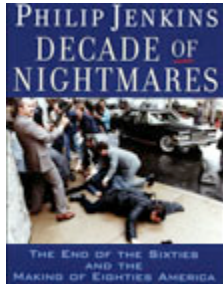




Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of the Public Affairs Program. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I want to thank you all for joining us this afternoon.

Our guest today is Philip Jenkins. He will be discussing a book that a soon-to-come-out review in *The New York Times* says is a "humdinger." It's [Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America](#).

History is a matter of interpretation as well as evidence, of judgment as well as knowledge. It is a narrative of how the present world came to be the way it is. With this in mind, many Americans, if asked, would tell you that it was the decade of the 1960s that transformed their lives and made them what they are today. Yet it is this lingering nostalgia for this era that has made it so difficult to dispassionately consider the legacy of other critical years in America's recent past and their impact on our lives today.

In *Decade of Nightmares*, Professor Jenkins writes, "Historical eras rarely begin or end at neat or precise points, and decades are highly malleable." Accordingly, he suggests that the period between the fall of Saigon and [Reagan's](#) second term—roughly, from 1975 to 1986—had more influence than the sixties in foreshadowing the events and attitudes which continue to inform who we are as a society today.

In support of this argument, our speaker often uses pop culture as an illuminating tool to reveal how the politically and culturally libertine America of the sixties transformed itself into the decades of reaction and denial that characterized our country in the mid-seventies and eighties. This period is now seen as the watershed years that created contemporary America and produced many of the influences that continue to haunt our political and religious life today.

For example, on the international scene, there were threats which became the basis of an ongoing narrative, whether it was the Soviet Union and its "evil empire," OPEC with its stranglehold on global oil, or the ayatollahs who made hostages of our diplomats in Iran. The themes that emerged survived and flourished, ultimately bringing us Ronald Reagan and the ascendancy of the political Right. As these dangers began to be described in terms of religious and moral evils, the language remained and continues to haunt the political rhetoric of some of our leaders today, eventually laying the foundation for the challenging relationship between America and the rest of the world. Now, more than two decades later, these influences show no sign of loosening their grip.

Our speaker this afternoon, Philip Jenkins, invites us to reexamine the years in question. He is

Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University. Professor Jenkins was born in Wales and educated in England, where he received his Ph.D. from Clare College at Cambridge, taking double first-class honors. Though his initial training was in early modern British history, he has since moved on to study a wide range of contemporary topics and issues, especially in the realm of religion.

He is the author of over fifteen books. Recent titles have included [The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity](#), which he discussed earlier at the Carnegie Council—the transcript can be found on our website—and [Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality](#).

It is once again a pleasure to welcome Professor Jenkins to our lecture series and to listen to him as he brings us to this present moment in history.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Remarks

PHILIP JENKINS: Thank you very much.

I should explain, I look at what I call "the decade of nightmares" in a number of different ways in the book, but I will focus on the area of religion, and fundamentalist religion, because of the context of the lecture series.

Most people would see the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 as marking a turning point in American politics, in American cultural life. I want to suggest, broadly, that the election of Reagan represents not the launching of a revolution, but almost the culmination of a revolution. As I often say, Reagan does not begin a revolution; he joins a revolution in progress. I believe that the second half of the 1970s is a very understudied period and that a lot of what we see as characterizing the 1980s, in fact, has its roots earlier.

We can talk about this, but, for example, if you look at the drug war, which is one of the defining moments in social policy and racial affairs, that really has its beginning in 1977-78. The hard-line criminal justice approaches, again, begin from 1977-78. In fact, I make an argument that 1977 is or should be to the moral conservatism, the moral counterrevolution, what 1968 was to what we may call the sixties radicalism.

It's in the late 1970s that we get a number of trends, a number of directions, in political rhetoric which really are going to have a long influence, right up to the present day.

Partly, this is an emphasis on combating forces of evil—unashamedly described as "evil." When [George W. Bush](#) describes the September 11 attackers as representing a "cult of evil"—the language of evil very much has characterized this presidency—he is drawing on a strand that really has its roots in the late 1970s.

