

# Demographics, Religion, and the Future of Europe

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by Philip Jenkins

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*Abstract: Immigration and changing demographic trends mean that Europe will in the very near future inevitably be transformed, culturally and politically. As in the Cold War, it again represents a critical theater for rivalry, but this time it is between Christianity, Islam, and secularism. European nations will either be the sites of religious conflict and violence that sets Muslim minorities against secular states and Muslim communities against Christian neighbors, or it could become the birthplace of a liberalized and modernized Islam that could in turn transform the religion worldwide. We urgently need to understand the developing contours of European religious beliefs and practices, and not just as they apply to Muslims, for the outcome of the rivalry there will have profound implications for the United States.*

When the Soviet Union collapsed, some spoke confidently of the “end of history” and the final resolution of ideological conflicts: quite simply, democratic capitalism had won, globally. Just fifteen years later, though, not only are rival ideologies once more locked in seemingly permanent struggle, but Europe again represents a critical theater for rivalry. Matters are different this time to the extent that those competing forces have a religious and supernatural character, as the shape of Europe will be decided by the interaction between Christianity, Islam, and secularism.

Religious conflicts pose critical dangers to most European nations of social and political strains of a kind not witnessed since the 1930s. As the recent disturbances in France indicate, European nations face what might be ruinous religious conflict and violence, setting Muslim minorities against secular states and Muslim communities against Christian neighbors. Of course, that is not the only possible outcome. Europe could yet succeed in achieving an ethnic and religious settlement on American lines; a salad bowl, if not a melting pot. In

that case, Europe could ideally become the birthplace of a liberalized and modernized Islam that could in turn transform the religion worldwide. But the dangers of disruption are real, and such a development would have a devastating effect on American interests. At the very least, these religious issues have to be confronted before any further progress can be made toward European unification.

We urgently need to understand the developing contours of European religious beliefs and practices, and not just as they apply to Muslims. Though modern Europe prides itself on its secular society, recent developments must make us ask whether the current religious situation can survive for long or whether it is so unstable as to threaten the social and political order. Can Europe's secularist experiment survive?

### **Muslim Communities**

Inevitably, recent discussions of European religion have focused on the rapidly growing Muslim communities. Over the past half-century, European nations have accepted substantial immigrant populations chiefly drawn from Africa and Asia, so that today, Muslims constitute around 4 or 5 percent of the European population. For many years, a political consensus held that Muslims would be drawn into Europe's overwhelmingly secular social order, but the notion of assimilation has recently suffered terrible blows. In summer 2005, terrorist bombings in London drew attention to a whole subculture of disaffected second-generation British Muslims who were prepared to kill and die for their beliefs. A report from the normally restrained British intelligence services warned of a domestic "insurgency," noting that a hundred thousand British Muslims came from "completely militarized" regions of the world, such as Somalia or Afghanistan. "Every one of them knows how to use an AK-47. About 10 percent can strip and reassemble such a weapon blindfolded, and probably a similar proportion have some knowledge of how to use military explosives."<sup>1</sup> London imam Omar Bakri Mohammed notoriously praised the subway bombers as the "fantastic four." If poverty and deprivation coincide neatly with religious identity—if the young, poor and Muslim increasingly confront the old, well-off, and Christian—then European societies would face a political meltdown recalling that suffered by Lebanon in the 1970s.

Assuming for the sake of argument that European nations avoid serious violence, today's talk of insurgency will in a few years sound like grotesque panic-mongering. Even so, demographic trends mean that Europe will in the very near future inevitably be transformed, both culturally and politically, and religious affiliations will play a dominant role. In most European nations, Muslim communities have birthrates three times larger than

<sup>1</sup> UPI, "Intelligence Chief Warns of UK Insurgency," Aug. 8, 2005.

their non-Muslim neighbors. France, Germany, and the Netherlands could by the 2030s have Muslim minorities of around 20 to 25 percent of the population, and those proportions will grow as the century progresses.

Moreover, while Islam is undeniably growing, Christianity—at least in terms of active practice—is clearly shrinking. For several centuries, the European continent has been the demographic and cultural heart of Christianity, and still today it is the home of some 560 million Christians, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. Since the 1960s, though, many observers have noticed a steep decline in religious practice and observance, marking what is apparently the most rapid process of secularization ever recorded. The theme of “godless Europe” has become a media staple, as journalists remark predictably on the centuries-old but empty churches, not to mention the public debate over whether a European constitution should devote a single line to recording the continent’s Christian heritage.

The decline of a religion—or even its death—will not necessarily alarm those who do not adhere to the faith in question, nor need it have damaging policy consequences. Liberal or leftist Europeans see no tragedy in the emergence of a fully secular, progressive society. Yet the process of de-Christianization coincides not with the growth of scientific humanism, but rather the dramatic expansion of other religions of a traditionalist or fundamentalist bent, and especially of Islam. This change has immense consequences for the United States, for policymakers, and for anyone interested in the whole idea of Western culture. For two centuries, “the West” has been defined in terms of the transatlantic relationship between a Europe and a North America that, for all their conflicts and mutual misunderstandings, shared common cultural, intellectual, and (usually) religious assumptions. Within our lifetimes, that vision is likely to end. The political implications are obvious: imagine the United States and Europe permanently at odds over the Middle East, oil issues, or Israel and Palestine. In economic terms, too, Europe matters hugely. For all the excitement over the coming of an “Asian century,” the EU still constitutes a critical engine of the global economy, with a combined GNP not far short of the United States’. When *Fortune* surveys the world’s largest corporations, European nations still provide around a third of the total, much as they have since the 1950s, with France, Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands strongly in the lead. If European nations are entering an era of internecine religious struggle, that is a critical fact for the United States.

