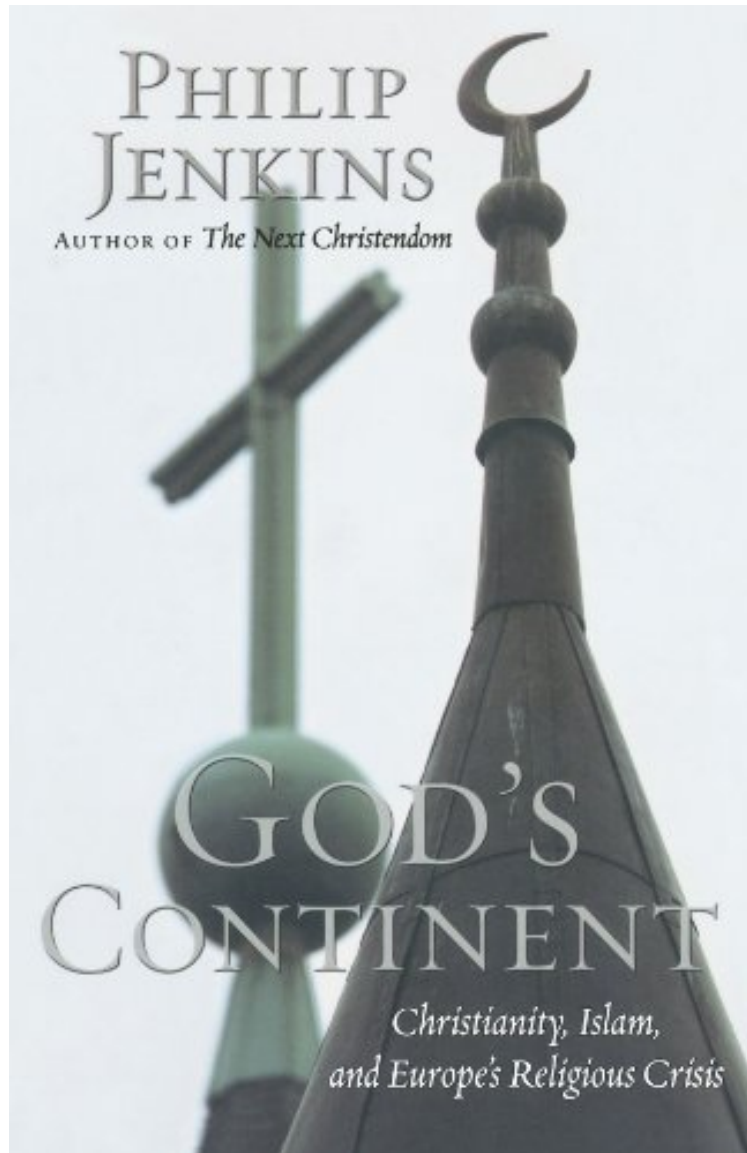


(Free pdf) God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis (The Future of Christianity)

# God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis (The Future of Christianity)

*Philip Jenkins*

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**Philip Jenkins : God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis (The Future of Christianity)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis (The Future of Christianity):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Interesting hypothesis but overly optimistic

By Doug Erlandson "God's Continent" by Philip Jenkins contains an interesting thesis, which is that the condition of Christianity in Europe (the original home of Christendom) is not as bad as most people, especially conservative Christians, make it out to be. This is a most interesting conclusion in light of the meager church attendance in most European countries (with a few exceptions, such as Poland). Furthermore, with the influx of immigrants from the Islamic countries, it would seem that the dominant traditional religion will soon be Islam (although secularism might remain, as it is today, the religion of the masses). As he has made clear in "The Next Christendom," Jenkins does not see a return of Europe to its status as the center of Christianity in the near future, since for him, the next Christendom will be established in Africa and perhaps South America. So, why is he optimistic about the future of Christianity in Europe? Precisely because of immigration. As he points out, the immigration to Europe that has taken place over the past few decades has come not just from Islamic countries but from the majority Christian countries of sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, many of the largest congregations in Europe today are comprised of African immigrants and their children. But will this mean a return to Christianity in Europe? It is at this point that Jenkins is unduly optimistic. It is unlikely that the African immigrants are going to convert their European neighbors to the faith. (Cultural differences will play their part in this, as will the fact that the immigrants tend to live in their own communities.) Moreover, although immigration has taken place, it is not likely that these immigrants will become a significant percentage of the European population any time soon, if ever. Finally, if and when these immigrants become assimilated into the broader European culture, why suppose that their Christian faith will permeate that culture? Why not suppose that the immigrant community will become as secular as the Europeans are today?