I want to emphasize, too, it's not just an idiosyncrasy of President Bush to do this; you can actually find speeches by [Bill Clinton](#) which delve at least as deeply into the language of "purging of dark forces"—that's an actual quote—rooting out sin and evil. He draws quite heavily on that.

One aspect of this is a fascination with conspiracy and an idea of problems as involving the work of evil enemies. The contrast I sometimes draw is, in [John F. Kennedy's](#) inaugural in 1961, when he addresses the Soviet Union, he talks about the adversaries. He deliberately pencils out the word "enemies," and he urges adversary nations to join with the United States in a struggle against the dark forces released by science—by which, obviously, he means nuclear weapons.

Obviously, in the 1980s, for Ronald Reagan, it is the "evil empire." They are no longer adversaries; they are enemies.

I also make the argument that in this period domestic and foreign enemies and issues are drawn

together, are synthesized very strongly. In the language of dealing with crime, for example, we are no longer dealing with social dysfunction, we are no longer dealing with socially or economically troubled individuals who need rehabilitation or who need social solutions. We are dealing with evil enemies who must be fought.

That brings us to the language of war. Let me just use a popular culture analogy. For those of you who remember from the film [Psycho](#), it ends with a psychiatrist launching a learned exposition of what drove Norman Bates to commit his crimes. This is in terms of oedipal forces and his relationship with his mother. In 1978, the film [Halloween](#) ends with a psychiatrist being asked, "Was that the bogeyman?" And the answer is, "Yes. Yes, it was the bogeyman." So far has psychological science come in eighteen years.

Popular culture is important because it helps shape people's ideas as to the causation of problems. I argue in my book that in 1980 images of evil, enemies, and conspiracy combine to affect the analysis of both foreign, international problems and also domestic problems. The idea of the "terror network," that terrorism is not a number of discrete issues, but part of one global menace with a center—if you like, a spider at the center of the web—originates in 1979 and is promulgated very forcefully during the year 1980. Obviously, the "war on terror" is very much an artifact of the early eighties. It is at this point when people are first discussing putting antiaircraft missiles on the White House.

So many of the things I am talking about here obviously have religious dimensions. The Reagan administration works very closely with conservative evangelicals. [The Moral Majority](#) is founded in 1979. I would suggest not so much that Reagan himself is necessarily drawing on these ideas. This represents a parallel current. These are some of the forces already in progress. I suppose if you want to look at the new political aspect of evangelicalism, it is very much a product of the 1960s. There are a couple of absolutely key events which don't register so much in mainstream society at the time, but have an earthquake effect on the evangelical community.

One is the school prayer decision by the Supreme Court in 1962, which causes the most enormous shock for hitherto quietist or anti-political evangelicals, because, for years afterwards, they relate the growing social, cultural, sexual chaos in the country to the removal of God from public institutions. If this is a federal decision, as later would be the abortion decision, then it can only be reversed by federal action, by constitutional amendment. You see this kind of politicization.

With the other one, the linkage may not seem very close. But the other key event which reverberates for many years afterwards is [the Six-Day War](#) in the Middle East in 1967. What does this have to do with American evangelicals? Almost everything. Evangelicals see Jews reoccupying and reuniting Jerusalem. In the minds of many, the prophetic clock has begun ticking. This is seen as an unthinkable thing. I always cherish the quote of the 17th-century Anglican bishop, who was asked about the fulfillment of prophecy, and he responded angrily, "Jews in Jerusalem? You might as well talk about men on the moon." Well, the events sort of coincide rather nicely.

Over the next few years, ideas of apocalypse, [end times](#), confrontation with evil at home and abroad are brought to a mass market by some popular culture devices, which have a phenomenal impact among the 40 percent or so of Americans who claim to be born-again by 1976, and which register barely at all in what you might call the mainstream media. Hal Lindsey publishes the book [The Late Great Planet Earth](#) in 1970, which popularizes ideas of the [Rapture](#), and which draws an explicit connection between events overseas— in the Middle East and the confrontation with the Soviet Union, the nuclear confrontation—and growing social, cultural chaos at home. You can use any number of indices to indicate this.

