Jere Van Dyk Interviews Philip Jenkins

Philip Jenkins , Jere Van Dyk

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Philip Jenkins

Jere Van Dyk

JERE VAN DYK: Hello, and welcome to the Carnegie Council. I'm Jere Van Dyk.

Today we have with us Dr. Philip Jenkins, Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Jenkins has a new book out, called *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America.* Dr. Jenkins is an extremely prolific writer. This is just one of many books that he has written. We are very happy to have him with us today.

Dr. Jenkins, thank you very much for joining us.

PHILIP JENKINS: Thank you very much.

JERE VAN DYK: In your book, you state that the beginning of the 1960s started with the assassination of President Kennedy and ended with the resignation of Richard Nixon. We're here to talk about religion and politics. Can you talk a little bit about the 1960s and a little bit about religion and what it means?

PHILIP JENKINS: One of the problems about dealing with history is you obviously need to divide things into convenient periods, and decades make some sense. The problem is, if you study periods like the 1960s, the beginning and end of the era tend to get short shrift. Many people would say that the 1960s, as we think of them, the time of tumult and experiment, did not really get going until after the Kennedy assassination, and so many of the events that we think of as being part of the 1960s don't really happen until the early 1970s. I'm thinking of things like the Attica riot, the Roe v. Wade decision, and the agitation against Nixon. So that's why I choose those particular dates.

I'm interested in the question of how and why the 1960s end, why by the mid-1970s so many of the 1960s values are part of the mainstream—people see the greening of America, this perpetual future of liberalism and libertarianism—whereas, by 1981, America has elected Ronald Reagan, a very conservative president. What happens between 1974 and 1980? I argue that there is a shift in political culture, political rhetoric, which is in a generally conservative direction, although sometimes the people who are pushing that conservatism might label themselves liberals or Democrats.

So much of the change is a change of perception about the nature of evil. I use the word advisedly, because in the 1960s so many social problems are seen as a macro social dysfunction. In the late 1970s, increasingly they are seen as evil, whether we are looking at crime at home or foreign aggression.

JERE VAN DYK: Is evil something that we talk about in America in a different way than people would talk about it in, say, France or in Italy or in Scotland?

PHILIP JENKINS: Definitely. I think, explicitly, religious justifications, not just of evil but of sin, come much more naturally to the minds of Americans in mainstream political culture than they would in most

European countries, as would conventional invocations of God. At the start of the Iraq war, for example, Tony Blair wanted to give a speech in Britain which he ended, "God bless you," much to the horror of his advisors, who thought this was something from a strange cult. It's not something that one does. In America, religion is much more part of the fabric of mainstream politics, and very much more so since the early 1970s. So yes, there is a real cultural contrast there.

JERE VAN DYK: What about religion in the 1960s? Many people feel that religion lost its way, or America lost its way, in the 1960s. Do you see that, or why is that an issue here?

PHILIP JENKINS: It depends how you define religion. When people talk about religion and politics, they are usually looking at evangelicals, they're looking at the Protestants, and they are looking at the evangelical Right. In fact, we are all familiar with very, very powerful religious movements that were very successful all the way through the 1960s.

It is impossible to look at the civil rights movement, for example, except in terms of a religious movement, and arguably a new great awakening. It is led by Baptist preachers, strongly supported by mainstream clergy, and especially by the Catholic church. You can't look at a lot of 1960s liberal movements, for example the anti-Vietnam War movement, without looking at the role of the mainstream churches, liberal churches, the Roman Catholic Church. So religion generally continues to be a very strong force throughout.

The "revival of religion" in the 1970s could be seen perhaps as the media discovering something which had always been there but which had escaped their attention. Undoubtedly, evangelical groups do become more active. But there is also a rediscovery of what was going on.

A famous example in 1976: One of the main media anchors was responding to Jimmy Carter's announcement that he had been born again. He stared at the camera in total bafflement and said, "We've talked to some of our experts and they say that this is not some cult-related thing," which was good news for the 40 percent of Americans who claimed to have been born again at that point.

JERE VAN DYK: Now, Jimmy Carter is the first president to actually come out and state unequivocally that he was, and still is of course, a Christian, right?

PHILIP JENKINS: I'm far from certain about that.

JERE VAN DYK: Other presidents have come out and said, "I'm a born-again Christian"?

PHILIP JENKINS: I'm drawing the distinction between a born-again Christian and a Christian. I'm sure Eisenhower, for example, was very happy talking about his Christianity. So was Kennedy in his way. Carter just represented a particular subset.

