greatly exaggerated." What do you mean by this?

Ask a typical North American what they think of when they hear the word *revival* and most would tell you about sawdust trails, nineteenth-century camp meetings, Pentecostal crusades in the 1920s, Jimmy and Tammy Faye Bakker, or the like. For most of us revivals are an American folk ritual about as relevant to the twenty-first-century world as an old John Wayne western. People in North America don't really believe they happen anymore no

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matter what they may have heard about the Toronto blessing or the Brownsville revival in Florida. What I am arguing is that revivalism is bigger than ever and busy all over the world.

What are global revivals and how do they work?

I see them as charismatic people movements that seek to change their world through the translation of Christian truth and the transfer of power. These grass-roots movements are a combination therefore of a spiritual factor (the Spirit of God), a people factor (the transfer of power to the marginalized), a truth factor (the application of the gospel to the pressing questions of a people group and culture) and a justice factor (a mission to change one's world in response to the gospel). They are messy to look at when you run into them in real life but at their core are these key elements.

What is the significance of the global revivals that you highlight in the book?

There are thousands of global revivals. I wanted to pick a few key movements that highlight both the geographical scope of global revivals as well as illustrate some of the dynamics of revival. So I look at three revivals from Asia (Korea, India and China), three from Africa (Nigeria, East Africa and Ghana) and two from the Americas (Brazil and the United States).

How do the forces of globalization contribute to the spread of Christianity?

Globalization is a buzzword. Everybody uses the term but not everyone agrees what it means. For many it is an evil force that is destroying local economies and culture as the rich West eats up global resources and monopolizes markets. For others, myself included, globalization is not just a capitalistic steamroller from the West but a two-way global highway with heavy traffic on both lanes. Pressure from the West threatens a local culture somewhere in the Majority World. Christianity with its vernacular Bibles and indigenous churches shows itself to be less an agent of globalization than an ally of the local. A newly confident local people movement begins in reaction to the threat of the West and often hops on the global highway headed back in the opposite direction. The new studies about African Christianity migrating to the Global North show that globalization is less a conspiracy and more an opportunity for resurgent religion and revived Christianity to meet a desperate need in the spiritual wastelands of the Western world.

How has American evangelicalism changed its identity in recent years?

In light of the new world Christianity, American evangelicalism is best understood not as a political movement of the religious right but as a broker of an international network that brought local non-Western revivals together to produce a truly global awakening. I have a chapter in the book in which I argue that the real significance of Billy Graham and the postwar evangelical revival is less about saving America from Neo-Paganism than it is about finding and defining global evangelicalism and providing the networks for evangelical movements from the Global South to cooperate and join the global highway and move west.

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What the current global awakening teaches me is that the real emerging church is a wildly global and culturally pluralistic one which moves us toward the vision of 1 Corinthians 12, a body of Christ with many parts each recognizing their global interdependence.

How significant is the revival leader in the ultimate outcome of the revival?

The new light leader, as I refer to charismatic catalysts of revival, is critical to global revivals. They seldom are great preachers or credentialed clergy. Their power comes from their direct encounter with the power and presence of God and the transformation produced by that encounter.

The revival leader in some sense is the “exhibit A” of a movement, embodying in her or his life the truth and reality that others will crave. These leaders tell their story and by so doing build out a movement that promises to lead the new people of God out of their misery and malaise.

How might religious revivals trigger radical political movements?

Western anthropologists have studied what they call revitalization movements among North American Indians, rural Chinese, African watchtower movements and the like. They have been obsessed with the question of violence, convinced that new religious movements are deeply irrational and therefore violence-prone. I reject that idea as extreme and unrepresentative of Christian renewal movements. Revivals do not tend to produce radical political movements, but they do tend to produce progressive change in both civil society and the public square. Brazilian Pentecostalism, for example, has not produced violent change like some nineteenth-century Catholic peasant revolts did in other parts of Latin America, but it has produced high levels of what has been called “social capital,” qualities that make a person employable, dependable, hard working, and faithful in marriage and family life. This social capital has tremendous impact on real politics, the politics of the street. Indirectly as it becomes a mass movement it affects the political sphere in terms of new kinds of candidates and new kinds of voters.

What can we learn from these historical revivals as we look toward the future of the church?

The current global awakening needs to shake us from our cultural isolation and obsessions as North American Christians. Much has been written about the emerging church movement in North America. I think there are many positive aspects of this emerging church movement. What the current global awakening teaches me, however, is that the real emerging church is a wildly global and culturally pluralistic one which moves us toward the vision of 1 Corinthians 12, a body of Christ with many parts each recognizing their global interdependence. The message of global revivals is that God is internationalizing his people and we stand at an Ephesians moment (to use Andrew Walls’s expression) in which the cultural, geographic and political barriers are breaking down in light of the gospel. The current global revivals are not ends in themselves. Their ultimate significance will be seen in multicultural missional churches that seek to change their world in the power of the Spirit and in partnership with the mission of God.