One of the most popular films released in America in the late 20th century is the film [A Thief in the Night](#). I am not going to embarrass people by asking for a show of hands as to how many people have seen this, but its enthusiasts claim that it has been seen by up to 300 million people. *A Thief in the Night* is an appallingly badly written and badly acted film, which has not prevented it from being the definitive portrait of the end times, after the Rapture—the Rapture when all the good Christians are removed from the world and when the confrontation leading to Armageddon takes place, with the establishment of an evil, secular Antichrist regime on the planet in which the remaining people have a simple choice between

either succumbing to Antichrist or facing martyrdom. *A Thief in the Night* has an enormous role.

At every point in this story, we find the year 1976 as being a critical story. We find so many new denominations beginning in 1976. The modern megachurch movement begins in 1976, and also the idea of a political evangelical movement. We are so accustomed to the idea of a Religious Right that it's rather difficult to realize how radical some aspects of this were in 1976.

To give you an example, in the late sixties and early seventies, one of the great divisions between evangelicals and Catholics was abortion and contraception. Let me tell you something which many of you may find remarkable. In the late sixties and early seventies, the Southern Baptist Convention actually supports abortion rights. By the time of the [Roe v. Wade](#) decision, the Southern Baptist Convention basically supports a moderately pro-Roe position, which seems stunning in retrospect.

In 1976—I believe for the first time in American history—the previously absolutely resolutely opposed sides of evangelical Protestants and Catholics begin to make common cause in the struggle against abortion, in the struggle against gay rights. Partly, they have been galvanized politically by Jimmy Carter's election victory and the subsequent disappointment that Carter has let them down. But also they have been moved by a number of political campaigns around the country to defeat radical changes, as they perceive them, in social and family structures. There are two great issues, of course. [ERA](#) [Equal Rights Amendment] is one and gay rights would be the other. In 1977, evangelicals and Catholics combine to support the [Anita Bryant](#) initiative in Florida against gay rights.

By the late 1970s, we have this really remarkable union of Catholics and evangelicals. Political activism in American history by religious groups is nothing new. You may know, [President Grant](#), in the 1860s, complained that he had to face three political parties in his country, the Republicans, the Democrats, and the Methodists. But the idea that the evangelicals and the Catholics would combine on moral issues is a stunning development.

In many ways, the culture war idea of the 1990s, the idea that conservative religious groups would inevitably be such firm allies is a product not just of the late seventies, but of this year 1976-77. So many things come back to that year.

So far, so much of what I am saying is a reasonably familiar story, the idea of the rise of a Religious Right. But I would like to look at this in a slightly different way— I think a slightly unusual way.

In 1979 or 1980, anyone looking at the landscape of American politics could not fail to see the role of religion as a conservative force; not just religion, but traditional, orthodox religion. I would also suggest to you that exactly the same is true on a global scale. We might say this happens in the United States due to particularly American conditions. But the same American conditions do not cause similar changes—*mutatis mutandis*—in other societies and other religions.

Let's just take the year 1977 as a focus. What happens in the year 1977? Look around the world. In Israel, for example, we have [the Likud](#) government, with an unprecedented mobilization of orthodox and traditional-minded Jews. In India, we have the defeat of the Congress Party by the [Janata Party](#), which is the first successful mobilization of traditionally minded orthodox Hindus, and a party which would later become the [BJP](#), the fundamentalist party there.

Above all, the classic example of Islam. In 1975, organized political Islam in most of the Arab world or the Islamic world is not a force. By 1979, it is very definitely a force. There is a dramatic change in just that four-year period.

What has happened? In 1979, for example, look at what is happening in the Muslim world: In February, you have the success of [the Iranian Revolution](#), which sends reverberations around the Islamic world. You have the unsuccessful coup attempt by fundamentalists in Mecca—a remarkable event, which the Saudis try to deal with by making the devil's bargain, by basically telling the fundamentalists that there's a whole world out there just anxious to receive their message, and, "We'll be very happy to give you the money. Just go and do it somewhere else."

That's the point at which you get the madrasahs and the mosques, representing a very strong Wahhabi kind of Islam, appearing all over South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia, in North Africa, in Nigeria. This is the point at which calls for [Sharia law](#) begin appearing in countries which had hitherto been marked by a much more politically moderate, quietist Islam from very strong Sufi roots.

