The relationship between church and state must begin, in some measure, with a consideration of the ways in which a state legislates the activities of religious groups within the borders of the nation. However, an examination of state declarations of religious freedom without pushing beyond what are usually grand constitutional statements is almost meaningless. To fully appreciate the ways in which states deal with religion, one must push past what is stated in law and explore the ways in which these declarations play out in day-to-day life. This may mean exploring the symbols of religious groups as they are or are not visible in public, or it may mean examining the ways in which courts interpret constitutional provisions around religion. So, for example, while the United States has a clear separation of church and state in its constitution, an examination of cultural symbols reveals that church and state are intertwined to the extent that politicians frequently invoke the name of god to assist in state matters. The relationship between church and state is not solely a matter of internal law and politics, however. Church-state relations are influenced by, and themselves influence, global forces which may take the shape of international human rights declarations, the activism of internationally organized groups, or broader cultural vectors such as events that are worked up to create a culture of fear or which demarcate a social phenomenon as a ‘cause for concern’.

If we accept that a component of globalization is the increased flow of people across nation-state borders, and that they take/bring with them their cultural capital, including their religious beliefs, then we can begin to appreciate the ways in which new pressures are being built on church-state boundaries. In Canada, for example, population stability and growth is now in the hands of immigrants, who often come from ‘non-Christian’ nations. The religious texture of many nations is shifting, and in this process there are new pressures to think about, not only the ways in which a state is to mediate relations between church and state, but also its role in mediating relations between religious groups. Who is allowed a defining voice and how loud is that voice permitted to be?
Following Beyer’s assertion that globalization is not a new phenomenon, but only newly named (2006) and Michel Foucault’s notion of demarcation, I use the framework of globalization somewhat cautiously, employing the moderate social constructionist approach described by James Beckford. The deployment of a globalization framework poses a particular discursive context in which some issues are demarcated as being of analytical importance, while others are excluded from communicative possibilities. While acknowledging this as a limitation, it is offered more as a caution in reading any assertion of global patterns, flows, etc. as somehow existing as social facts. Rather, globalization is used here in a critical manner to suggest possible ways of thinking in the exploration of cultural processes.

In this chapter, I will draw on a Canadian example as case study through which the notion of the ‘global’ shall be examined. Using the example of the regulation of polygamy through the criminal code, the following questions will be examined: how, or have, state boundaries become fluid in the global context in relation to religion? How do local events impact on the global? Where do the local and the global intersect? Do nation states remain impervious to the ‘global gaze’ in negotiating the church-state relationship? Is there a hegemonic (Christian?) global gaze in relation to religion? I am conceptualizing church and state broadly in this chapter, moving away from what I consider to be a rather narrow definition of this field that has emerged primarily from scholarship in the US, to a more global perspective that has somewhat fluid definitions of both church and state. This may be rooted in my own particular cultural circumstances: Canada has no official separation of church and state, and thus the relationship between these realms is complex and amorphous, as is illustrated by the religious freedom clauses of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The preamble pays homage to the ‘supremacy of God’, section 2 guarantees freedom of religion, section 15 guarantees that one will not be discriminated against on the basis of, among other things, religion. The Charter reinforces the guarantee of funding for religious schools (Catholic and Protestant) in certain provinces at the time they entered Confederation, and section 27 states that the Charter shall be interpreted ‘in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians’. The provisions of the Charter set out the framework within which church-state relations are framed in Canada, and clearly involves an intertwining of issues of religious freedom, multiculturalism, and the historical presence of religion in Canada.