

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

Author—Philip Jenkins

Year—2007

Categories: Religion, Europe, Migration, Islam

Place: (Western) Europe

Time: 1960-2000

Argument Synopsis:

Jenkins’ *God’s Continent* attempts to contextualize and analyze the dominant media argument that predicts a Muslim ‘takeover’ of Europe. Put another way, he is focused on the fears that as Europe becomes less Christian it leaves space for the expansion of other religions, namely Islam. Jenkins seeks to reveal the central contradiction inherent in this argument—European cultural and social arrangements have lessened Christianity’s influence on the continent and yet Islam will be immune to these same pressures? Jenkins reveals that for many decades after the end of the second world war, the political consensus was that Muslims would be drawn into Europe’s overwhelmingly secular social order, but the events of the early twenty-first century (i.e. 7/7, 2004 Madrid bombings, Theo Van Gogh assassination) has hurt this notion of assimilation. Jenkins notes the prevalence of books being published that stokes fears of encroaching ‘Eurabia’—Jenkins positions his book against these arguments by attempting to provide a more objective analysis of the current situation.

The book provides a detailed history of Christianity and Islam in Europe and argues that both religions are adapting and developing in new ways. Jenkins’ work has three main themes—the rise, the fall and the renewal of Christianity; the presence and adaptability of Islam in Europe; and religion’s relationship to Europe’s changing political, economic, and social contexts. He relies heavily on newspapers, online resources, and academic books for his sources. The first half of the book focuses on Christianity’s revival and how a cultural, rather than religious, Islam is present in Europe. He argues that at its root Europe’s current ‘crisis’ is political, economic or social—not religious. The second half of the book discuss the underlying causes of religious tension, which he identifies as integration, toleration, diversity, migration, generational gaps, and economic, social, and racial grievances. Although the root of the crisis is not religious, Jenkins acknowledges that the 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.

Jenkins concludes with a comparison between the United States and Europe, noting how European migration since the twentieth century has been predominantly Muslim while the United States’ migration has been predominantly Christian. He also reveals that as people migrate they often seek out religious institutions to ease the transition and Europe’s relatively little domestic mobility compared to the United States can partly explain the higher levels of European secularization. Jenkins posits that the encounter with Europe caused a sudden immersion in modernity for many Muslim migrants, and these pressures are likely to create an ever-more adaptable form of Islam that can cope with social change without compromising basic beliefs.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Fate of Islam must be understood in wider religious context, so that both Islam and Christianity are considered together in terms of maintaining a hold on believers and in relation with the secular order
- Predictions of Muslim ‘takeover’ of Europe rely on the assumption that Islam is somehow immune to the secularizing forces of Europe
- Signs that both Islam and Christianity are adapting and will continue to adapt