Religion seems to play a much greater role around the world at the end of the seventies than even in the mid-seventies. In my book, I make the facetious comment that, clearly, the world had passed through the tail of a comet which suddenly led people to act in such strange ways.

What had happened? My thesis—and I am very happy to discuss this—is that in many countries around the world, the post-1945 era was characterized in a considerable faith in the power of secular governments, in the secular narrative of modernization and progress, not just in terms of ever-expanding GNP, but in terms of a modernization of family, of women's roles. You think of the Middle East, for example. You think of a very secularist ideology. You think of [Nasserism](#) in Egypt. You think of the [FLN](#) in Algeria, [Baathism](#) in Iraq and Syria.

By the early seventies, most of these ideologies have been largely discredited. In some countries around the world, modernization comes under increasing attack. One of the watersheds I would see here is the great economic crisis that affects many countries in 1973-74. Following on from this, we have the grievances left by modernization, but without the promise. I think that is what tends to lead people to look back to religious roots and religious justifications.

Clearly, I am not offering a blanket global theory, but I would suggest a few issues there.

The other comment I would make is that I think it's slightly misleading to talk about the rise of religion in American politics. I often invite people to describe a period in American history or American politics which they think is relatively free of religion. Very often the story is that, although the religious presence is quite strong, often it is not seen.

One of the examples I cite here was that in 1976, Jimmy Carter was a breakthrough, in a way. He represented the southern born-again tradition. He announced that he had been born again. I still cherish the moment when the media news anchor stared at the camera, as somebody said, with all the comprehension of a fish examining a nuclear submarine and said, "Well, we've talked to some experts on religion, and they say they don't think this is a cult-related thing," which was very good news to the 40 percent of Americans who were born-again at that stage.

Was religion a force in American history in the 1960s? Obviously. What are the most important movements in America in 1960s? Well, you would have to include the Civil Rights Movement, which is, of course, largely led by Baptist preachers, with the strong support of Protestant clergy, Catholic clergy, Jewish rabbis. It has a very strong clergy element across the board.

I sometimes challenge my students to suggest to me a secular movement in American political history. It's harder than you think. They sometimes come up with the [New Deal](#), and you say, "Of course, the labor movement of the 1930s would have been impossible without the role of activist Catholic priests applying Catholic social doctrine." As I say, religion is anything but a new force.

I think a lot of the concern on the Religious Right and the religious politics of the 1970s reflects the fact that many people do not like it. I sometimes argue with the word "fundamentalism," when I am asked about fundamentalism. I suggest that this is rather a pejorative term, rather like the notion of "terrorist": I am a freedom fighter; you are a terrorist. I am a passionate Bible believer; you are a fundamentalist. This person reads the Bible and is driven to help the poor. Therefore, he or she is a passionate religious believer. This person reads the Bible and goes out and fights against the gay rights referendum. Therefore, he or she is a fundamentalist.

So I think I think it's a little misleading to talk about the growth of religion. It's more the kind of shape that religion takes.

I would also look more widely at the religious changes of the mid-seventies. We tend to focus on the conservative evangelicals, the Religious Right. A lot of things are also happening with other religious groups that we perhaps don't think of in terms of a religious revival. One of the traditions which is most dramatically affected in the 1970s is Jews, especially American Jews. There is quite a similar kind of drift back to orthodoxy, to traditional religion, quite often reflecting deep discontent with changing gender and family roles in the mainstream society.

It is in the 1970s, especially, that two great movements revolutionize American Judaism. One is the radical new focus on the Holocaust, not just as a unique historic tragedy, but as an active evil of cosmic dimensions. It has been said, I believe, by [Peter Novick](#), that it is in the mid-1970s that the civic religion of American Jews comes to revolve around two pillars. One is the Holocaust and the other is the state of Israel.

It is the sense of American political weakness in the face of the Soviet Union and of Third World revolution that drives a significant number of American Jews to support conservative positions. In the early 1970s, there are many Jews who don't know that the Constitution permits voting for Republicans. By 1980, Ronald Reagan attracts more American Jewish voters than any Republican before or since. Would you describe that as a religiously motivated change? I would be tempted to. I would see it as a very parallel development to what you see among American evangelicals.