JERE VAN DYK: Now, Carter is a southerner from Georgia. Now, we're talking about the 1960s and the civil rights movement. What we had was tremendous animosity towards the civil rights movement, particularly in the South, and the South is in many people's eyes more conservatively Christian than anywhere else. How do you account for that?

PHILIP JENKINS: Well, for one thing, there is a recent book—I wish I could remember the title—which argues that one of the key things in allowing the civil rights movement is the change of attitudes in the mainstream Protestant, and especially Baptist, churches, the white Baptist churches, in the 1950s and 1960s. So there are a lot of changes that do happen.

As we look back, what really mobilizes the churches in the 1960s, especially in the South, seems increasingly to be the school prayer decisions of 1962.

JERE VAN DYK: The Supreme Court decision?

PHILIP JENKINS: Yes, Engel v. Vitale in 1962. That's what really infuriates evangelical churches and really brings them back much more into politics. We can see there a trajectory that is going to culminate in 1976.

JERE VAN DYK: The idea that a secular government is interfering in their lives, or that the government is secular and not Christian, and America is no longer "one nation under God"? Which one?

PHILIP JENKINS: Mainly the latter, mainly the idea that America is taking God out of children's lives, out of those public schools, which of course in so much of the country are absolutely crucial institutions in every aspect of the community.

You also link that with the social changes, family changes, gender changes, of the 1960s.

JERE VAN DYK: Gender changes meaning—

PHILIP JENKINS: The changing role of women, for example; and then, by the early 1970s, the big upsurge in divorce, then the coming of abortion in 1973. The idea is: America is betraying its children; children need God; children need to pray. You can see what happens when children aren't allowed to pray: we get the late 1960s, we get the chaos, we get the riots, and so on.

JERE VAN DYK: It's a result of the lack of the opportunity to pray in school?

PHILIP JENKINS: Please understand I am not saying that, but that is a part of the analysis.

JERE VAN DYK: Interesting.

PHILIP JENKINS: It's from 1962 on that you start getting people who otherwise have been quite quietist, who would have stayed out of politics, but begin to say "We have to get involved, and we also have to get involved in a particular way. Because this is a Supreme Court decision, as would be Roe v. Wade, we have to get involved at the federal level. Controlling the White House, controlling the Congress, matters because we need a constitutional amendment to change these things." So that's what takes politics from being at the school-board level to being at the federal level.

JERE VAN DYK: Now, did this movement from being quietist to being more activist and political come from the ground up or did it come from leaders down; and, if so, who were the leaders?

PHILIP JENKINS: I would say both things happened at once. There are a number of very important books which both reflect intellectual trends and which lead them. One of the most important, for instance, would be Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth,* which appears in 1970, is probably the best-selling American book of the 1970s, and continues to be a huge best seller. It's an apocalyptic portrait of the end times, which is so successful because it tries to combine social chaos at home and the weakness of America abroad as the dual problems facing us—"these are signs of the end times."

Far and away the most successful film of the 1970s—no competition—is "Thief in the Night," which if you're not in the evangelical subculture you probably are not aware of. It is a 1972 film. It really takes the Hal Lindsey vision of the end of the world and puts it into a fairly badly acted film about the end times, in which, for example, you begin with the Rapture, all the good people being taken away, and then the creation of an evil one-world state under the power of an Antichrist in which Christians are persecuted. The film's enthusiasts say that it has been seen by 300 million people since it came out in 1972.

JERE VAN DYK: Probably more than the entire population of America.

PHILIP JENKINS: Because it's had a huge international audience. Don't forget, evangelicalism has a

very strong global vision and global reach.

JERE VAN DYK: I want to talk about that. You've written about that, a very interesting article in *The Atlantic.*

So you feel then that the events that started to take place in the 1970s came about as a direct result in people's minds, based upon your analysis, of what happened in the 1960s?

PHILIP JENKINS: Oh yes. I think we see a revolt against the 1960s, great concern about the 1960s, and an increasing sense that government, and specifically the federal government, is trying to impose these very undesirable moral changes, particularly on schools, particularly on children. Much of the agitation, for instance, focuses on textbooks. There were some very, very successful campaigns to purge unpatriotic or immoral themes in textbooks. It was a big battle from the mid-1970s onwards.

JERE VAN DYK: What books, for example?