Over the past four or five years, many European writers have drawn attention to the sharp decline of Christianity and the concurrent growth of Islam. Commentators believe that we are witnessing *The Death of Christian Britain*, or *The Undoing of a Culture* across much of Europe.<sup>2</sup> A Spanish writer

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000*, Routledge 2001; Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill, 2004).

cries “*Adios to Christianity!*”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Islam threatens *Jihad in Europe, The War in our Cities*; for one author, France stands on the cusp *Between Jihad and Reconquista*.<sup>4</sup> Conservative American visions verge on the apocalyptic. George Weigel’s *The Cube and the Cathedral* uses Europe as an awful warning for the United States, a disturbing object lesson in how Christianity dies and the destructive effects of secularism.<sup>5</sup> A godless Europe, he argues, may for a few years appear pleasantly tolerant and nonjudgmental, but without commitment to faith and family, collapsing moral standards and plummeting birth rates create a society that is literally unsustainable.

Pessimists imagine the future of Europe lying in the hands of groups who have confidence in themselves and their divine mission, above all the Muslims. Some observers see Europe making a wholesale transition into the Muslim world. Bernard Lewis remarked in a 2004 interview that “Current trends show Europe will have a Muslim majority by the end of the 21st century at the latest. . . . Europe will be part of the Arab west—the Maghreb.”<sup>6</sup> Bat Ye’or (the pseudonym of British author Giselle Littman) envisages an emerging Muslim-dominated subcontinent of Eurabia in which remaining Christians and Jews might enjoy some tenuous kind of second-class status not unlike Ottoman dhimmitude, and writes of the emerging Euro-Arab “axis.”<sup>7</sup> Underlying this vision is a memory of the morally gutted Europe of the 1920s and 1930s, which collapsed in the face of totalitarianism. Bruce Bawer’s *While Europe Slept* draws its title from Winston Churchill’s classic warning of the dangers of appeasing Hitler.<sup>8</sup>

While European nations do indeed face subversion and civil unrest, such accounts—and the predictions drawn from them—are multiply misleading. Most troubling perhaps is the portrayal of Islam as a religion—and of Muslim communities—as a kind of cancerous growth. Islam, moreover, is presented as a homogeneous and unchanging reality, without consideration of the dynamic relationship between that religion and the dominant European society. Meanwhile, the apocalyptic accounts pay little serious attention to the wider realities of religion in Europe, beyond a general assumption that traditional Christianity has failed, so that the continent is just biding its time until Islam is ready to expand into the vacuum.

<sup>3</sup>Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *Adiós a la cristiandad* (Ediciones B. Madrid, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>Ali Laïdi, *Le Jihad en Europe: Les Filières du Terrorisme Islamiste* (Seuil, 2002); Udo Ulfkotte, *Der Krieg in unseren Städten* (2003); René Marchand, *La France en danger d’islam: Entre Jibād et Reconquista* (l’Age de Homme, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America and Politics without God* (Basic Books, 2005).

<sup>6</sup>“Europa wird am Ende des Jahrhunderts islamisch sein” (Europe will be Islamic by the End of the Century), *Die Welt*, July 28, 2004.

<sup>7</sup>Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (2005) and *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (2001), both Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press.

<sup>8</sup>Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within* (Doubleday, 2006), alluding to Winston Churchill, *While England Slept* (1938).

The growth of European Islam, while very important historically, must be seen in a larger religious context. Far from having vanished, Christian churches are still an active force in many nations, and Christian belief remains far more potent than we might initially imagine, though expressed with far less public fervor than in the United States. The theory of de-Christianization seems hard to reconcile with the outpourings of grief following the death of Pope John Paul II and the passionate interest in the election of his successor. Undeniably, religious practice has declined among Christians, with an astonishing rapidity in such former Catholic bastions as Italy, Spain and—just since the 1980s—in Ireland. But scholars such as Grace Davie show that falling observance cannot simply be equated with pure secularism.<sup>9</sup> Even in the relatively secular countries, survey evidence still shows high levels of belief, suggesting that people are “believing without belonging.” Presently, strict secularism is highly advanced among cultural and political elites, but has not yet made enormous inroads among ordinary people. Davie also suggests that the Christian presence remains potent through social memory. European Christians are “content to let both churches and churchgoers enact a memory on their behalf,” secure in the knowledge that Christianity is there if and when they need it; and most do still define themselves, however vestigially, as Christians. Rising Islam will simply not be expanding into an ideological or religious vacuum. Even if Islam threatens (or promises) to overwhelm Europe, then Europe could well transform Islam.

Also, accounts of the collapse of Christianity fail to take notice of the enormously significant growth of immigrant churches among Africans, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Latin Americans. Even if we accept the grimmest view of the fate of Christianity among ethnic Europeans, then these new churches represent an exciting new planting, even a re-evangelization of Europe. Already in London, half the Christians attending church on any given Sunday are of African or Afro-Caribbean ethnicity. Rome is home to at least fifty thousand Filipinos, most of whom are fervently loyal Catholics, and similar populations are reshaping Christian life across the continent. There even exists a Federation of African Churches of Switzerland. These movements are all the more significant since Europe's very large populations of global South origins are targeted so passionately for evangelism by both Christians and Muslims. The winning side in such a contest might conceivably decide the future of European religious life.

We must ask whether Islam, too, will in coming decades succumb to the same kind of secularization that has affected the traditional churches. At first glance, this seems counterintuitive: we recall the second-generation British Muslims drifting towards Islamist radicalism. Yet powerful currents in European society work strongly against the survival of religious orthodoxies of any kind. One current, obviously, is the sexual libertarianism that arouses

<sup>9</sup> *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford, 2000).

opposition to any form of religious-based regulation of moral conduct, in matters such as premarital sex or (especially) homosexuality. One need only look at media or advertising to appreciate just how much more liberated European nations are in sexual matters than the United States. The other mighty force for change is the changing role of women, as emerging feminist ideologies within Islam challenge religious assumptions concerning domestic violence, arranged marriages, or sexual freedom.