Roman Catholics, of course, represent the largest single religious denomination in the United States, and by far the largest contingent of Christians worldwide. They represent probably 55 percent or 60 percent of all Christians worldwide. Is there a Catholic political change or political development in the 1970s? Assuredly there is. Catholics in the mid-seventies begin what you can only call—and I did not coin the phrase—a Catholic civil war, which runs through the mid-1980s. So much of the Democratic Party's crisis from the mid-1970s onwards is a struggle to retain the loyalty of urban ethnic Catholics, and much of the division is strongly expressed in religious terms. The coming of [Pope John Paul II](#), in 1978—of course, right in the middle of this period—has enormous implications for American politics, not just for the politics of Latin America.

This is not a case, obviously, of a new religious element in politics. It is a new conservative religious element in politics, challenging a preexistent liberalism. Once again, through the eighties, it is very difficult to understand the opposition to Ronald Reagan without looking at the Catholic Left, which is at the forefront of the antinuclear movement, the pro-immigration movement, and which opposes the main Reagan budget cuts.

I suppose I am saying, yes, indeed, there is this new Religious Right. But instead of representing a new religious force in a hitherto secular politics, it represents another player in what was—and, arguably, what always had been—quite a religious cast of characters.

If you are not familiar with the book, there is one I particularly recommend to you by an English scholar called Grace Davie, which is called [Europe: The Exceptional Case](#). In a sense, the title says it all. What she argues is that European politics and European culture really are extremely secular. This is manifested, for example, at the start of the Iraq War. [Tony Blair](#) wanted to give a speech to the nation which culminated with the phrase "God bless you," and his advisers went through the roof, suspecting that Tony had joined a cult and was about to wear orange robes and shave his head. One did not invoke God in politics. That was left for Americans—or Americans and everyone else in the world.

Maybe the case is not, "Why is America so oddly religious," it's, "Why is Europe the exceptional case?" And that is her argument, which is that most areas of the world are reasonably happy with the idea of religion as an important force in society and politics. In terms of attitudes to the importance of God, you receive a startling geography lesson, with Africa always coming out in surveys as the most religious continent. [John Mbiti](#), a Kenyan theologian, has the lovely line that Africa is "notoriously religious." At the other extreme, you have Europe, with levels of secularism which are astonishing: "God? What's that?" Halfway between the extremes, you find the United States, floating somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean, halfway between Africa and Europe.

In summary, what I would argue is that a lot of the social forces that emerge in the mid-seventies do emerge in religious forms; that there is an overtly religious and evangelical element that comes into American rhetoric in the mid-seventies, which really survives today, at least as much in the rhetoric of Bill Clinton as of George W. Bush; but that it did not represent a sudden onset of religion into a hitherto secular politics. Americans have not yet figured out how to do secular politics, and show no signs of proposing to do so in the near future.

I am not exactly sure that that is where I intended to end this, but that's where I am going to end it for right now.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you very much for that really interesting discussion. I would like to invite you to pose questions to Professor Jenkins.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I was powerfully influenced as a university student by [Reinhold Niebuhr](#). That really shaped my values as a congressman. What has struck me has been, in recent years, the rise of a counterforce, if you will, speaking politically, among Christian evangelicals and Christian Protestants. I speak particularly of people like [Jim Wallis](#) and [Sojourners](#) and of [Zion's Herald magazine](#). You have dwelt quite appropriately on the conservatism. But I wonder if you see any signs of a revival of a more liberal point of view.

PHILIP JENKINS: Absolutely. The only point with which I would take issue with you is whether the presence of forces like that would be a revival or a rediscovery of things which have always been there. There are a couple of things I would say:

There is an evangelical magazine called [Books & Culture](#), which seeks to be an evangelical counterpart to [The New York Review of Books](#), which is an interesting idea. I commend that to you for the diversity of voices that you find there. The editor told me something. In 2004, they were debating whether they should endorse anyone in the coming election, and on their board of directors, they couldn't find a Bush supporter, which I thought was interesting.

