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CHRISTOPHER CATHERWOOD (PhD, University of East Anglia) is a lecturer on Balkan and Middle Eastern history, with a special emphasis on the conflicts between Christianity and Islam. Grandson of well-known British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Catherwood is author of several books, including Church History: A Crash Course for the Curious.
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A trendy new theory says that where you were raised influences the rest of your life. For example, Bill Gates lived near one of the few schools at the time that had a computer, and tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams were raised near one of the rare tennis courts in their part of Los Angeles.

I am not sure about whether this theory always works, but it can be applied to my own life. I was raised in an evangelical church in London that was one of the few at the time that had a very international congregation. People from every inhabited continent would come faithfully every Sunday, and this was back in the 1950s. (Today another high profile evangelical church in London, All Souls Church, Langham Place, has a congregation that is 45 percent from outside the United Kingdom, many members being from Africa, Asia, and Latin America).

Then from the ages of around eighteen to twenty-six I was involved in the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). This really does have members from every inhabited part of the planet, and I would go each year as a British delegate to its international student conference, in Austria, where fellow students from dozens of different countries and continents would convene annually for two to three weeks at a time.

Now my wife and I attend a similarly internationally oriented church in Cambridge, itself a very cosmopolitan kind of place; the college that
I use for my social base, St. Edmund’s, regularly has students from over sixty countries in any given academic year.

So in a real sense I have been raised with the tale I am telling in this book: that evangelicalism is truly a multinational, multicultural, interdenominational body of every race, social class, and political persuasion that one can imagine, and not the white, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, and politically far-to-the-right-of-center body that the press often describes it as being. Many Brazilian evangelicals have views that would put them almost on the Marxist end of the political spectrum, yet they can have fellowship with a white American who has voted Republican all of his or her life.

I have therefore been fascinated by the issues raised in this book since childhood, and have been actively involved in the wider evangelical world for over thirty-six years. In recent times authors such as Philip Jenkins have described the global evangelical renaissance in academic terms and have brought it to the attention of the university world, at least, if not to the media, where the old clichés still, alas, persist. But for me the astonishing growth of evangelicalism over the past few decades has paralleled my own life experience, as I visited fellow evangelicals in Central America, the Middle East, behind the Iron Curtain pre-1989, and in China and other parts of East Asia. What books now tell you are things I have seen with my own eyes.

Therefore when Richard Roper and Allan Fisher asked me to write this book, I was delighted to accept their offer in the hope that my readers would get a picture of what the evangelical world is really like as opposed to the rather distorted media view that is certainly based upon ignorance and probably upon strong bias as well.

I hope that my readers will end up as excited by one of the biggest global phenomena of the twenty-first century as I am. Enjoy the book!
For many readers who might not know any professing evangelical Christians, the answer to this chapter’s question might seem a simple one, if what you see in the newspapers is any guide. An evangelical is a white, middle-class male Republican from the southern part of the United States (or, as we now have to add, a white female Republican from the rural West of America).

Now, for sure, many evangelicals would indeed fit into this description, and they are the demographic about which the mainstream media writes the most. But, in truth, this description presents a highly misleading picture, and also a dangerous one, as it confuses evangelicalism as a whole, which is a worldwide, global movement, with just a tiny segment of it, and gives it a political coloring that is utterly atypical of evangelicals in most countries today. For it is now widely said that the average evangelical is an economically poor black Nigerian woman with numerous family members suffering from HIV/AIDS.

So wrong gender, wrong skin color, wrong country, wrong social class—in fact wrong everything when it comes to the stereotype of evangelicals we commonly see on television or in the newspapers. For
The fact is that the overwhelming majority of evangelical Christians today do not live in the West at all but in what most commentators refer to as the *Global South*, or the Two-thirds World, since most of the world live there. These are often countries south of the equator whose level of economic development seldom matches the prosperity of the West, which experts define as the United States plus the western half of Europe. (China is usually lumped together with these nations, although when you look at a map, you will see that China is *north* of the equator, which puts that nation geographically more with Europe and the United States, which would not really be accurate in any other sense. But as hundreds of millions of Chinese still live in the kind of poverty we see in the Global South, and as a very large percentage of them are Christians, we can keep our generalization for now.)