Understanding modern European religion is critical for studying the United States. Europe apparently presents a classic example of the familiar theories of secularization, which claim that when a society reaches a certain stage of social and intellectual development, it “comes of age” and no longer needs God in anything like the traditional sense. The theory works perfectly in Europe—and abysmally badly in the United States, a comparably advanced economy and a sophisticated postindustrial society in which religion is booming, often in evangelical and charismatic forms. Put simply, we need to understand why Europe and the United States have taken such very different directions. Which of the two models is “exceptional”? Or is secularization theory itself deeply flawed? Once again, American discussions of this issue are generally hampered by a lack of knowledge of European conditions and history. The popular econometric theory of religious choice argues that European religion declined because state churches represented a monopoly supplier that stifled free religious competition—a view that ignores the extremely free conditions of the religious marketplace historically prevailing in nations such as Great Britain. Discussions of European conditions are shaped more by stereotypes than realities.

### **Godless Europe?**

What does the death of a religion look like? Observing any European city, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Christianity is sick or dying. Though ancient churches stand as visible monuments, most have lost their traditional role as thriving centers of community. Attendance has collapsed in most nations, as has the number of clergy and religious. Catholic schools survive, but are now overwhelmingly staffed by lay teachers. Unlike the United States, moreover, religious disaffection is not merely expressed in nonparticipation in church activities. A significant number of Europeans declare themselves atheist or non-religious. Across the continent, opinion surveys indicate that the number of those who never attend a place of worship—around 30 percent—is roughly equal to the number attending weekly or monthly. In some countries of Western Europe, the number of never-attenders reaches 60 percent.

In historical terms, moreover, these changes have occurred in a brief moment. As recently as the 1950s, the project of European unification clearly

had its roots in Catholic political circles, to the extent that the European flag—twelve stars arranged in a circle—was borrowed from traditional images of the Virgin Mary, the woman “crowned with the stars,” though with the central figure subtly omitted. To take another index of respect for religion, just in the mid-1970s, the historic parish churches of Great Britain were commonly kept open through the day; today, none are, for fear of theft or vandalism.

Contemplating European secularization, Americans often assume that this must have something to do with the bloody historical experiences of the twentieth century, especially the Nazi regime. For all their other effects, though, these events played little role in modern secularization. In most countries, the churches played a role that was at least creditable, and sometimes heroic, and charges about alleged Vatican complicity with the Nazis have never gained much credibility outside the United States. To the contrary, Pius XII remained for most Catholics an inspiring symbol of anti-Nazi resistance.

Other factors, though, contributed mightily to the decline of religion, making Europe a wonderful model of secularization theory in action. According to this sociological model, traditional Christianity works best in a pre-modern or pre-scientific setting, but it is displaced by economic development. Under the impact of modernity, individualism, privatization, and the rise of a scientific worldview, older styles of Christianity lose relevance. The faith inevitably declines when GNP per capita reaches a certain level, when modern hospitals fulfill the need for healing, when social services meet the needs once fulfilled by church-based charities, and when people feel confidence in the stability of their society. We must then speak of the death of God, or at least a God who responds to prayer or intervenes in any kind of traditional sense. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in “the world come of age,” “God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without Him.”<sup>10</sup>

European Christians certainly felt the full force of secular rivalry with the growth of social welfare systems from the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the 1960s, changes in gender roles and family structures have also undermined older religious assumptions. While European economies have experienced all the same pressures as the United States’—a move to a postindustrial economy, a huge upsurge in female employment, the growth of political feminism—these changes have arguably been still more far-reaching in Europe because of the greater tradition of enforcing social change through law. Under the EU, a highly intrusive legal apparatus has strongly encouraged women’s rights as well as social and legal equality for homosexuals. Across Europe, social change has been reflected in a steep decline in family size and a growth in single-parent households. Today, Western European nations report some of the lowest birthrates ever recorded: 1.2 in Spain or Italy, below 1.0 in

<sup>10</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*, letters of April 30 and July 16, 1944.

regions of Germany (the replacement rate needed for a population to maintain its stability is 2.1 per woman). The figures elsewhere would be even more striking if we separate out just ethnic Europeans, whose “birth dearth” is masked by the much higher rates of their immigrant neighbors.

For many reasons, then, church strictures about sexual morality and family seem ever more out of tune with social realities. Gay activists have been especially antagonistic to vestiges of religious influence in politics. To quote British politician Matthew Parris, “I say: enough of tolerance. I do not tolerate religious superstition, not when it refuses to tolerate me. Sweep it from the corridors of power.”<sup>11</sup>

Across Europe too, repeated sex scandals illustrate the apparent hypocrisy of the churches. In the Catholic tradition particularly, cases of child molestation by clergy have assailed churches in Austria, Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere. While these incidents have contributed to declining Christian practice, the publicity they received is as likely a sign as it is a cause of secularization. If the Christian consensus had not been undermined already, stories of clerical abuse probably would not have reached the media or had the effect they did. Whatever the causal sequence, though, abuse stories served as a perfect symbol of church implosion, most tellingly in Ireland, which has experienced radical secularization over the past twenty years.