PHILIP JENKINS: For example, there is a very active, really quite powerful Texas couple, called Mel and Norma Gabler. Not enormously well known in terms of the history of the period, but the nemesis of school boards across the country. They would take history textbooks, for example, and say, "This is completely unacceptable because it does not stress the Godly mission of America's Founders." Some states, notably Texas, one of the largest markets for textbooks, would respond to this and say, "Well, we're nervous about taking this; we're taking another textbook," which will be an enormous blow to the publisher, who very often would respond to these criticisms. So we hear so much about the creation and evolution issues, which reach a height in 1980 and 1981, but there is also this more general concern about textbooks and the "spiritual pollution" of America's children. Many of these issues come together in the late 1970s, and very often focus on children and education.

JERE VAN DYK: I want to talk a little bit more about that, particularly education. You talk in your book about how a Supreme Court decision in 1976 led to an IRS decision in 1978 to outlaw in some ways or take away the tax exemption for Christian schools, which led to evangelicals moving towards conservatism. Could you talk a little bit about that?

PHILIP JENKINS: With the attack on segregation in the South, many white parents put their kids in new, independent Christian schools.

JERE VAN DYK: Private schools?

PHILIP JENKINS: Private schools.

There was then the issue of why they are doing it. Are they doing it to escape integration, or are they doing it because, at the same time as desegregation, there are these concerns about immorality in the public schools? Clearly, the evangelicals say it's the latter.

The Carter-era IRS believes that these are racially motivated decisions, and so, as you say, the IRS chose to remove tax exemption from these schools. That really is such a detonator because it pulls together all the themes that we have seen over the past fifteen years—the idea of government promoting Godless schools, the idea of taxes being used to promote a de-Christianized America, and the idea that the only way you can fight this is by going to the federal government. It is no coincidence that in 1979 the Moral Majority is formed and becomes a very successful vehicle for the Reagan campaign in 1980.

JERE VAN DYK: My understanding of, let's say, quietist Christians or evangelical Christians is that they have traditionally been exactly that, quietist, outside of politics. With the Moral Majority, led by Jerry Falwell, they become very political. How do they do that and still hold on to their beliefs? You make a very, very interesting statement in your book, that Jimmy Carter, or the Carter Administration, realized that as it gained power it could not hold on to the exact Christian beliefs that he held. Power corrupted;

he was part of the world.

PHILIP JENKINS: Right. Well, Carter also had the problem that he was—I won't say in charge of, because he was never in charge of—he was in a Democratic Party which had been radicalized by the new politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s. So he could get to be president, but the idea of getting his party to so much as talk to him was very, very difficult.

Carter, by the way, also preserves a somewhat older Protestant idea on some issues of sexual ethics and the emphasis on privacy. It is very often forgotten that in the immediate aftermath of Roe v. Wade the Southern Baptists are actually pro Roe v. Wade.

JERE VAN DYK: Were pro, in effect, a woman's right to abortion.

PHILIP JENKINS: That's correct.

JERE VAN DYK: Please explain that.

PHILIP JENKINS: I can't explain it beyond saying it. In the late-1960s and early-1970s, abortion especially, and contraception, had always been major Protestant-Catholic divisions. Protestants, including very hard-line evangelical folks like the Southern Baptists, say: "You know, abortion is very regrettable, but under certain circumstances it is an acceptable option." The lines that we later see, where abortion becomes the deciding front in the culture wars, would not really happen until 1975-1976.

That is one of the most important moments in American religious political history, because it is literally the first time that radical Protestants or evangelicals form a common front with Roman Catholics. That is the first time that it has ever happened. The fact that we pay so little attention to it in the history of the era is remarkable. It is critical.

JERE VAN DYK: I'm thinking now of Kennedy going to Houston in 1963 to say, "I am a Catholic but I can still be a good American. I am not going to pay allegiance to the Pope; I'm going to pay allegiance to the United States." But this time, in 1976, is the first time that Christians and Catholics came together politically?

PHILIP JENKINS: Please, Catholics are Christians. The evangelicals.

JERE VAN DYK: Evangelicals.

PHILIP JENKINS: What I'm saying is that's a very common statement, which you will find very often from evangelicals.

But the idea of this moral front, where over on this side we have good Christians—and I would add they do try to reach out to conservative Jews as well—that we have this idea of the moral majority against this Godless secular society, is really a remarkable idea. Through most of the 19th or early 20th century, the deciding character of evangelical politics is: "Is it Catholic? If so, let's try and stop it."