Take the world’s most international evangelical organization—the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. As of 2008, this organization has over half a million members—students on the campuses of universities. Its chief executive is a French-speaking African from Chad, in West Africa. Its president is an Arab Christian from Egypt, and until recently its number two was a Jamaican. In many of the countries in which IFES works, Christianity is illegal, and so its work is clandestine. The key thing about it, though, is that it is run by the citizens of the countries themselves—Peruvians in Peru, Nigerians in Nigeria, Thais in Thailand, Hungarians in Hungary—and not by people from outside. This is one of the hallmarks of the global evangelical resurgence of the past few decades, and it has become one of the most controversial, since citizens of Global South countries often have far stronger attachments to certain doctrinal issues than their more accommodating (or perhaps simply fearful) fellow evangelicals in the West.¹

There is, however, one thing about which the secular commentators are right: in terms of religious adherence, the United States in the twenty-first century resembles the rest of the world far more than it does the secular countries of Western Europe. In that sense, America is closer to Nigeria or Brazil than it is to France or my own country, Britain, both of which are highly secular, and, in the case of France, officially secular by law (what they call *laicity*). The exception would
be the Northeast of the United States, once highly Christian and now much more akin to Western Europe than it is to the rest of the United States.

So what interesting things do we discover about evangelicalism when we look at the majority world, or Global South, or whatever we want to call it? One quick consideration first, and then our voyage can begin.

“The Next Christendom”
Here I am deeply indebted, as are all serious students of worldwide twenty-first-century religious trends, to the quartet of books by Professor Philip Jenkins of Penn State University in the United States. His books are impressive, as he is a teacher at a secular American university and many of his works are published by Oxford University Press. He is clearly an outside observer making what he feels are objective judgments on the new global forms of Christianity—what his first bestseller calls “the next Christendom.” Take some extraordinary statistics:

a. There are more Presbyterians in Korea, a nation that might soon be majority Christian, than there are in the United States.
b. The world’s biggest Baptist church is also in Korea.
c. Half the people who attend church on a Sunday in London are of African ancestry.
d. There are between seventeen and twenty times as many practicing Episcopalians (or Anglicans) in Nigeria than in England, where the Church of England began. The vast majority of Nigerian Anglicans are evangelical, and Nigeria as a whole is 44 percent Christian.
e. There are more Chinese Christians than there are inhabitants of the United Kingdom—US government statistics say that there might be as many as 80 million Christians in the People’s Republic of China, if all the illegal, unregistered (and mainly evangelical) Protestant churches are counted.
f. Over 40 percent of Guatemalans and Chileans are evangelical.
Within the lifetimes of most of you reading this, countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, and Brazil will have far more Christians than the previous heartlands of Christianity in Europe and the United States.

In fact, the last point really only paints half the picture. As Jenkins points out, there are more church-attending Christians in Brazil alone than in the whole of the United States and Western Europe combined. Of these a rapidly growing number are not Catholics but Protestant evangelicals. Likewise, today around 40 percent of Ugandans are Anglicans—members of the worldwide Anglican Communion, of which the mother church in England itself is now a tiny minority—and the overwhelming number of Ugandan Anglicans are evangelicals. Not only that, but there are now reverse missions happening, with Anglican Ugandan evangelicals taking a lead in evangelizing post-Christian secular England. The former vicar of one of Britain’s best-known evangelical Anglican parishes (Holy Trinity Brompton, the originator of the Alpha course), Sandy Millar, is now a suffragan (or assistant) bishop of a Ugandan diocese—a white Englishman subordinate to a black African on one level, but in a far more important sense, someone from a very secular country under the authority of somebody from one of the world’s more strongly Christian countries, Uganda.

As we think of Africa, an important point needs to be made, one trusts without getting into too much political trouble. (We shall see later on that it is really only in the United States that one can draw a link between political and religious conservatism. In many countries there is no evangelical political default mode, and evangelicals are linked to all variety of ideologies, of the left, right, and more besides.)

One of the points that Jenkins makes, and I think entirely correctly, is that sociologists, including those whose main area of expertise is religion, tend overwhelmingly to be both inwardly secular and politically on the left. This, Jenkins argues cogently in several of his books, severely distorts how we see religion, and how we study phenomena such as the massive explosion of evangelical Christianity globally, outside the narrow prism of the post-Christian Enlightenment West, into which
category most mainstream American universities would fall (even if the states in which they are situated are themselves religious).

