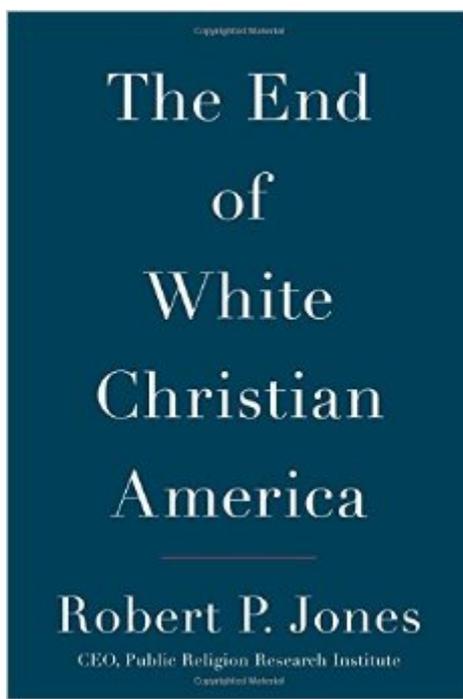


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The End Of White Christian America



Synopsis

New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), challenges us to grasp the profound political and cultural consequences of a new reality "that America is no longer a majority white Christian nation. For most of our nation's history, White Christian America (WCA) "the cultural and political edifice built primarily by white Protestant Christians" set the tone for our national policy and shaped American ideals. But especially since the 1990s, WCA has steadily lost influence, following declines within both its mainline and evangelical branches. Today, America is no longer demographically or culturally a majority white Christian nation. Drawing on more than four decades of polling data, *The End of White Christian America* explains and analyzes the waning vitality of WCA. Jones argues that the visceral nature of today's most heated issues "the vociferous arguments around same-sex marriage and religious liberty, the rise of the Tea Party following the election of our first black president, and stark disagreements between black and white Americans over the fairness of the criminal justice system" can only be understood against the backdrop of white Christians' anxieties as America's racial and religious topography shifts around them. In 2016 and beyond, the descendants of WCA will lack the political power they once had to set the terms of the nation's debate over values and morals and to determine election outcomes. Looking ahead, Jones forecasts the ways that they might adjust to find their place in the new America "and the consequences for us all if they don't.

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Customer Reviews

Jones interprets many of today's most contentious political/cultural battles as the product of shifts in America's demographic make-up. He convincingly shows that ongoing demographic shifts in America's ethnic mix are accompanied by unprecedented changes in religious affiliation. White Christian (by which he means Protestant) Americans dominated the nation's politics and social life for most of our nation's history. Jones dates the shift away from this dominance to the Catholic Kennedy's election in 1960, with the change accelerating through the 1960s and 1970s. In subsequent decades, the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans surged, along with increases in the numbers of Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and others; 2008 was the last year in which Protestants represented a majority. Jones further interprets survey data to identify a generational shift within Protestant mainline and evangelical movements, finding younger believers to be far more accepting of gay and interracial marriage. Jones argues that it is this demographic shift which has driven the furor over several key issues in recent years, including Gay marriage, abortion, and a number of initiatives to infuse politics with "Biblical values." Jones cites polling data indicating evangelical white Protestants are the least likely group to have black friends to explain their alienation from movements such as Black Lives Matter. He likens the passion driving the religious white conservative reaction to the "anger and denial" stage of grief, predicting believers will eventually refocus their energies to strengthening their own community of believers. 'Jone's interpretation of today's culture wars is shaped by his own liberal outlook, but his account should also be interesting to conservative readers. The data Jones provides derives from solid sources. Regardless of one's political views, the demographic changes he outlines are real and are changing America's politics and culture. Most of the explanations for the rise of the "angry voter" behind the Trump campaign have focused on economic issue. While Jones does not address the 2016 presidential campaigns, his work provides a useful background on how demographics also factor into the rise of Trump's popularity. The results of the campaign should also prove an interesting test of Jones's argument that "White Christian America" has lost the political clout to dominate national politics.