JERE VAN DYK: Exactly right. In fact, I think, just until recently—perhaps you can enlighten us on this—I understand that the Chaplain of the U.S. Congress was always a Protestant, and only recently has a Catholic been allowed to offer prayers there.

PHILIP JENKINS: I'm not familiar with that, but I would not be surprised.

JERE VAN DYK: In your book you talk about what I find very interesting, that what you have in the 1970s is the rise of the power of faith, if you will, fundamentalist faith, elsewhere: the rise of Hindu fundamentalism; we have in Pakistan the rise of [inaudible] in Islam there; the Likud Party in Israel; Pope John Paul came to power in 1978. Is there a tie there between what's happening overseas and here? Can

you explain that?

PHILIP JENKINS: Yes. As I say in my book, obviously it's not a case of the planet passing through the tail of a comet and everyone suddenly decides to get religion into politics. So it has to be some common theme.

Very briefly, by 1979, religion matters in politics vastly more than it had in 1975. So many politicians get lost with this. One of the famous quotes I like is, when the Iranian revolution took place, Walter Mondale issues his famous remark, "What in hell is an Ayatollah anyway?" That sort of ignorance persists for a number of years, not just with Mondale, obviously.

I think there are a number of things. But in the 1950s and 1960s, I think there was widespread confidence in the secular model, the secular narrative, or growth and modernization, and that widely affected gender roles and family roles. If you look at the Arab world, for example, the movements that have been more successful are Nassarism in Egypt, Baathism in Iraq and Syria, and so on.

What causes the crises there is, first of all, the failures in things like the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, but more dramatically across the world the 1973-1974 economic crisis, which devastates many countries, including Europe and the United States, and the resulting arms shock.

JERE VAN DYK: And the Arab oil embargo.

PHILIP JENKINS: And the oil embargo. I believe that causes people, first of all, to lose faith in that secular narrative. They begin to be much more overtly concerned about changing gender roles, changing family roles, the breakup of traditional societies, whether we are looking at Pakistan or Iran or the United States. Clearly, the changes are very different in the different countries. There is, however, a new emphasis on more traditional, more orthodox kind of faith. So that would be the common factor I would see.

JERE VAN DYK: What you're talking about here, which I find very interesting, is that because of what happened—the Arabs lost the Arab-Israeli War, the Yom Kippur War to us, the War Ramadan to Muslims—that Nassar and these people lost the way, and people started to look to faith, started to look to Islam in that case. In this case why would people look to serious Christianity in the West? Is this a loss of faith at what happened in the 1960s, or am I talking about two different things?

PHILIP JENKINS: There is a similar kind of distrust in what you might call the liberal secular narrative of the state—if you like, the post-New Deal, post-1945 sense of "the state will bring progress." Well, clearly, by the early-1970s, that is a very kind of overtly optimistic theory. People tend to shift to alternative views, in many cases views which aren't far below the surface but become more strongly political.

The other thing you do find at the end of the 1970s is when you have these different movements, is that some of them become very actively proselytizing. So, for example, it's in 1979 that you have the failed coup d'état in Mecca, which terrifies the Saudi Arabian authorities, and then they basically make a devil's bargain with the Islamists, which is: "Go and convert the rest of the world to radical Islam, but stay out of our country." It's from that point, in Africa for example, or in South Asia, that you get all these Saudi-funded mosques and radical madrassas being founded. That's when you get the great evangelization movement and the return to a more fundamentalist kind of Islam around Africa and Asia.

JERE VAN DYK: That's right. That attack, or that hostage crisis, that took place at Mecca, I think, was probably June or July. Prior to that, in February we had the Ayatollah Imam Khomeini coming to power, fundamentalist Islam—which was what? It seems to me it was an act against modernity in Iran.

PHILIP JENKINS: Very precisely, because the Shah had been leading what he called his "white revolution," and as long as it succeeded, as long as it had growing prosperity, modernization behind it, it

could work. But after 1973-1974, there are so many blows around the world that it becomes very hard to sustain. People start focusing on the inequalities, people start looking at the fact that women are being liberated. "Should we be concerned about this?" It's those issues, about women and children and family, which cause real terror.

JERE VAN DYK: Do these issues—let's say feminism, women's liberation, if you will; children; women working outside the home—does this have to do with people being afraid that they are going against the Koran, or going against the Bible?

