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Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*,
Oxford University Press, 2007, 352 pages.

Natalia Vlas

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Centre for Political Analysis

Department of Political Science

Babes-Bolyai University

revista.europolis@yahoo.com

<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/cpa/rev/europolis.html>

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Author: Natalia Vlas
Centre for Political Analysis
Babes-Bolyai University

It is a common theme of recent studies and discussions¹ that Christianity is living its last days in Europe and Islam is slowly becoming the main religion of Europeans, to the point that Europe may actually be on the brink of becoming "Eurabia." In an exciting new book, *God's Continent*, part of the trilogy that also includes *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity*, Philip Jenkins challenges this idea by showing that the religious situation in Europe is far more complex than it is perceived. In twelve chapters that can be grouped into two main sections –one dealing mainly with Christianity, the other one with Islam– Jenkins presents an optimistic view regarding the fate of Christianity in Europe, despite his recognition of the religious crisis that Europe is confronted with.

The reasons for Jenkins' optimism can be summarized in three main arguments. Firstly, based on statistics and surveys, Jenkins establishes that Christianity still occupies a majority in Europe. There are still 531 million Christians in Europe, of which 60 to 70 million still assert that religion plays a very important part of their life; compared to them, the 15 million Muslims are insignificant and it is unrealistic to believe that

¹ See among others, Bruce Bawer (2006), *While Europe Slept*, New York: Doubleday; Silvia Taules (2004), *La nueva España musulmana*, Barcelona: Debolsillo; Tony Blankley (2005), *The West's Last Chance*, Chicago: Regnery; Bat Ye'or (2005), *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press; Claire Berlinski (2006), *Menace in Europe*, New York: Crown Forum; Ali Laidi and Ahmed Salam (2002), *Le Jihad en Europe, les filières du terrorisme en Europe*, Paris: Seuil; Patrick Buchanan (2002), *The death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization*, New York: Thomas Dunne; Martin Walker, "Europe's Mosque Hysteria", *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2006, 14-22; George Weigel (2005), *The Cube and the Cathedral*, New York: Basic; Callum G. Brown (2001), *The Death of Christian Britain*, London: Routledge;

this foreshadows an imminent “conquest of Europe.” Secondly, Jenkins argues that despite the secularization of the last two centuries and the detachment of Europeans from their organized religion, most of them still believe in the supernatural and maintain a strong Christian identity. Accordingly, Christianity is still sufficiently vital to counterbalance Islam’s influence in Europe. Thirdly, far from denying the threats that Islam poses to European culture, politics and lifestyle, Jenkins argues instead that Islam in Europe is facing the same secularizing pressures as Christianity and it is very possible that the result of the adaptation of Islam to the European secular culture will be a more tolerant and secular version of Islam, profoundly different from the fundamentalist stream most feared by Europeans and non-Europeans alike.

Unlike most other scholars, Jenkins sees promising signs in the current European religious crisis and estimates that the critical developments linked to Muslim immigration and the increased attention paid to religious concerns will probably drive more Europeans to rediscover their Christian roots.

Although the main interest of this book is religion, other fields are also addressed as being impacted by religious developments in Europe: domestic and foreign policy, economics and law. So this is a book worth reading- not only for sociologists, theologians, or people interested in European religious developments, but also for political scientists and specialists of other disciplines and for the public at large as well.

One of the strongest points of Jenkins’ book is that, just like in the entire trilogy, he considers the significant force of the non-white, evangelical Christianity, that tend to be left outside by most other scholars. He emphasizes the importance of evangelicals in Europe, which outnumber Muslims by two to one and have the potential for re-evangelizing Europe’s “old-stock white populations,” besides providing an important counterweight to booming Muslim populations and which deplore the fact that no one speaks about the evangelical presence and impact on the European continent, which is much more significant than the Muslim presence.

Another significant contribution that Jenkins brought to the debates regarding the fate of Christianity in Europe is that he reminds his readers of the fact that immigrants coming to Europe are not exclusively Muslims - large numbers of Christians from Eastern Europe - Poland, Croatia and Slovakia in particular - where religion is still in a healthier state, as well as from the global South are also coming to Europe, being factors of renewal and stimulating the revival of Christianity in Europe.

By emphasizing "some surprising signs of life" that brings hope to Christianity in Europe: the influence of Christian immigrants and evangelicals, pilgrimage, the re-adjustment of Roman Catholicism under John Paul II, who began a re-evangelization of secular Europe and the continuation of the orientation established by him under Benedict XVI, and the charismatic renewal within the Roman Catholic Church, among others- Jenkins succeeds in proving that Christianity still has a chance in Europe. His arguments against those fears that Europe will soon become part of the Arab West Maghreb come off as being pretty successful.

Probably less successful are his attempts to show that Islam in Europe will have a more peaceful, tolerant and secular face than that which is feared by most Europeans. His main arguments that the strongly militant and politicized character of Islam is a response to temporary circumstances and that "in the long term, the underlying pressures making for accommodation and tolerance will prove hard to resist," as there are many "historical forces working against extremism" are not sufficient to give readers the needed reassurance.

Neither is his underestimation of the recent violent episodes in the heart of Europe, which he considers to be "rare" and motivated not necessarily by religious hatred, but by class hatred as well, or the underestimation of the force of some Islamic doctrines such as Jihadism and the division of the world between the dar al-Islam (house of peace) where Muslims live and the dar al-Harb (house of war- where the infidels live) and the fact that Muslims are expected to bring God's will to dar al-Harb, even by force, if necessary. Even though the average Muslim does not always take literally and seriously these doctrines, they

might well take them (provided specific circumstances appear) and from this point of view Jenkins' optimism seems somehow inappropriate.

For all its over-optimism, Jenkins' book is a valuable resource, and a timely and significant analysis, to be welcomed even by those who don't agree with the author's ideas, as it challenges the conventional wisdom in a well-documented and elegant way. It is interesting, challenging and very dense in data, but also easy to read. Even if it does not always succeed in reassuring us that the future of Christianity in Europe is as bright as he would like it to be, or that Islam will genuinely be "Europeanized," it is a book worth reading.