

Title—God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis

Author—Philip Jenkins

Year—2007

Categories: Islam, Christianity, Culture, Religion, Migration

Place: Europe

Time: 1960-2005

Argument Synopsis:

Jenkins' *God's Continent* strives to analyze the popular argument that the influence of Christianity in Europe is consistently fading and this process of dechristianization coincides with the expansion of other religions especially Islam. Jenkins attempts to problematize this story through a focus on three important themes: the rise, the fall, and the renewal of Christianity in Europe; the presence and adaptability of Islam in Europe; and religion's relationship to Europe's changing political, economic, and social contexts. Jenkins reveals that the population statistics of Muslims in Europe do not justify the portrait of a 'wholesale barbarian invasion from Muslim lands,' as there are statistically still very few Muslims in Europe. He reveals how during the latter half of the twentieth century when there was large scale migration to Europe from Muslim majority countries (most often from former European colonies) the general consensus was that Muslims would be drawn into Europe's overwhelmingly secular social order. However, Jenkins points out how the early events of the twenty-first century, specifically instances of Islamic terrorism that occurred throughout the continent, has weakened this consensus and led to the growth of theories of a Muslim takeover of Europe.

Jenkins' central argument is that Islam in Europe is adapting to its circumstances, and that fears of a Muslim takeover of Europe are unfounded. He reveals a central contradiction at the heart of these predictions, namely: that Islam would somehow be immune to the European cultural and social arrangements that have lessened Christianity's influence over time. This presupposes something innate within Islam that marks it as distinct from other religions. He illuminates how when assessing the status of European Muslims it is often difficult to distinguish between problems arising from issues of class and poverty over those inherent in the religion itself. Jenkins argues that the system is complicated by the casual attitude of Europeans to classification—ethnic minorities are often counted as Muslims regardless of their levels of observance while only European Christians with high levels of observance are counted as Christians. The first half of the book focuses on Christianity's European revival and how a cultural, rather than religious, Islam is present in Europe. The latter half discusses how integration, toleration, diversity, migration, generational gaps, and grievances (economic, social, and racial) are the underlying causes of religious tension, not due to Islam's 'incompatibility' with Europe. At its core, Europe's current crisis is political, economic or social—not religious.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Role of religion in modern European history has been far more important than is sometimes assumed and religion will continue to have a place in Europe's future
- Fate of Islam must be understood in a wider religious context, so that both Islam and Christianity are considered together in terms of maintaining hold on believers and in relationship with the secular order
- Widespread evidence of accommodation to European norms from Muslim groups