PHILIP JENKINS: I think it comes to be placed in those terms, but there is more of a sense of a violation of social codes and social traditions, which in the context of Islam, for example, becomes very hard to distinguish from the idea of a violation of religious law because "We know that God ordained this particular kind of society." Now, it's not an absolutely global movement, but it does affect some very important areas.

Then, of course, you get a number of other detonators, like when the Afghan war breaks out in 1980, that provides such a stimulus for jihadi movements around the Islamic world.

JERE VAN DYK: And most of those young men were not married, were they? They were not with women. They were looking for a cause, they found a cause, and their cause was with God. And that's still with us, isn't it?

PHILIP JENKINS: Absolutely.

By the way, the other thing which you can see there is you can see is that this movement of faith in the late-1970s is very demographically driven. This is the absolute height of the Baby Boom generation. They're in young adulthood at this point. They are prepared to seek a cause which grants them excitement and meaning in their life.

JERE VAN DYK: Which is the same thing that the young Islamists were looking for.

PHILIP JENKINS: Precisely. Or, indeed, the members of the group that becomes the BJP in India. And, as you say, it affects different parts of the world. In the late-1970s, for example, Orthodox Judaism starts reviving in a way which would have seemed incredible in the 1950s, when clearly this was an extinct movement, this is just part of ancient history. Suddenly, now it's back.

JERE VAN DYK: Moving back to—

PHILIP JENKINS: Back to basics.

JERE VAN DYK:—back to basics. Also back to Samaria, Judea. Also what I find interesting—and you also talk about it in your book, and I wanted to ask you a little bit about it. What is the tie between evangelical Christianity and Israel, and how important is the role of Israel in American politics insofar as evangelical Christians are concerned?

PHILIP JENKINS: It gets back to what I was saying about Hal Lindsey's book. There's a quote I often use from the 17th century, when a leading Protestant Englishman was saying, "Jews returning to Jerusalem? You might as well talk about men on the moon." Never prophesize. When the Jews do return to the State of Israel in 1948, that causes enormous excitement and the idea that the prophetic clock is ticking—and that's true for evangelicals and Pentecostals. When, then, in 1967 the State of Israel re-conquers, re-unites Jerusalem, not only is the clock ticking, but the clock is at two minutes to midnight. That's 1967.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey's book comes out, very shortly afterwards, and he provides a whole prophetic calendar in which there is going to be an imminent apocalyptic scenario in which the Soviet Union will

play the role of Gog and Magog; they will march on Israel in the last days.

So it is absolutely clear that evangelicals are completely on the side, not just of Israel, but of the most hawkish variety of Zionism. But it's not just Israel, but the fact of Jerusalem itself being retaken in 1967, that really pushes things. As I say, you get "Thief in the Night." It also raises questions about: So what will the imminent future be?

People use what's called a premillennarian approach, the idea that things will get worse and worse and worse in the last times before the final bust-up. Some of the aspects of the end times would be a collapse of families, breakup of traditional moral structures, sexual immorality, evil cults. And people look around at America in the mid-1970s and say, "Hmm, yes." . . . [Gap in taping] . . . the secular Apocalyptists of the mid-1970s.

JERE VAN DYK: For example?

PHILIP JENKINS: For example, all the people who are predicting collapse through overpopulation, exhaustion of material resources, global cooling (which is the 1970s version of global warming), and all the books that appear in the first half of the 1970s especially about how the world may not see 1980.

So if, for example, someone taps on your door and says, "The world is about to end soon, repent, the end is nigh, and here's an article from Scientific American which proves I'm right," the two cultures tend to become united.

JERE VAN DYK: United philosophically perhaps, but not in truth.

PHILIP JENKINS: Not in truth, but using the same apocalyptic rhetoric, which I really see as a fairly powerful force in American culture. For example, when you have the nuclear debates in the 1980s, one of the most powerful arguments people draw is from Jonathan Schell's book about the fate of the Earth, with this very apocalyptic vision. You have the nuclear winter idea. And Lovelock's book *Gaia* comes out in 1979—you know, the Earth is seen almost as a goddess, and in destroying the environment human beings are committing deicide, they are murdering God.

A very powerful set of ideas, which may not be absorbed as a whole by evangelicals, but they contribute to the sense of an imminent end.

JERE VAN DYK: Evangelicals I think, or Christians in general, would adhere to the idea in Genesis that man should have dominion over the beasts of the Earth and the fowls of the Earth—I think that's how it goes. Where do Christians come in—Christians, not just evangelical Christians—insofar as environmentalism is concerned? When did that start, in the 1970s, 1960s?