Consequently sociologists tend to like looking at, for example, what they call the African Independent Churches (AIC). Unlike Jenkins, who is academically neutral, I hesitate to categorize such groups as “Christian,” along with similar offshoots in the African diaspora in places such as Brazil. If these organizations and their millions of followers are counted among the “Christian” growth statistics, I might find myself sympathetic to mainline Catholics who feel that such groups should not really be counted, though I would of course disagree with them that there is no difference between such exotic creations and mainstream Protestants.

In addition, in many countries, “cradle Catholics,” those who outwardly profess Catholic faith but who never attend a church, are, so far as experts such as Jenkins are concerned, counted in the statistics as Christian members of their country, such as in the United States. Likewise, most statisticians and commentators also agree that in England, while twenty-five million inhabitants firmly put themselves down as Church of England, only a million or so of those, a mere 4 percent, actually ever attend a church. To me, the main criteria is whether there is a link between profession and practice, something that does of course show my evangelical viewpoint, since to evangelicals, a Christian lifestyle is as important as mere words.

But in the Two-thirds World, at which we are looking, profession and practice do go very much hand in hand, since in these parts of the world Christianity is new; the nominal faith that we see in Anglicans in England and Catholics in the United States is still thoroughly foreign.

Nevertheless, to return to Africa, regardless of how one categorizes such AIC movements (such as the Kimbanguist churches, founded by Simon Kimbangu in the twentieth century), one statistic is vital: these AIC denominations make up only 10 percent of professing Christians in the African subcontinent. Sociologists like them because they give a fascinating and unique flavor, and they are, by definition, a breakaway from what such sociologists see as an authentically African rebellion against white Western forms of dominant Christianity.
However, as Jenkins also points out again correctly, all the undue attention the AIC receives is deeply resented by the 90 percent of African Christians whose profession of Christianity is entirely mainstream, and increasingly evangelical. They regard their own expression of Christianity as entirely authentic, and for white Western secular sociologists to deny their authenticity is to them insulting, if not racist. As Jenkins writes, by 2025 (now much closer than when he predicted this), there will be 400 million professing Christians in sub-Saharan Africa alone. Even in terms of formal adherence to Christianity, sub-Saharan Africa, according to many observers, will already have displaced Europe as the chief Christian heartland within a mere quarter-century.

This change is one that will take a long time to percolate through to the consciousness of the secular media and academic worlds in the West—though one can thank both Penn State University in the United States and Oxford University Press on both sides of the Atlantic for giving somebody such as Philip Jenkins the opportunity to say things to both academia and the media that are abundantly obvious to the rest of us, but not to the denizens of the more blinkered audience that he is addressing.

Nonetheless it is now true: African Christians are more typical of twenty-first-century Christianity—and, I would add, of evangelical Christians—than those in the now predominantly secular West.

We are seeing evidence of this in some of the debates within the Anglican Communion. Historically, the Archbishop of Canterbury was seen *ex officio* as the leader of Anglicanism worldwide. This is now emphatically no longer the case, and not just because seventeen to twenty times as many Nigerians attend an Anglican church every Sunday than do Britains. Globally speaking, the focus both of numbers and of power has shifted overwhelmingly to the Global South, and this change has seen self-confessed woolly “bearded lefties” like Rowan Williams eclipsed by figures from Nigeria, Uganda, and other countries south of the equator. Archbishop Akinola of Nigeria speaks for a vibrant and growing church, Archbishop Williams of Canterbury for one that is in decline—except, that is, for its evangelical wing.
Who Are Evangelicals?

Secularization Theory
One branch of sociology has had a major problem with all of this. The growth of evangelical Christianity, and indeed of religion in general (such as the revival of Islam and Hinduism), has been a huge blow to those who held to what they called secularization theory.

According to this way of thinking, as we became more advanced technologically, medically, and in all sorts of other ways, religion, which these sociologists see as part of the premodern past, was bound to decline. Faith, to such experts, is no different from magic and other forms of ancient superstition, and however much we might enjoy the adventures of Harry Potter, we know that such things are just fairy tales with no place in the postreligious secular modern world.