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not Quite the Apocalypse

By N. Smith "God's Continent" makes a convincing case that the decline of European Christianity and the rise of Islam in Europe are not reaching quite the apocalyptic heights feared by so many. Islam is growing, but it is in many ways capitulating to the same forces of modernism and secularism that have weakened European Christianity. At the same time, the immigration trends that are bringing Islam to Europe are also bringing to the continent the vibrant Christian faith of Africa and Asia - a faith that has not capitulated to modernism's insistence upon a deep divide between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the political. Jenkins argues that this growing Christian faith is often ignored - not because it isn't real or vital, but because it is found primarily in immigrant communities. Old-stock Europeans see immigrants from Asia and Africa and simply assume that Islam is on the rise - when, in fact, many of those immigrants are bringing a Christian faith that is often quite orthodox and vibrant. Jenkins certainly grants that the rise of Islam is a real challenge for Europe, and he devotes quite a bit of effort at describing a way forward. Too much of his proposed solution, it seems to me, involves hoping that both Islam and Christianity make their peace with Western secularism, embracing a deep divide between the sacred and the secular, the religious and the political. The rise of Islam is exposing the bankruptcy of Western culture's gods of pluralism and multiculturalism. The solution is not for the church to defend those gods. Rather, we have much to learn from global Christianity's embrace of the communal and public character of Christian faith.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. At times interesting, but kind of banal

By Customer In his third installment of the Future of Christianity series, Philip Jenkins, yet again examines and challenges prevailing assumptions - this time concerning the religious landscape of Europe. In "God's Continent" Jenkins provides an important corrective, which adds color and complexity to various accounts that warn of the emergence of a Eurabia with the rise of Islam in Europe amidst a dying Christianity. It is true, Jenkins notes, mainline Christianity and state-sponsored churches have experienced sharp decline. For example, Jenkins notes that the number of priests in Europe has experienced a critical down turn, reducing from 250,000 in 1978 to 200,000 in 2003 (Jenkins, 32). In France, moreover, the shortage of priests has been so severe that they have imported priests from West Africa (Jenkins, 32). While Jenkins recognizes that Christianity is not flourishing in Europe at present (Jenkins, 3), Jenkins wants to contend that Christianity in Europe has been experiencing some renewal and fresh movement as well. Jenkins highlights Christianity's vigor in Eastern Europe, in places like Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Jenkins, 57). Moreover, Jenkins also highlights the reinvigoration of Catholicism under John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. For example, charismatic Catholic movements like Rinnovamento nello Spirito Santo in Italy and Emmanuel Community network based in France, the former with 250,000 members in 2000 and the latter containing 6,000 members with around 20,000 people attending summer sessions and retreats (Jenkins, 74-5). Moreover, Jenkins discusses the widely-successful evangelistic program called the "Alpha Course," which began at Holy Trinity Brompton, London, which in 2005, reached approximately 1.6 million people in Britain (Jenkins, 83-5). However, the fresh movements within Christianity have occurred through Christian immigrants now living in Europe. As examples, Jenkins notes 30,000-member Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations, a charismatic church in Kiev led by Sunday Adelaja, a Nigerian. Similarly, Jenkins points out Pentecostal preacher, Matthew Ashimolowo's church, Kingsway International Christian Center, which 5,000 people attend (Jenkins, 88-89). As one last example, Jenkins also tells of the 1500 missionaries from 50 different countries currently at work in the UK. As a result, Jenkins refers to these recent developments as "the southernization of European Christianity" (Jenkins, 91). Jenkins also contests common depictions of Islam. Without dismissing the challenges European governments will face in integrating Muslims into European society, including the real threat

posed by a small percentage Islamists, Jenkins points out that accounts of Muslim immigration popularized by the media often sensationalize the data. Consider population statistics concerning Muslims in Europe. Jenkins notes that there are only 24 million Muslims, which accounts for approximately 4.6% of Europe's total population (Jenkins, 15). Yet, Jenkins asserts, even these stats assume a broad definition of Muslim, which includes any person raised "in a Muslim community or whose father is Muslim" (18). In reviewing this evidence, Jenkins argues that "[e]ven if we assume, controversially, that Islamization represents a deadly menace, then it is presently not an urgent prospect outside France [which has a Muslim population of 8-10%] or, conceivably the Netherlands, which has a Muslim minority of 6 percent" (15). Jenkins adds further weight to his assertions by demonstrating that common talk about the rise of Islam presupposes that Muslims are immune to secularizing forces (Jenkins, 19-20). As such, Jenkins suggests any future work on Muslims in Europe will have to examine any acculturation to European society, including the impact of European individualism, economic forces or the education of Muslim women, which could correspond with a lower birth rate (20). From the current data Jenkins appears to be convinced: "Barring major new immigration, visions of Muslims achieving majority status in Europe within this century assume extraordinary high and continuing rates of population growth" (20). In the end, Jenkins successfully debunks the inevitability of a secular Europe by challenging conventional wisdom about the state of both Islam and Christianity in Europe. Moreover Jenkins offers an alternative to Huntington's "clash of civilizations," in which Jenkins envisages the potential for benevolent relations between Christians and Muslims in a secular Europe (14). Despite these meritorious qualities, Jenkins book is not beyond reproach. One of the common critiques is Jenkins's journalistic approach. While Jenkins often offers breadth, he often offers little depth. The best articulation of this insight I have encountered is from John Coughlan, head of public relations at the Academy of European Law in Trier, Germany. In his review "The Coming Eurabia?" Coughlan argues: "For a more informed reader, however, it can be frustrating reading. Jenkins's approach is first to present a ream of controversial opinions and often spurious arguments before finally letting the light shine in with the balanced diagnosis promised at the outset. Many of the sources for these arguments are the new media, and thus second-hand, which makes it difficult to distinguish between factual observations, selective quotations and outright biased opinions. On one occasion, the author quite deliberately cites inaccurate data in order to bolster his case--only to reveal 12 pages later that the quotation's source is out-of-date. This polemical style inevitably undermines the resulting analysis."