PHILIP JENKINS: Environmentalism goes through a number of different phases. In its modern phase, it really gets going, I suppose, in the late 1950s, with the work of authors like Rachel Carson.

JERE VAN DYK: Oh, *Silent Spring.*

PHILIP JENKINS: And, of course, you have Aldo Leopold in the 1940s with *A Sand Country Almanac,* a number of books like that. But the first Earth Day, for example, is 1970.

Christians are very divided about that. They don't put it on the front burner as an issue. Some have today. For example, right now, in the last couple of years, a number of very prominent evangelicals have spoken on this. But don't forget the Christian spectrum. The largest church in America is the Roman Catholic Church, and the Catholics are really quite open to environmental ideas from quite early on. So I think [inaudible] of Christians holding very hard anti-environmental attitudes. Some do, but there is a very broad spectrum.

JERE VAN DYK: Now, in the 1970s Jimmy Carter, a devout Christian, led to Ronald Reagan, who I don't think really went to church at all, but certainly conveyed the idea that he was Christian in a certain way, or religious in a certain way. Or am I wrong?

PHILIP JENKINS: He did have quite religious sentiments. For example, he was very deeply imbued with some of these apocalyptic ideas. That emerges quite frequently. There is a wonderful moment. In the Book of Revelation, there is a scene where you have the star appearing that portends the end, and the star is known as Wormwood. When the Chernobyl incident happened, people were very excited about the fact that Chernobyl is the Russian word for Wormwood. Reagan was very keen on this. To anyone who would listen he would say, "Do you know what that word means? It means Wedgewood" [sic]. He became very excited about this. He was very taken by the idea of Wedgewood [sic] and the apocalyptic sign.

JERE VAN DYK: So time passes through the 1980s. Even though your book's subtitle says "The Making of the American Eighties," your book goes on beyond that. You make a point about how in 1992 Pat Buchanan talked about how there is a cultural war going on in the United States.

PHILIP JENKINS: Right.

JERE VAN DYK: Is that war still going on?

PHILIP JENKINS: I think it is going on in certain ways. I think it's morphing. I think there is one reason why it has not been more overt. If I could explain the absence of the culture war, I think the clergy abuse crisis within the Roman Catholic Church served to so devastate the political power of the Catholic hierarchy that they did not put up the kind of opposition, or kind of effective opposition, that we would have expected them to on so many of the genetic issues, so many of the stem cell issues. The Catholic hierarchy in many ways was discredited by the start of the new millennium. So I would argue that the clergy abuse crisis has an immense negative political impact, which we tend not to pay attention to because it explains what didn't happen as opposed to what did.

JERE VAN DYK: Explain to us why fundamentalism has arisen to where it is today, chart the course why it has become such a focus.

PHILIP JENKINS: I have something of a problem with that because I never know what the word "fundamentalism" actually means. Fundamentalism as a concept originates in early-20th century America. There are many people who would say it can only be applied to Christianity.

For example, in Islam you have what is sometimes translated as "fundamentalism." The word is *usolia* [phonetic]. But on the other hand, if you look at the normal Islamic means, the normal Muslim means, of reading the Koran, it is by definition a fundamentalist interpretation. No vaguely orthodox Muslim would assume that Mohammed had any role at all in dictating or writing the Koran—he just served as the secretary—and it was delivered by God. So as the bumper sticker says, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." That's a fundamentalist attitude. That has nothing to do, however, with the political or social outlook that we would expect from a Muslim. Somebody who believes in that inspired view of the Koran could be a feminist, a progressive reformer, or whatever. So I do have problems with "fundamentalist."

I would also say that "fundamentalist" is usually used as a pejorative term. It is rather like "I am a freedom fighter; he is a terrorist." If your view of the scripture leads you to campaign for the poor, then you are a passionate believer in the Bible. If it leads you to fight homosexuality, then you are a fundamentalist. So I think it tends to be used in a relative or selective way.

Clearly, what I call radical right-wing or very conservative religion does have an enormous upsurge in the mid- and late-1970s. Some people would say—

JERE VAN DYK: In the United States. I'm talking about the United States, and then we'll go overseas.

PHILIP JENKINS: Right. I was thinking globally there. But in the United States, certainly it does have this upsurge.

The big problem for American evangelicals has been translating political power into results. Although the Moral Majority plays a great role in electing Reagan in 1980, it gets virtually nothing for it. There is very little in the way of—

JERE VAN DYK: Payoff.