The process of secularization has obviously had political consequences. For most European nations, it is many years since Christianity has played a dominant political role, and for most of the past century, Christian activism has engendered vitriolic anticlerical and antireligious sentiment. Recently, though, the goal of limiting excessive religious influence in secular affairs has escalated towards a more vehement exclusion of any Christian elements whatever. Two recent events in particular demonstrate the antipathy of political elites, at least, to any acknowledgment of religion, and perhaps to the toleration of Christian sentiment as such. During the debates over the European constitution, framers sought an exalted protocol that would describe the roots of European values and civilization. Though many wished to include at least a passing nod to the Christian heritage, others strenuously resisted even such an acknowledgment, preferring to speak of “a cultural, religious and humanist inheritance . . . nourished first by the civilizations of Greece and Rome, characterized by the spiritual impulse and later by the philosophical currents of the Enlightenment.”

As this debate was in progress, Italian politician Rocco Buttiglione was a candidate for the position of European Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, the kind of appointment that is rarely challenged. Buttiglione, however, had expressed the view that, based on his Catholic faith, homosexual behavior was sinful. He continued, “I may think that homosexuality is a

<sup>11</sup> Parris, “Sweep out religious superstition which will not tolerate me,” *Times*, Oct. 23, 2004.



sin but this has no effect on politics, unless I say that homosexuality is a crime. . . . The state has no right to stick its nose into these things, and nobody can be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.” Yet with all these qualifications—mildly expressed, from an American perspective—he was rejected from the office. Pursued to its logical outcome, the decision excludes any and all Christians of traditional or orthodox leanings from office within the EU, and soon, presumably within member states.

### **Faith Among the Ruins**

And yet, for all the signs of Christianity's being in its death throes, other indicators seem to point to church life and even vigor. The continent's 560 million Christians include 286 million Catholics, 158 million Orthodox, 77 million Protestants, and 27 million Anglicans. If accurate, Europeans would still constitute 28 percent of the world's Christians. But what do the figures mean? The number of Anglicans indicates some of the problems. Like most European nations, England long possessed an established state church that claimed as its adherents everyone within the territory who was not actively affiliated with some other group, and that notional membership could not be ended by any degree of non-attendance or even open antipathy. Realistically, that 27 million figure for Anglicans includes at most a million who attend Anglican services with any kind of regularity, and the membership rolls of other state churches—German Evangelical Lutherans, or the Swedish Lutheran church, until recently the state church—should probably be reduced to a like degree.

The European Values Survey shows remarkably high levels of acceptance of supernatural belief among those who are barely affiliated with any Christian denomination. Moreover, these beliefs include not just generic acceptance of the idea of God, but also of more specific beliefs such as sin, judgment, and the afterlife. Millions who might not set foot inside a church except for baptisms, weddings, and funerals definitely refer to themselves as Christian. Such loyalty might represent only a transitional phase, from active affiliation to total indifference, but even if that is true, Europe is presently home to several hundred million “cultural Christians.” And outpourings of religious feeling at key events—after a national tragedy, say, or a Papal visit—suggest that this adherence might go beyond a vague sentiment.

Such findings do not necessarily offer comfort for Christians in the longer term, as it is not clear for how many decades more cultural memories can survive. Residual Christianity may be in reasonable health a generation or so after institutional structures went into freefall, but the situation in thirty or forty years might be very different. Arguably, the election of German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Pope may reflect a realization by Catholic hierarchy that they must make a last-ditch effort to reassert the faith in Europe, where it faces

urgent challenges. Still, the picture of sudden Christian decline is more complex than it initially appears.

Any discussion of European values, social or religious, must take account of the very different nature of policymaking and media in Europe and the United States. Briefly, Europe has a much more homogeneous ruling elite than the United States, one much more concentrated in the same metropolitan centers and sharing similar backgrounds and values. For better or worse, those elites are less subject to expressions of public sentiment and less democratic. To take an example, opinion surveys consistently show European publics at large to be quite conservative on issues of criminal justice and law enforcement, and this conservatism extends to what we think of as the most progressive Scandinavian nations. If decisions were made by referendum or plebiscite, then European policies on criminal justice would look much more like those of the United States, and most nations would execute murderers. In reality, no European nation has had the death penalty since France renounced the practice in 1981. In most nations, not only is capital punishment not accepted, but even its discussion is rigorously barred, alongside other policies favored by large popular majorities. The restriction of political asylum rights would be another example.

In other words, at least some apparent differences between Europe and the United States reflect not broad social trends, but rather the elitist nature of European decision-making. To draw a parallel with the official “European” views on religion, we would have to imagine a United States in which all media reflected the socially liberal values of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe*, and in which any forms of conservative or charismatic religious expression were greeted with incredulity. The United States certainly has much more active religious practice than does Europe, but it also has far better means of seeing the religious life that is actually going on.

In fact, the story of European de-Christianization needs to be qualified somewhat. First, the story is geographically sporadic. Some countries are far more secular than others, and the “New Europe” of the former Soviet bloc includes many areas of continuing Christian strength, notably in Poland. Perhaps such nations are on the verge of rapid secularization on the West European model, but they are not there yet.

Also, even within the secularizing nations, the survival of very strong institutional networks provides a foundation for political activism. In Spain, the legalization of gay marriage in 2005 came after massive popular demonstrations, organized by a weakened but still formidable Catholic church. But attitudes towards abortion demonstrate the decline of Catholic political power in many nations, chiefly during the 1980s. At the same time, the map of legal differences indicates the power of continuing resistance to secularism in much of Eastern Europe and even, still, in Ireland. Interestingly, while many nations make abortion available virtually on demand through the end of the first

trimester, very few are anything like as liberal as the current U.S. law in terms of later-term abortions.

Some thriving devotional practices and other aspects of Christian life often escape public notice. One is the fact that pilgrimage to both old and new religious centers and shrines such as Knock and Medjugorje have achieved new popularity as a result of the late Pope's enthusiasm. Another is the continuing intellectual vigor and public debate within the churches, manifested for instance by the current Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, an accomplished Christian scholar on par with any leader of his church of the past two centuries. Pope Benedict XVI is also a figure of great intellectual depth.