Is the Christian church in Europe doomed to collapse under the weight of globalization, Western secularism, and a flood of Muslim immigrants? Is Europe on the brink of becoming "Eurabia"? Though many pundits are predicting just such a scenario, God's Continent reveals the flaws in these arguments and offers a much more measured assessment of Europe's religious future. While frankly acknowledging current tensions, Philip Jenkins shows, for instance, that the overheated rhetoric about a Muslim-dominated Europe is based on politically convenient myths: that Europe is being imperiled by floods of Muslim immigrants, exploding Muslim birth-rates, and the demise of European Christianity. He points out that by no means are Muslims the only new immigrants in Europe. Christians from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe are also pouring into the Western countries, and bringing with them a vibrant and enthusiastic faith that is helping to transform the face of European Christianity. Jenkins agrees that both Christianity and Islam face real difficulties in surviving within Europe's secular culture. But instead of fading away, both have adapted, and are adapting. Yes, the churches are in decline, but there are also clear indications that Christian loyalty and devotion survive, even as institutions crumble. The third book in an acclaimed trilogy that includes *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity*, *God's Continent* offers a realistic and historically grounded appraisal of the future of Christianity in a rapidly changing Europe.

From Publishers Weekly Jenkins loves to skewer headlines, to the point that each new book seems to present nothing less than a paradigm shift. *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity* announced that Christendom is moving south, its face now less European than African, South American and Asian. Here he looks back at the old Christendom, and finds there a story more complicated than fading Christianity and triumphant militant Islam. Sure enough, many great cathedrals and once-charming village churches are spackling over the cracks on the states nickel. But a host of grassroots-based Catholic religious organizations are flourishing. Ours, Jenkins asserts, is actually a golden age of religious pilgrimage. And it is not only Muslims pouring into Europes borders: African Pentecostals lead thriving congregations across their adopted continent. Poles pack Englands Catholic parishes, and priests from Zaire and CoteIvoire bring new life to age-old churches in French villages. Despite world-transfixing incidents of terror, Jenkins says that Islams dramatic growth in Europe is actually largely a success story of integration and growth in toleration. Conservative and liberal cultural commentators each have their reasons for trumpeting Christianitys demise and militant Islams growth in Europe. Theyre not wholly wrongthe story just needs nuancing. And who but Jenkins could enliven this storyline with an ocean of sociological data poured into a novel-like book thats impossible to put down? From Booklist\*Starred \* From the future of Christianity in *The Next Christendom*(2002; rev. ed., 2007) and the current growth of Christianity in *The New Faces of Christianity* (2006), Jenkins turns to the state of religion on the continent most identified with historic Christianity. Common knowledge has it that European Christianity is sick unto

death, and falling church attendance, baptisms, and church weddings bolster that notion. Yet in Europe independent congregations are mushrooming, a sizable proportion of new immigrants are Christian, and the trend of population growth indicates that Christianity will remain the majority faith in Europe for the foreseeable future. Jenkins also inspects Islam in Europe, analyzing the same cultural clashes that Bruce Bawer presented with literate alarm in *White Europe Slept* (2006), and he confirms Bawer's observation that Western European political elites have been monumentally insensitive to the complaints of ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In addition, Jenkins thoroughly discusses the moderate, peaceable Islam most Muslims practice and argues that European Muslims will settle into amicable coexistence as their incomes and comforts rise. This immensely informative, quintessentially balanced, utterly lucid volume completes Jenkins' *Future of Christianity* trilogy magnificently. Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "A gem, abounding in sparkling points, telling anecdotes, observations and statistics." --*Philosophy Now* "Philip Jenkins is an excellent guide as we think about Christianity, Islam, and secularism in 21st-century Europe and in the world more generally." --*Books Culture* "God's Continent is a seminal exploration of religious Europe by a prolific and insightful author. Present assessments and future claims about Europe will be markedly deficient without an awareness of Jenkins' contribution." --*Evangelical Missions Quarterly* "Philip Jenkins gives a realistic and historically well grounded evaluation of the future of Christianity in secular and globalizing Europe. . . Seldom have I read a book with such an intellectual pleasure and lively interest as Jenkins' *God's Continent*. Written in a clear style and supported by solid arguments it helps to understand the processes happening in Europe and the European world we live in." --*Anthropos*. . . A rich and stimulating read that helps draw a useful and constructive map of a terrain that is extremely important and deeply contested." --*International Journal of Public Theology*