PHILIP JENKINS: No payoff in terms of legislation about homosexuality, about abortion. I think I'm right in saying Reagan's first Supreme Court pick is Sandra Day O'Connor, who is a supporter of ERA and of abortion rights. People like Falwell and Robertson are appalled by this.

JERE VAN DYK: They felt they were betrayed, did they?

PHILIP JENKINS: Right. That's the incident in which—I believe it's Falwell, who announces the selection of O'Connor as "a blow to the Christian conscience of America," which stimulates Barry Goldwater's famous threat to "kick him in the ass." He represented a very different generation of conservatives.

JERE VAN DYK: Yes. There was no religious component to Goldwater conservatism, I don't think.

PHILIP JENKINS: No. It was very hard-line anti-Communist, but in many ways it was almost libertarian at home. Government had no right in the pocketbook or the bedroom.

JERE VAN DYK: When I was talking about fundamentalism, I specifically wanted to talk about American or Protestant fundamentalism. We can definitely talk about what we incorrectly call "Islamic fundamentalism." Also, what we have is, in addition to what you just talked about, the fact that President George Bush is seen as a serious Christian by the evangelicals. He has the support. According to a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, 87 percent of evangelical Christians supported us going into Iraq. Why do they support him and why would they support going to war? Can you explain that?

PHILIP JENKINS: It's interesting. Bush himself is a member of the Episcopal church, which is one of the most liberal American churches.

JERE VAN DYK: He's still a member?

PHILIP JENKINS: He's still a member, I believe. He also has Methodist ties and connections, but again the Methodists tend to be a very liberal bunch.

Certainly at the point of going into Iraq, what I think evangelicals liked about him was that he spoke unashamedly about religious commitment in a way that they found believable, which they did not with some others.

I think people were also very interested by his response to 9/11, where he spoke so regularly in terms of "this is a matter of evil," and he spoke the language of good and evil very, very convincingly. He spoke it naturally. I think that carried over into the decision on Iraq.

JERE VAN DYK: It wasn't having anything to do with going against the Antichrist or another religion, like Islam, that in some way is seen as evil, in your eyes?

PHILIP JENKINS: I don't believe so. It was the idea that there is a confrontation with evil, not specifically with Islam as evil.

You are absolutely right, by the way, to say that most Americans did not notice any serious distinctions between Saddam, the arch secularist and Baathist, and Islam.

JERE VAN DYK: Because there's not very much that was Muslim about him, was there?

PHILIP JENKINS: Not until the tanks were approaching Baghdad.

JERE VAN DYK: That's exactly right. Now he uses the Koran when he's in the courtroom, I understand.

What about the rise—the continued rise in some people's eyes—of what we will call incorrectly "Islamic fundamentalism," more like Sunni radicalism? Do you think that Christians in America see this now more and more as a war between religions, or not?

PHILIP JENKINS: Yes, I believe so. There is some survey evidence in that. I know some Muslim groups have been rather appalled by some surveys that have been done of mainstream non-Muslim Americans, where people are asked, "What do you find admirable about Islam?" Twelve percent say, "Absolutely nothing," and about 30 percent can't think of anything at all good to say. That rather troubled them.

I think if a president actually did come out with a much more overtly anti-Muslim attitude, I think they would win a lot of support. I hate to say that. But I think the image of Islam has suffered so repeatedly over the last few years. You can point to however many Islamic social movements or cultural achievements, but the images that come to mind are just one after another of beheadings and massacres and bombings and suicide bombings and 9/11.

JERE VAN DYK: So it has nothing to do with anything that has come out of this Administration or anything from the United States?

PHILIP JENKINS: No.

JERE VAN DYK: It's what has come from—

PHILIP JENKINS: TV largely.

JERE VAN DYK: From TV?

PHILIP JENKINS: Yes. Which, by the way, from conversations, I know a lot of Muslims have been deeply appalled by and find it ever more difficult to defend.

JERE VAN DYK: That's true.

Also, we're talking about Islam, we're talking about Christians' views, let's say, of Saddam Hussein and Iraq. You talked about and you have written about global Christianity, how things are changing, and Americans are not clearly aware of new developments in Christianity throughout the world.

PHILIP JENKINS: Right.

JERE VAN DYK: Can you talk a little bit about that for us?

PHILIP JENKINS: I think many Americans—or many Europeans as well—have a sense of Christianity as being "the religion of the West." As the West secularizes, so Christianity will fade or disappear, and the default religion of Africa and Asia is obviously Islam.