Finally, Europe resembles the United States in the upsurge of evangelical and charismatic movements, admittedly on nothing like the American scale, but still, not a negligible phenomenon. In Britain, this boom has largely occurred within the Anglican church, while elsewhere, independent churches and Pentecostal churches have boomed. Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Mormons have all shown impressive growth.

Again reflecting cultural differences, European governments have been troubled by the growth of "sects," a term that in the European context means something more like the American sense of a sinister cult, and several regimes have tried to control growth. Restriction has been most heavily used in the former Soviet bloc, partly at the behest of the Orthodox churches—a telling example of continuing Christian political clout. Nevertheless, the Christian fringe continues to grow, and it threatens, perhaps, to become much more than a fringe.

## **New Christians**

In 1987, Sunday Adelaja left his native Nigeria to travel to the USSR, part of the Soviet attempt to recruit bright third-world students to their cause. After the USSR collapsed, Adelaja settled in the Ukraine, where in 1992 he began a Pentecostal church that would become known as the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God. Today, that church has perhaps twenty thousand followers, overwhelmingly Ukrainian or Russian, and represents a significant political force in Ukraine. The church offers a charismatic and supernatural-oriented message, as followers claim to have been cured of cancer or AIDS or raised from the dead. However extraordinary Sunday Adelaja might appear, he is only one of many highly successful third-world evangelists now operating in Europe. While he was setting up shop in Kiev, another Nigerian, Matthew Ashimolowo, was founding a church in London. He would soon build the enormous Kingsway International Christian Centre. Pastor Ashimolowo, however, has been somewhat less successful in reaching out to white Europeans, because his message seems so foreign. Summarizing one image of Christianity in Britain today, he complains, "The trouble is we are seen as a Black thing and not a God thing."



Kingsway International Christian Centre in Hackney, London.

Such spectacular success stories may be atypical, but they reflect a critical phenomenon in contemporary European Christianity, namely the powerful boost being supplied by global South communities. As European nations from the 1950s onwards struggled to find labor—particularly for its menial jobs—they drew immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, commonly from ex-colonies. Unlike the United States in the same years, a majority of immigrants were Muslim, but a significant number were Christian, commonly representing the very successful new churches exploding in their regions of origin. The new Christian growth fell into two closely overlapping categories: the churches established on European soil by and for the new immigrants themselves, and also deliberate missionary activity directed from the global South. In both instances, we see activity by transnational networks operating in literally dozens of nations, churches headquartered in Brazil, Nigeria, the Philippines, or Korea. The Nigerian-centered Redeemed Christian Church of God operates in England, Germany, and France. The Congolese EJCSK, the church of prophet Simon Kimbangu, is active in numerous African and Western European nations. Brazilian congregations, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, are also widespread.

Some of these immigrant communities are numerous and influential. London has 380,000 Africans, who now outnumber Afro-Caribbean residents, and some regions of the city have a strongly African cast. The religious impact is unmistakable. Commenting on a successful African church, a correspondent in the British *Guardian* noted that “London, the cynical capital of the unbelieving English, must be one of the least religious places in the world.

Of those who chose to answer the census question, 1.1 million Londoners (15.8 percent of the total) said they had “no religion. *Yet, as the city continues to be Africanized, so it is being evangelized,*” chiefly by charismatic and Pentecostal churches.<sup>12</sup> Similar stories could be reproduced in Paris, Rome, or Berlin. Though the absolute numbers may be small, the growth potential is immense, particularly as second- and third-generation members of the newer churches move them into the religious mainstream.

There is now under way a changing character of the Catholic priesthood due to the influx of global South clergy now found across Western Europe, including in once solidly Catholic regions: the image of African priests ministering in Ireland is particularly memorable. As in the Protestant and charismatic churches, the faces of Christian leadership are now Nigerian, Vietnamese, and Filipino.

New Christian churches have proliferated in both Europe and the United States, but their impact has been radically different. While in the United States new groups have added a stratum to the existing range of churches, in Europe they have more commonly offered a replacement. As the difference is sometimes expressed, when a Christian church goes out of use in Europe, it becomes a warehouse, a condo, or most commonly, a mosque. In the United States, a church that becomes obsolete generally is rededicated as another church, often for a Brazilian or Korean congregation.

The concern the immigrant churches have aroused perhaps reflects the growing secular climate in the wider society. In Britain, African and Latin American churches only make headlines during exposés of exorcism and spiritual warfare episodes in which children have been harmed, sometimes after they were accused of being witches or demon-possessed. Recently, African churches have been subjected to astonishing vilification. Following one well-documented instance of African human sacrifice in London, the media began linking such activity to Pentecostal churches and even suggested that several hundred children had fallen victim to such atrocities. In retrospect, the charges are wholly fictitious, and the whole affair must be seen as a media-driven moral panic. But the affair indicates staggering official ignorance of charismatic Christianity, of the distinctive religious practices of African and global South believers, and a tendency to dismiss enthusiastic Christian belief as, in effect, “a Black thing.”

### **The Moor's Last Laugh**

Near Granada, in Spain, stands the site of one of the great turning points of European history. In 1492, after the Christian Reconquest, the last

<sup>12</sup>Leo Benedictus, “From the Day We’re Born Till the Day We Die, It’s the Church,” *Guardian* Jan. 21, 2005, my emphasis.