However, apart from Western Europe, where one could argue that secularization theory did indeed come true—the religious are a rapidly diminishing proportion of the population in that part of the world—global statistics and evident experience show the exact opposite: now in the twenty-first century the world is becoming more religious rather than less.

Let us take another example of the rise of religion, courtesy of one of the other few sociologists of religion, Mark Juergensmeyer of the University of California, Santa Barbara, who predicted the rise not fall of religious adherence globally.3

In the 1950s the wave of the future in the Middle East was Arab socialism, embodied in the anticolonial figure, Gamal Nasser, the ruler of Egypt. Having routed the British and French at Suez in 1956, he was a hero of resistance against colonialism. But there is one thing that should be mentioned—while he was an Arab nationalist, the other ideology he possessed, socialism, is of course a thoroughly Western ideology. So while in one sense he was a secular nationalist against the West, in another he was totally Western in his ideological preference for socialism.

Consequently, when he and other local Arab leaders were trounced utterly by the Israelis in the 1967 war (a conflict that he had helped to provoke), the disillusionment among many Egyptians with the twin secular pillars of his regime, Arab nationalism and socialism, became very strong. Earlier in 1966, Nasser had ordered the execution of a very
different kind of Egyptian ideologue, a Muslim scholar called Sayyid Qutb, who had been radicalized as a Muslim while living briefly in the United States as an exchange teacher. Qutb viewed Nasser as an apostate Muslim, someone who had betrayed the true path of Islam for Western views. But while Qutb was executed, his brother was not, ending up in Saudi Arabia where he taught a young idealist with a name we all now know well, Osama bin Laden.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Bin Laden’s picture, now infamous, was on the front cover of Juergensmeyer’s book about the rise of religious nationalism, *Terror in the Mind of God*, published presciently in 2000, some while ahead of the shattering events of 9/11.

According to the British journal *The New Scientist*, over 84 percent of the world today is religious in some form or another. While this includes animists in the middle of rain forests and Western believers in the tooth fairy, it is, nonetheless, an astonishing statistic for the twenty-first century. If ever a theory has proved to be a complete flop, it is surely that of the inevitable rise of secularization. As we grow supposedly more sophisticated, we are getting *more* religious not less, though it is fair to say that we would have to include the extraordinary amount of superstition, of reading horoscopes and keeping crystals in the living room, along with a turning to the great historic religions, within the growth of religious belief. The great early-twentieth-century British thinker G. K. Chesterton expressed the idea that when people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing but frequently *anything*, and much of the modern world reflects that.

In particular, two kinds of religious faith are expanding at exponential rates, Protestant Christianity and Islam, in its different internal varieties (not just Shia and Sunni, but branches within the Sunni as well). German-based Arab writer Bassam Tibi has called this the *clash of universalisms*, and this too is further proof of how the secularists got it so wrong. (This is not the place to discuss Tibi’s theories and other interesting debates, about which I have written elsewhere, as have many other commentators. Readers can find a large number of books on all this, especially post-9/11.) Christianity is a universal faith, in a way that an ethnic religion such as Hinduism is not, and Islam, while
Arabic in origin and language, makes similar claims to be a faith open to all races and nations.

Not only that, but it is evangelical Christianity that is expanding, and in parts of the world as diverse as Nigeria and Indonesia, often coming into conflict with a resurgent Islam. As the deeply Christian south in Nigeria expands northward, it meets up with an African Islam traveling southward, often with bloody results with Christians being put to death by angry Islamic mobs seeking to impose Muslim Sharia law upon the non-Islamic populations over which they wish to rule.

How is this?

I think that the answer, which both secular and religious writers now agree, is that the absolute nature of belief, both of evangelical Christians and activist Muslims, makes this kind of clash inevitable. So those who really do believe something are those who are growing, and those who prefer Western twenty-first-century postmodern angst are going nowhere, including those parts of Christianity for whom compromise with secular modernity is seen as the only way forward. There is indeed a wonderful irony in all this, because one of the main platforms of the liberal wing of Christianity is that only their de-supernatural brand will appeal to “modern people,” yet globally it is precisely that watered-down version that is dying, whereas the supernatural-believing evangelical version is growing by leaps and bounds.