Well, the problem with that is that the numbers don't work. Christianity has been growing very dramatically. I can give a lot of figures for that. In 1900, for example, Africa had 10 million Christians, 10 percent of the population; by 2000, that number rises to 360 million, which is just under half the population, which is quantitatively the largest religious change that has ever occurred in history. Probably by 2050, the leading Christian nations in the world in terms of population, the United States will still be at

the top, but there will be no European nations. It will be Brazil and Mexico, China, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Philippines.

Last year there were more Catholic baptisms in the Philippines than in France, Spain, Italy, and Poland combined. Think of a Catholic, think of a Filipino or a Nigerian.

JERE VAN DYK: Fascinating.

Now, do you think that religion is going to still be a part of politics in the future in the United States? Is it going to grow or not?

PHILIP JENKINS: I would say religion always has been a part of politics. One of the reasons we tend to think it is not is because we just focus on things like the Christian Right.

I often challenge my students to try to come up with a secular movement in American political history. It is not easy, because so many of the movements that we think of as very secular in fact are not. If you look at, say, the labor movement in the New Deal, it would have been absolutely impossible without Catholic activist priests applying Catholic social doctrine. You look at the civil rights movement, you look at African-American politics. Religion always has, and I would suspect always will, be part of American politics. In the 1860s, Ulysses Grant was complaining he had to deal with three parties in his country: Democrats, Republicans, and Methodists.

JERE VAN DYK: I've even heard people say that in New Jersey politics are run by the Mafia and the Presbyterians.

You've also talked in your book about hedonism and Puritanism when you talk about religion in America. So there are two sides here: there's the very religious side and the side that I wouldn't consider religious at all, hedonist.

PHILIP JENKINS: Well, we can talk about that. Maybe. There is undoubtedly a strong secular current in American history.

My point is, though, that even people who might be on what you might call the secular humanist side very often get into religious ideas, whether or not they're admitting them. I've talked, for instance, about this very strong Apocalyptic current.

One big area, of course, we haven't discussed is American Jews. Clearly, for many American Jews it has been said that the civic . . . [gap in taping] . . . are these religious ideas. Well, the whole idea of Holocaust is a religious idea, it's a religious term, for a historical event. But it is interpreted religiously.

Arguably, you can have very secular Americans, whether notionally Jews or Christians or whatever, but in their attitudes to Israel there is a very strong religious current. I know Zionism is notionally a secular movement, but for many people it also has a lot of religious content.

JERE VAN DYK: When you say "many people," we're not talking about Christians now; we're talking about Jews—

PHILIP JENKINS: Christians and Jews.

JERE VAN DYK: —going back home, "back to our roots."

PHILIP JENKINS: Yes.

JERE VAN DYK: Do you think that anti-Semitism exists in the United States to the degree it did before because of things like this, the rise of religion, that it's not so?

PHILIP JENKINS: I think anti-Semitism in the United States is really a marginal phenomenon compared to what it was, for example—well, the 1930s would probably be the absolute height. No, I really think that has been so driven out of anything vaguely approaching acceptable behavior. I honestly don't. It exists, certainly, but I don't see it as a major issue.

JERE VAN DYK: Good.

One more question about Jews. Do you think that there is an increased interest in Conservative Judaism? You talk about that in your book a little bit. And if so, why?

PHILIP JENKINS: Again, it is part of the issue of returning to roots. Very often, the people who are attracted to returning to Orthodox Judaism are the women who find in Orthodox Judaism a more precisely defined role, a shelter from much of the sexual confusion of the prevailing culture. That's a powerful force which expresses itself much more in Orthodoxy as opposed to Conservative or other forms of Judaism.

JERE VAN DYK: What kind of religion did you grow up in as a young man?

PHILIP JENKINS: Nothing particular.

JERE VAN DYK: Why did you choose religion as something to focus on?

PHILIP JENKINS: Because it kept coming up in whatever I was trying to do. For example, when I was working on social problems and ideas of social fears, I was working in the early 1990s at the time of all the scares about ritual and satanic abuse. The clergy abuse crisis followed from there. I worked on those two topics, and things developed from there.

JERE VAN DYK: Did it make you more religious, less religious?

PHILIP JENKINS: The work did not as such. I tend to be quite good at keeping things in compartments.

JERE VAN DYK: Thank you for taking the time and talking with us today.

PHILIP JENKINS: Thank you.

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