*Table 1.* Muslim Populations in Western Europe 2005 (in millions)

	<b>Muslims</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
France	5	60	8.3
Germany	3.5	82	4.3
Britain	1.6	60	2.7
Italy	1	57	1.8
Spain	1	41	2.4
Netherlands	1	16	6.3
Belgium	0.4	10.3	3.9
Austria	0.35	8	4.4
Switzerland	0.31	7.2	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>342</b>	Av: <b>4.2</b>

Muslim king, Boabdil, is reported to have turned and wept as he contemplated the ruin of a once great civilization. This was “The Moor’s Last Sigh.” As Fouad Ajami has pointed out, though, recent developments suggest that the Moors might breathe again, and according to some projections, might again hold sway over portions of Europe. Boabdil would have “the Moor’s Last Laugh.”<sup>13</sup>

In American popular history, the Christian-Muslim encounter is generally framed in terms of the Crusades, and a tendentious version of these events in which Christians are unabashed aggressors against highly civilized Muslims. In European history, of course, the Muslim presence is more recent and more threatening, and not until the end of the seventeenth century was Central Europe largely freed from the threat of Turkish annexation and the mass enslavement of native Christians. Balkan populations remained under heavy-handed Muslim oppression until modern times. In Western Europe, meanwhile, the Muslim presence was minuscule until the 1950s. Europe as a whole had 18 million Muslims in 1970, rising to some 32 million by 2000. Some communities grew significantly (see [Table 1](#)).

These figures are not immense when set beside the continuing Christian strength suggested earlier. The relatively small scale of Muslim numbers might surprise Americans, for whom their key minority issues involve an African-American population that has at no time since the nation’s founding been less than 10 percent of the national total, and sometimes much larger. (Counting Latinos and Asians in addition to African-Americans, the United States today deals with “minorities” of perhaps 30 percent of the national population, probably rising to almost half the population by 2050.)

Projections of ethnic minorities, however, sometimes confound non-white immigration with the Muslim presence, so that imagining European cities achieving “majority-minority” status late in the present century implies

<sup>13</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 28, 2004.

Muslim domination. In fact, many recent immigrants are Hindu, Sikh, or Christian. But even allowing for just Muslims, the non-white presence is still a novelty in Europe outside major seaports. Also, Muslim migrants are not equally distributed across the continent, but tend rather to concentrate heavily in certain major cities and metropolitan regions. French cities like Marseille have acquired a strongly North African flavor. In Frankfurt, immigrant groups make up some 30 percent of the population, and about one person in eight is of Turkish Muslim origin; the city has 27 mosques. Muslims make up around a fifth of the population of Vienna, a figure that roughly doubled during the 1990s.

Most crucially, while Muslim populations retain the characteristically high birthrates of immigrants, ethnic Europeans have experienced the dramatic decline in growth noted earlier. The situation in France is by far the most acute. Allowing for illegal immigrants, Muslims might already comprise 10 percent of the population, and that figure could certainly rise to 30 percent by 2050. Quite plausibly, too, Germany as a whole might be dealing with a Muslim population of 25 percent by 2050, with heavy Muslim concentrations in all the major cities. The Muslim population of the Netherlands doubled between 1990 and 2005, growing from perhaps 3 to 6 percent of the population. The figures are all open to further expansion if we assume an EU with essentially uncontrolled borders, open to unrestricted mass immigration from North Africa and the Middle East. In contrast to Europe, the world's most intense growth rates are in the nations bordering the Red Sea, lands that cannot cope with the numbers they already have: new inhabitants will desperately wish to migrate somewhere.

Having said this, we need to be careful about extrapolating further, as Bernard Lewis did when he consigned the future Europe to the "Western Maghreb." In order to reach a simple majority by 2100, as Lewis projected, the Muslim population would need to double every thirty years or so. That would require an extraordinarily high birthrate, one far higher than the present figure, and—a riskier assumption—this rate would have to remain unabated through the end of the century. Muslim birthrates would have to continue steadily on this incredible upslope through the end of the century, despite all the pressures for cultural assimilation, particularly as they affect women. A Muslim population of around 25 percent by 2100 is more probable—a historically striking statistic, with enormous political implications, but nothing like a majority. Nor does this figure take account of high birthrates among Europe's immigrant Christians, who would serve as a counterweight to Muslim expansion.

But it would be a mistake to see European Islam purely through its conflicts with mainstream society. Most significant for the future of Islam will be its struggle to survive as a practiced religion within a notionally secular society. Millions of those of Muslim background are as lukewarm in their religion as many Christians are in theirs, and the minimally observant "cultural Muslim" is a well-known type. In France presently, just 5 percent of Muslims attend mosques with any degree of regularity, raising questions about the

prospects for a straightforward Muslim takeover. And if, as some believe, radical Islamist ideas influence around 4 percent of Western European Muslims, then 96 percent remain free of such venom. Also, there is no such thing as a “European Muslim”: there are Moroccan Muslims, Turkish Muslims, Nigerian Muslims, and so on, representing very different forms of the faith and varying degrees of commitment.

But in parts of Europe, Islam has succeeded in maintaining high levels of faith and practice, not least through the operation of Sufi networks. More alarming for the West has been the systematic growth of puritanical and evangelistic forms of Islam, which attempt to eliminate traditional cultural differences between strands of Islam, drawing all into a common pattern. These also reject cooperation with the mainstream society. If in fact Islam can retain the loyalty of young Muslims, the second- and third-generation descendants of Asian and African immigrants, while Christianity continues to contract, then perhaps this kind of demanding religion would in fact be the dominant form of practice in a future Europe.