For while the supernatural may be regarded as somewhat weird in the faculty clubs of New England or in the dinner parties of the chattering classes in London, it is precisely this feature of evangelicalism that is giving evangelicals the cutting edge over more Western forms of theological liberalism. We just saw that most of the world is still religious, and while that may be unfashionable in some Western quarters, it is far different elsewhere.

Philip Jenkins mentions this phenomenon in his books, which has helped to make the case academically respectable, but countless missionaries on home furloughs from Atlanta to London will tell you exactly this, from personal experience. Let’s look at demonic influence, for instance. Dealing with demons may not be something normal in many evangelical churches in Britain or the United States, although most would profess still to believe in the demonic at least in theory.
But in Africa, for example, the shadow of occult forces and the fear of spirit possession are still powerfully real—and, in fact, increasingly therefore in England as well, where thousands of the African diaspora now live.

Who wants watered-down faith when the local witch doctor has cursed your family? While writing this book, our home group in Cambridge, an academic city as we saw in the last chapter, just looked at the passage in Luke’s Gospel in which Jesus cast out demons from a man traditionally called the Gadarene demoniac. For us this was a wonderful study of the power of Jesus over evil, and also proof that his power extended outside of mainly Jewish areas to those lived in by Gentiles. But if you live in West Africa, such possession is an ever-present real occurrence, and the fact that Jesus has power over demons and that Christians are protected by him and the Holy Spirit is a major advertisement for the evangelical version of the Christian faith. Much of the world still lives in fear of the occult, in Asia and in Latin America as much as in Africa, and the sheer joy and liberation from this debilitating terror is one of the greatest things that salvation in Jesus Christ can provide.

We know that the living conditions of many of the poorer parts of the Two-thirds World or Global South are not all that different from those in Old or New Testament times. But so too are the spiritual realities. This is unquestionably, the sociologists are now learning to agree, one of the most powerful reasons for the spread of evangelicalism in this part of the world. While white liberals want to think of themselves as progressive and as the most politically correct of all, it is again ironic that those in the Global South reject as Western and alien the form of spirituality-lite that Western bien-pensant liberals adopt. What sounds fine in Harvard or Cambridge is rejected as totally unrealistic and white in the parts of the world where the vast bulk of twenty-first century people now live.

Paradoxically, evangelicalism is so frowned upon in so-called “right-thinking” quarters of the Western intelligentsia because of this whiff of the primitive that people associate with it. Yet, and this is going to be our final irony in this chapter, that very view is of course profoundly racist! “Well they would believe that kind of thing over there
in Africa. . .” And yet many of these same people with these snobbish and condescending views were pillars in their youth of things such as the anti-apartheid movement and of trying to gain equal civil rights for those of different color in their own countries—all very commendable attitudes with which all decent evangelicals should agree. But when it comes to religion, the very continuation of which such people reject, it is a different story!

But one of the greatest things about true Christianity, and thus its evangelical version, is its egalitarianism. This too is one of its great sources of appeal in the Global South, since illiterate peasants have an equal place alongside Nobel Prize winners in the eyes of God.

These two things—the supernatural and the sense of equality—are of huge help in the struggle from Nigeria to Indonesia against Islam. For Islam too is a faith of absolute beliefs and of complete rejection of any kind of racial prejudice. The very absolute nature of evangelical belief, so off-putting to Western postmodernists, is its great strength when pitted against Islam, for Muslims too are firm believers in absolute truth.

One way Christianity has an advantage over Islam, sociologically speaking, is that faith in Jesus Christ empowers women in a way that Islam cannot match. All over Latin America, where Islam has not penetrated, evangelical women are liberated from machismo by the power of the gospel. When we look at the role of women in the New Testament, at how much women could and did do, we see a radically different picture from the inferior legal and social role of women in Islam. It is not surprising in the areas of the world where Islam and Christianity are meeting and clashing that millions of women are turning to salvation in Jesus Christ, who, unlike the chauvinists of his own day, would always speak to women, take them seriously, and use them in key roles in supporting the growth of the kingdom of God.

**Evangelical Statistics around the Globe**

Let us now look at some of the statistics that Philip Jenkins has used to get a more close-up picture of *global* evangelicalism today. Statistics are not usually interesting in themselves, but the ones that follow tell a fascinating story, so please persevere! (This data is from a mix
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