You mentioned Jim Wallis. There are a number of people who are, in a sense, even more mainstream evangelicals. Some are within the National Association of Evangelicals, for instance—that was the organization to which Reagan gave his famous speech in 1983, which was the classic example of, "We are fighting the forces of evil." He began by quoting [The Screwtape Letters](#) about the conflict with demons. If you talk to people within the NAE these days, there are people who want to put front and center issues of environmentalism, of improving women's role worldwide, for example, through things like controlling sex trafficking. You find issues like this.

One of the things which strikes me most whenever I deal with really culturally conservative evangelicals—not necessarily political—is the degree of their global awareness. Very often you talk to people from a relatively conservative puritanical church and you will meet somebody who will say something like, "I was raised in Botswana. Then I spent two years in Sri Lanka. Then we had a couple of years in Bolivia. I'm just a regular." There is a degree of global awareness and global concern which is absolutely admirable.

So my short answer is, yes, I think that is very much there. But I don't necessarily see it as a revival.

One of the big dividing issues always is war and peace. Evangelicals, like many other Americans, can bring themselves to support war in some cases or can see it as a justified cause, but there are always the pacifist qualms. As I said, I really recommend journals like [Books & Culture](#) or [Christianity Today](#).

QUESTIONER: Who is the editor of that?

PHILIP JENKINS: John Wilson. A less dyed-in-the-wool conservative you have yet to meet.

QUESTION: Thanks for an interesting talk. I certainly agree with what you were saying about "fundamentalism" being a pejorative term. I think to call people "evangelical" is the more proper term. "Fundamentalism" refers to a very limited subset, who adhere to a much more withdrawn-from-society type of approach. Evangelicals want to go out in the world and spread the good news.

But I sense a tension in your talk that maybe you could clarify for me. On the one hand, you are talking about 1977 being this watershed in American cultural, religious, and political history. But on the other you are taking pains to minimize the different nature of the rise of this group and to put it in this continuum of religious activity in America.

I don't know. I'm more drawn to the former idea, that something really significant changed, and that this evangelical group became much more politically active in ways different from the preachers leading the Civil Rights Movement. They had a much more total effect, their religion was a much more totalizing ideology about defining how they approached politics. I think those who use religion to support the poor or values like that are not trying to inject religion so much into the political process, and defining for all society that there must be prayer in schools and you do not have a right to certain things in private life—abortion, gay rights, and so on.

It seems to me that that is a significant difference. Please tell me what you feel about those trends.

PHILIP JENKINS: Sure. Thank you. I do believe that what happens in the mid-seventies is a very important development. In fact, I would see it, in some ways, as comparable to other great revivals—1798 [the [Second Great Awakening](#) that began ca. 1798] and events like that. I'm just trying to distinguish it from the idea that this represents the infusion of, quote, "religion into politics." It's a stage at which a particular kind of very, very numerous religious tradition plays a political role.

By the way, in an excellent book by Joel Carpenter called [Revive Us Again](#), what he tries to argue is where the evangelicals go between 1925, and [the Scopes trial](#), and 1976. What he shows is that they spend fifty years remaining very powerful, very numerous, forming this wonderful network of institutions, which suddenly surfaces as if from nowhere in the mid-1970s. It is literally below the radar.

I think a couple of things are happening. There is a grassroots religious change which affects a remarkably large number of people. But in terms of the kind of totalizing ideology you are talking about, one of the reasons why the Moral Majority does not work—and if you talk to anyone in the Moral Majority, they will say they failed horribly—is that it was the leaders, particularly people like [Falwell](#) and [Robertson](#), who had this kind of ideology and it just was not reflected at the grassroots level. To a remarkable extent, if you look at the values of, quote, the evangelical in the pew, they are prepared to go out and vote on these hot-button issues, but very often they accept laissez-faire, live-how-you-want-to-live attitudes. They are very nervous about the attitudes of the Falwells and Robertsons. They are patriotic, but that doesn't mean they want to commit themselves to the unequivocal warmongering of a Falwell, for example.

I would emphasize this. People often talk about the 1980s as the time of the Moral Majority and Religious Right. The Moral Majority was a disaster. It went a long way to helping elect Reagan. What did they get from it? Did they get anything in terms of laws about gay rights? Did they get an abortion amendment? Did they get the simplest thing they want, which is a school prayer amendment? They got none of the above. By 1989, when it dissolved, nobody noticed. Then [the Christian Coalition](#) came along a couple of years later and said, "Well, we won't get fooled again. We're not just going to create a new Christian lobbying organization which only works to create a couple of highly successful lobbyists." That was led by [Ralph Reed](#).