The Book I Have Been Waiting to Read! Robert P. Jones's *The End of White Christian America* sounds almost preposterous at first. How could we be living at the end of "Christian America"? The evidence of the Christian religion, whether mainline Protestant or evangelical Protestant, seems to be everywhere! In his six-chapter book, Jones argues convincingly that the cultural forces that shaped the life of 20th-century America and earlier have died or actually are currently dying. The final chapter, in fact, characterizes the death in terms of the stages of grief from

the well-known book, *On Death and Dying*. A well-researched book from a highly credible scholar, *The End of White Christian America* should be read by anyone interested in religion and life in the US today. The book begins with an obituary: "After a long life spanning nearly two hundred forty years, White Christian America—a prominent cultural force in the nation's history—has died. WCA first began to exhibit troubling symptoms in the 1960s when white mainline Protestant denominations began to shrink, but showed signs of rallying with the rise of the Christian Right in the 1980s. Following the 2004 presidential election, however, it became clear that WCA's power were failing." (p. 1). The book begins with an examination of three significant cultural landmarks of organized religion: The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC; the Interchurch Center in NYC; and the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA. The UMC building established in Washington, DC, in 1923 was built to establish a connection between the Methodist Church—a leading denomination—and governmental policy making. At that stage, Methodists were particularly interested in alcohol and its continuing elimination and thwarting the growth of Roman Catholicism in the US! It is now a building that features tenants from many Christian and other world religion traditions. The Interchurch Center, connected with the National Council of Churches, now opens its door to both religious and secular tenants. Finally, the empire church of Robert Schuler that once presented his sublimated, conservative evangelical Protestant agenda of Orange, Co., CA, is now a Roman Catholic building for public worship, after the Schuler descendants bankrupted the church. These buildings provide important metaphors for understanding change in both mainline and evangelical traditions. The book examines Roman Catholics only in the sense that they were not a part of the "original" White Christian synthesis and occupy the position now of the incursions to non-white Christians. The book examines carefully the demographics provided by the Pew Foundation and surveys conducted by PRRI over the last few years as well as other normed studies. The book concludes with the idea that theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas have provided ways to suggest the end of mainline Protestantism and that scholars such as Russell Moore (SBC) and David Gushee (Baptist) have provided the ways of understanding decline and death to evangelical Protestants. For those people not "plugged in" to the traditions, these might sound like odd suggestions; however, for skill observers all of these writers suggest ways that the traditions may survive their own deaths—that is, beyond or after their own places in a cultural hegemony. The book examines two topics in particular that will interest contemporary readers: gay marriage and the treatment of GLBTQ people and race relations since Ferguson. Jones examines the challenge where mainline Protestants have in many ways embraced GLBTQ people and that evangelical Protestants have

not. I'm painting a broad sweep of what he examines with careful detail in light of how millennials understand this issue. Mainliners have moved toward acceptance while evangelicals have moved toward "religious liberty" as a way of understanding a cultural shift that has happened to alienate them from larger American life. Whatever can be said for evangelical Christians, the Supreme Court decision of 2015 was a "nuclear event" (145). With respect to race relations, Jones notes the institutional segregation that was set into civic structures as early as 1911 that provided for segregation as the order of the day in terms of organization. Jones moves behind the events that resulted in the deaths of several African Americans to talk about the way that socialization and the failures of socialization have set in those patterns both for mainline Protestants and evangelical Christians. What may surprise some mainline Protestants is how the surveys do not show the disparity between themselves and evangelical Protestants they have often been told. Jones' book does not suggest that Christianity will leave the face of America, but it is one that suggests the old order cannot be revived "it cannot be great again" but must accommodate itself to a diminished role. Any attempt to reassert the older mythic narratives of history will only make the challenges greater and the fall more apparent. Jones' analysis, based on a number of statistical studies from highly reputable sources, is illuminating. He seems to have limited "evangelical" at times to "Southern Baptist." That seems to be a mistake in a world of an increasing post-denominational movement. Still, however, many of those churches are "Southern Baptist" in orientation, with the outward signposts removed. He does note that contemporary feelings and opinions seem to support the ideological position of mainline Protestant groups, but that too is deceptive for them. What he does not examine are other traditions rising from the gap between mainline and evangelical positions "a kind of "new monasticism" or the emerging church. Jones' book is very much on the mark with its investigation. Anyone interested in the trajectories of modern American Christianity would do well to read his book.

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