### **Young and Old**

The religious divide in Europe is above all a generational gulf. Muslim immigrants are overwhelmingly young and undereducated, and in the context of largely stagnant European economies, they suffer acutely from social ills and dysfunctions. Their unemployment levels are astronomical—perhaps 40 percent of Berlin’s Turks lack work—and Muslims represent the main portion of criminal underworlds and prison populations in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Youth resentment can be seen through popular culture, in the hip-hop and music fusion cultures of urban Muslim Europe—artists such as German Turks Eko Fresh and Kool Savas, Britain’s Fun<sup>^</sup>Da<sup>^</sup>Mental, or French urban Raï music. Also indicating disaffection are the surveys in which young Muslims in many countries assert their nationality as “Muslim” rather than that of the European nation in which they notionally hold citizenship.

The demographic gap between religions is suggested by the relative lack of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant violence in the past decade. Though incidents have occurred, and Germany in particular has its notorious skin-heads, far Right movements have enjoyed nothing like the success we might have imagined, given the powerful currents of resentment in the society as a whole. A key reason for this placidity is the simple dearth of young white Europeans of the 15–25 age cohort, of the sort who in earlier generations might have become the foot-soldiers of urban violence. Increasingly, young urban and suburban Muslims confront middle-aged and elderly whites, a divide with strong overtones of class and relative wealth: the confrontation is of course a recipe for mutual grievance, and the source of much street crime. Religious



conflicts therefore draw on issues of race, class, and poverty, in which the state inevitably serves as the public face of the haves.

Demography underlies social realities, but also shapes religious patterns. Different styles of belief and worship appeal to different populations. For both immigrant Muslims and Christians, authoritarian, charismatic, and demanding styles appeal largely because their market is adolescents and young adults, commonly suffering from multiple social deprivations, and, moreover, observing gender roles in the process of rapid transition.

Projecting such conflicts into the near future, we find an unsettling picture. Urban politics, which have long been bedeviled by racial and religious tension, are acquiring a powerful theme of generational resentment. As traditional white populations become relatively older and richer, non-white communities, with their roots in Asia and Africa, are younger and poorer. If—as seems likely—Europe's economies enter a period of stagflation and unemployment, young audiences will listen enthusiastically to speakers who blame the crisis on the burden imposed by the selfish white elderly, who had in their day been responsible for imperialism, fascism, and racism.

These issues would focus especially on the politics of law and order, and resentment at the increasingly sophisticated—and repressive—methods of crime prevention. Soaring prison populations advanced the radicalization of young Europeans, white and non-white, who are exposed to radical political movements and gangs in what critics already call “universities of jihad.”

## **Revolutions at Home**

Stereotypes apart, a great many European Muslims are neither young nor discontented, but some issues are very sensitive and can stir deep grievances. Most fall into the general category of “family,” namely the education of children within the bounds of acceptable Muslim standards, especially for girls. For most communities, the role of women is a particularly explosive issue. Among British Pakistanis, the custom of arranged marriages threatens to draw in state intervention, arousing fears of imposed non-Muslim morality. So does the practice of polygamy, still a thriving underground institution. Across Europe, too, the suppression of domestic violence raises issues of interference in patriarchal authority. Other controversial themes setting states against families include female circumcision, a practice not commanded by Islam but widely held to be a duty among many African communities.

If birthrates are so critical in religious change, then much depends on the changing nature of gender roles and family structures among current immigrants, and it is here above all that the European social context has had its largest impact on traditional Muslim structures. In recent years, a lively and militant feminist culture has developed in the best-established Muslim communities. Across Europe, for instance, Fadela Amara's *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*

(Neither Whores Nor Submissives) (2003) has given rise to a burgeoning movement. The phrase's meaning is obvious: just because a woman refuses to accept the role of a doormat does not mean she has abandoned faith, family, and decency. So the fate of the new European Islam—and of the societies in which it develops—will above all be decided by conflicts and compromises within families, between men and women, between parents and children.

## **Ultras**

For Muslims even more than for Christians, the infusions of new faith and traditional piety introduced by transnational groups tend to be anti-assimilative and to defeat factors that otherwise would contribute powerfully to secularization. If such transnational networks keep on operating and migrating on a semi-permanent basis, that fact strongly works against any kind of mainstreaming or veering towards the secular norm.

One of the most alarming is the Lebanese model, recalling the situation in which Lebanese elites formed a nonreligious consensus pledged to money-making by the elites on both sides. The situation collapsed in the 1970s, due to factors that ominously recall contemporary Europe—the growing demographic gulf between rich and poor, the radicalization of the poor Muslim young, the influx of incendiary new ideologies from conflicts in other lands. In 1975–76, Lebanon collapsed amid apocalyptic violence. For some years, European elites have presented their new society as a world living after the end of history, with the turbulence of the twentieth century concluded, with all passion spent. But the Lebanese example showed that economic growth alone cannot substitute for cultural and national loyalties; that ideology and religious activism can never be wholly suppressed; and that ultimately, demographic pressures have the capacity to overturn even the most stable-looking society. As in Lebanon, Europe's elites seem to believe that if they no longer think in terms of religion, of national loyalty, of cultural identity, then nor will anyone else. They seem to be quite wrong on all scores.

## **Transforming Europe**

Europe faces two possible religious futures: one of conflict or one of assimilation. Clearly, societies wish to avoid turmoil, but the best ways to achieve this result are by no means obvious. Americans can easily sympathize with contemporary European dilemmas, given their own long debates over African-American populations and controversies over assimilation and integration. Europeans, too, must decide how far cultural and religious identities should be prized and preserved and weigh the social costs of doing so.

European political elites overwhelmingly share a political and cultural consensus in which religion, though tolerated, can only exist in privatized

form, and in which public expressions of belief on American lines are viewed with deep suspicion. Equally unassailable is the orthodoxy of multi-faith and multicultural consensus. The assumption seems to be that if secular Europeans have laid aside their primitive religious impulses, so also should newer arrivals. The cultural gulf between political elites and recent immigrants is therefore substantial.