I think there are two stories there. The leaders want the kind of ideology you want. I think the followers want much less. If they can have prayer back in the schools, if they can prevent gay rights ordinances, that will have a direct effect in the schools. If somebody wants to be gay, that's their issue. In other words, there is a lot of division there. The ordinary members of these churches are much less extreme and much less "all-encompassingly" political than their leaders. That's one of the main reasons they fail.

QUESTION: [Inaudible] are more moderate?

PHILIP JENKINS: Absolutely, especially the megachurches. The main complaint about the megachurches is not that they drill people into cult-like obedience, but that so many of the people turn up for an hour on Sunday and are never seen again. So it's not too much passionate involvement; it's not enough.

QUESTION: How can you explain that two Catholic countries like Spain and France have gone the other way? Ninety percent of the population in France is Catholic. Today 40 percent of all people who live together haven't been married. In Spain, you have a government now that accepts the gay marriages. That is one question.

Question number two: you talk about America. Canada is also part of America. What is the situation in Canada? What is the difference between Canada and the United States?

PHILIP JENKINS: All of which brings me to my next book, which is trying to answer these issues. It's not just Spain and France. It's Italy. It's Western European countries. In the last twenty-five years they have gone through one of the most rapid periods of secularization ever recorded in terms of numbers, in terms of adherence, in terms of vocations. The only way in which the Catholic church is surviving in France right now is importing African and Asian priests.

A friend of mine was recently trying to find a mass in southern France on a Sunday. Big mistake. Seventeen parishes under the supervision of one priest, who is Vietnamese. That is not an unusual position.

QUESTIONER: What is the explanation?

PHILIP JENKINS: What is the explanation? The problem I have is that Europe seems to follow secularization theory perfectly. Secularization theory suggests that when society achieves a certain stage of a social welfare system, when modern medicine becomes very well established, then religion becomes a solely privatized, individual matter, and we no longer need public organized religion. It works wonderfully in Europe.

The question is not why things like that are happening in Spain and France; it's why they are not happening in the United States. Why is the United States different?

I have a couple of suggestions about that. I will give you one for an example.

I think that, unlike Spain or France or Italy, the United States has much more of a history of being a society of repeated waves of immigration. It is also a society with a very high degree of geographical mobility, in which people can expect to move every couple of years. In any community like that, if you are going to move very frequently, you maintain your cultural identity, you find community in a new location through religious institutions. That's why you get these successive waves of churches and religious institutions promoting this religious life.

Your next comment would be, why doesn't this work in Canada? I don't know. I genuinely don't know. Canada is much more European. If you walk into a Catholic church in Montréal, you see two sorts of people, Vietnamese and Haitians.

In other words, you are asking an absolutely critical question. But my comment would be, we need to explain why America is so odd among the advanced countries in this way.

QUESTION: I work for the government of Quebec, but I'm American. This is more of a comment than a question.

I am just reading a book called [The Ethics of Identity](#) by Kwame Anthony Appiah. He has a whole chapter on this issue.

I think maybe with Canada, it's that the political structures enable one to be recognized. What we're seeing happening right now in France is that there is a huge group of people which the governmental structure recognizes and another group which is not recognized, and you have this huge schism. So we thought that secularism was working very well, and we have noticed in the last year that it's not.

PHILIP JENKINS: Okay, the contrast between Canada and the United States: both, obviously, immigrant societies, with successive waves of immigrants. So Canada should look much more American.

The only thing I would say about that, maybe, is that the western provinces, the prairie provinces, do look more American. You do get much more in the way of Pentecostal churches and much more fundamentalist churches there, which you tend not to get in Ontario.

Canada also echoes the United States in one way, which is that there is the great "unchurched West"—Vancouver and Seattle. That, by the way, would be a great book, a great comparative study.

QUESTION: Just a quick comment. Secularization is on the rise in the Catholic community around New York. Just last week the cardinal was closing churches in parishes all over the area. You may find more masses around here than France, but you're not going to find many people there.