Also critical is the Muslim role in mainstream politics, as Islam has emerged as a potent political force. For instance, Turkish intervention was decisive in securing a SPD-Green victory in recent German elections. As more and more immigrant groups assume the citizenship of their new nations, the task faced by conservative and Christian Democrat parties becomes ever steeper.

Other nations face wrenching debates over free speech and the restriction of writings or utterances that may offend Muslim minorities. Particularly troubling is the extension of hate-speech laws to cover attacks on religions or religious doctrines, a tendency that has resulted in draconian prosecutions for what look like forceful arguments rather than “fighting words.” These developments herald a kind of ultra-sensitive group libel law radically different from anything in U.S. experience. Also, such measures challenge fundamental notions of cultural identity, as when Italian Muslims refuse to let their children read anti-Islamic passages in Dante or urge the suppression of historic art denigrating Islam and Mohammed.

Also worrying is the development of a kind of *millet* model of religious governance. The word *millet* stems from Ottoman Turkish practice in which each minority religious/cultural community—Jews, Armenians, Orthodox Christians—enjoyed considerable autonomy to manage its own affairs, subject to the overarching authority of the Ottoman regime. In recent attempts to head off Islamic extremism, some European governments have tried to encourage “moderate” Muslim leaderships organized in regional and national councils, such as the French Council of the Muslim Faith. Governments are in effect recognizing particular clerical and religious groups as the official representatives of religious communities, treating members of those communities not as individuals and citizens, but as members of collective religious/cultural entities, holding group rights. Within a few years, European governments will have to confront attempts to exercise religious law within those communities.

European nations face a massive cultural contradiction. Political elites hold strongly liberal views on issues such as women's equality and the full acceptance of sexual difference, and those policies are implemented both through national law and the jurisdiction of the European Commission and European Court of Human Rights. Yet at many points, those policies run flat contrary to the assumptions of religious communities, Muslim and Christian, which demand respect for their own traditions in the name of multiculturalism. To take a not-so-imaginary situation, what happens when a traditionalist religious group, whether Muslim or Christian, condemns homosexuality

and urges severe penal sanctions for gays? Multicultural values demand respect for religious values; individual rights demand the suppression of hate speech. Another potent liberal value is child protection, which sometimes runs against models of child raising and treatment in immigrant communities. Again, which value prevails?

Other religious conflicts involve Christians as well as Muslims. One nascent political clash involves the right to evangelize for a particular faith, and in the process, disparage other religions. Can a Christian condemn Islam and its Prophet in order to make a convert? Laws against religious hate speech in practice become anti-proselytizing measures. And the strong European tradition of anti-cult, anti-sect laws comes perilously close to regulating which religious traditions can be practiced within a nation, suppressing controversial Christian or esoteric movements.

In short, Europe seems set for decades of church-state and mosque-state conflicts and compromises in a radically different social and cultural setting from the United States. The resulting religio-political situation promises to be something utterly distinct from traditional Western liberal notions. This fact also carries legal weight for Americans. In recent years, the U.S. Supreme Court has demonstrated a powerful if controversial tilt towards accepting European court decisions as authoritative precedent in matters such as sodomy law and the execution of juveniles.<sup>14</sup> European legal trends thus matter far more than might initially appear, and we need to understand the social context of European decisions in issues of religion and free speech.

### **Under American Eyes**

The fact that the different societies have followed such divergent trajectories in terms of religion and secularization has profound political implications. Religious thought and rhetoric increasingly provide a barrier between U.S. and European policymakers, which will only increase as European states need to take ever more account of their growing non-Christian minorities. Take, for instance, the declared U.S. policy goal of promoting religious freedom worldwide. This message is unlikely to receive the support of European nations, if the policy seems to involve major intrusions into the domestic affairs of Muslim states, in the process offending Muslim pride within France or Germany. Yet at the same time, such intervention might be strongly supported by Christian migrant communities, who would demand the protection of fellow Christians in Nigeria, say.

Or to take the Middle East conflict, most Americans, whether liberal or conservative, have a strong and largely uncritical view of the state of Israel, in

<sup>14</sup> See *Roper v. Simmons*, U.S. Supreme Court No. 03–633, decided March 1, 2005, where the Court held that the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments forbid imposition of the death penalty on offenders who were under the age of 18 when their crimes were committed.

marked contrast to the general hostility that exists across much of Europe. Explanations for this intercontinental divide are not immediately obvious. Certainly, Europe has larger Muslim minorities than the United States and is more dependent on Middle Eastern oil, but religious ideologies also play a critical role. While the U.S. media have accused Europeans (and especially the French) of a continuing anti-Semitism, we might equally point to the strong American tradition of philo-Semitism, which grows so naturally from the nation's roots in the Old Testament. At least on this side of the water, it seems only natural that an overwhelmingly Christian country should see its fate intimately bound up with that of the Jewish state. Some recent surveys confirm this notion of religious America confronting godless Europe, to the extent that in terms of religious worldviews, American Christians have more in common with Africans or Latin Americans than with the British or the Dutch. Might this ultimately lead to a greater sense of intellectual affinity towards African Christians than to secular Europeans?

Many Americans also respond naturally to Manichean language of evil and good that makes most Europeans cringe: witness the radically different attitudes to the political rhetoric of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s or to President Bush when he famously identified an "axis of evil" in 2002. This aversion to moralism of course is far more than a matter of etiquette. A society that truly believes its enemies are evil is far more likely to demand the deployment of maximum force against them, to seek their utter elimination: no conditional surrenders are possible.

In many ways, then, the religious change demands a fundamental reconsideration of U.S.-European linkages and also offers lessons for cultural development in what until recently had seemed like closely parallel societies.