PHILIP JENKINS: It's kind of interesting. Around here, whether you're in New York or Boston, the old-stock white Catholics very often are drifting away, and their seats are being more than taken by Haitians, by Vietnamese. Look at the seminaries. The seminaries are now 12 percent Asian in this country.

Within the Roman Catholic church, their projection is that by 2050, the Catholic church in the United States will be between 85 and 90 percent Latino. The people who are drifting away are the Irish and the Germans, the people whom we now call the Anglos.

I love telling Irish people they're Anglos. It drives them crazy.

QUESTION: You spoke about strange bedfellows and bizarre alliances. It was most interesting. I wonder, in terms of the secularization in Europe, what about the preponderance of North Africans and the Islam wave? How will that affect the whole religious—

PHILIP JENKINS: One of the critical facts with whatever sort of global trend you are looking at is the north-south demographic divide in terms of fertility, in terms of number of children per family. In many European countries now, we are reaching historically low levels of fertility. You need 2.1 children per woman for a society to maintain its numbers. In France, Italy, Spain right now, you are dealing with about 1.2 among white Europeans. There are sections of Germany where it's 0.8, which has not been recorded much in recent history.

A couple of interesting comments:

Firstly, that's a cause of secularization. If a society does not have children, it does not need the institutions, like schools and confirmation ceremonies, which tend to tie a religious community together.

Secondly, it's also a consequence of secularization. There is less of a religious motivation to procreate and maintain the society—once again, a huge difference between the United States and Europe.

France is the most interesting country in that way. Presently, France is about 10 percent people of Muslim stock. Many people think that could be 25 percent or 30 percent by the 2030s.

Note that I emphasize "people of Muslim stock." We often tend to talk about "Muslims," as if everyone from Algeria, say, is passionately religious. Most of them aren't. The head of the Turkish Islamist party had a lovely comment the other day, which I thought was a great dig, which was, "Well, yes, we're Islamic, in the same sense as the Germany Christian Democrats are Christian."

There's no reason why having people of Muslim stock—Muslim is not an ethnicity, God knows—should

necessarily be bad. The problem is, of course, the spread of quite radical Islamist ideas. France is the country where that problem is by far the most acute. If you were trying to create a society that was designed to fail socially, designed to fail to integrate, you could do no better than France, where there is real, utter segregation.

By the way, interestingly, the two countries with the highest proportions of Muslims in Western Europe would be France, with 10 percent, and the Netherlands, with probably about 6 percent. Those, of course, were the two countries which led the way in rejecting the European constitution and the referenda last year. Very interestingly, one of the big reasons that showed up in the polls was that people were terrified of Turkish membership. Turkish membership would immediately raise the Muslim population of the European community from 4 percent to 16 percent and would mean that within ten years, the largest country within the European Union would be Turkey—a picture which has a certain Ottoman quality to it.

QUESTION: I, too, was influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr. [The Irony of American History](#) was a powerful experience.

Lately, I am reading certain books. I'm reading [Bishop Tutu's](#) latest book [[An African Prayer Book](#)]. I'm reading [Abraham Heschel](#). I am also reading books about the cosmos, the parallel universes, the amazing advances. All of a sudden, it seems to be that religion and science are almost two sides of the mysterious and awesome and reverential awareness of things.

So taking all of this into account, my feeling is that gradually we will have more and more respect for each other's religion. Gradually spirituality is making enormous changes, and religion will always and must be a part of our inner lives—but taking evolving and perhaps more civilizing forms.

I wondered if you would comment on these thoughts.

PHILIP JENKINS: The only thing I would say is that one person who would wholeheartedly agree with you is [the Dalai Lama](#), who has made an interesting comment recently, which is that he is very anxious to work as closely as possible with scientists to understand the mind and the relationship between the mind and spirituality. He said that if science proves aspects of Buddhism scientifically wrong, then Buddhists should renounce them. He is actually establishing science as a rule to judge spirituality, which is interesting.

Oddly, I'm probably quite optimistic about a lot of these directions. We live in a world which will be dominated by the two great religions of the global south, Islam and Christianity. I actually think they have the potential of rediscovering common roots, far more than many of us fear.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you so much for a very fascinating discussion of the seventies and the eighties.

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