

Bruce Thornton --Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow Motion Suicide  
interviewed March 6, 2008

>>Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson. Joining me today, Prof. Bruce Thornton of California State University in Fresno. A classicist, Prof. Thornton sees in Europe a civilization that traces back at least 25 centuries. Today, he believes that long, long story maybe drawing to an end. His book, Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow Motion Suicide. Let's start with the cover. Flag of the European Union—

>> Right.

>> Doing a dissolve and sinking into a drain.

>> Yeah.

>> Sinking into a drain, Europe down the drain, explain yourself.

>> Well, as you know, I didn't design the cover but I love it.

>> You're -- okay.

>> I think it's -- I think it's great. There are several factors that most people who comment on Europe today identify. There is economic. In the new globalized economy, European economies aren't as efficient and aren't as adaptable because of state regulation and other factors as certainly as the United States' economy and the cowboy economies of China and India. They are not really placed to compete as well. Second is the incredibly expensive social welfare entitlements.

>> Ummm.

>> Europe has extremely generous retirement benefits, sick leave, et cetera. And as everybody knows, those expenses all are tied to payroll taxes, taxes on the economy. So those two factors interconnect. And then third, of course, is the demographic issue. The Europeans simply aren't reproducing, and again, modern capitalism's greatest resources are human beings. Those are the people who work and come up with the ideas to buy their products. It creates issues with labor, et cetera.

>> You place special emphasis on the loss of religious belief. From Decline and Fall, let me quote you to yourself.

>> Ummm.

>> The pride in the nation and belief in its unifying identity are abandoned, weakness or disintegration or at least weakness of the nation state as against the European Union superstate, right? If the future is a matter of indifference for the childless, you have mentioned that demographic question, and most important if traditional Christianity is discarded; what values, ideals, and beliefs will then unify Europeans? Give me a word or two on the sinking of traditional Christianity.

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>> Well, all these problems that I was enumerating, the real issues where why.

>> Right.

>> And then we get to the point, well, the loss of a foundational belief system that created the West in the first place, it created Europe in the first place. You know when somebody says a certain policy should be pursued such as equality of income—

>> Right.

>> To me, the practical issues of that aren't interesting. To me what's interesting is why would somebody believe that in the first place? To me, everything goes back to foundational belief. So when Christianity begins to disappear, and that's a long -- obviously it starts in the late 18th century and so it's a long process but as it begins to retreat from the public square, it creates a vacuum. And I'm sure you know the famous quote of G.K Chesterton, when a man stops believing in God, he doesn't believe in nothing, he believes in anything. So what we've seen in the last couple of centuries, particularly in Europe, are what I call in the book pseudo-religions -- substitutes for Christianity that give us a sense of meaning and importance of what we should pursue, et cetera.

>> Now, at the beginning of the 20th century, Europe is a continent of well-defined nations, check, we've got nation states, of high birth rates, check, we've got no demographic problem and of both, as best one can tell, informal and certainly official adherence to Christianity. So we check that box. In the century that follows, Europe produces two world wars, fascism, communism, the extermination camp, the gulag. Why shouldn't a modern European look back at the old order and say, "No more".

>> Well, but that those conflicts were themselves a consequence of the decline in Christianity and the substitute of political religions.

>> Okay, let me get that right.

>> The 19th century had communism, you know, and socialism.

>> Good, you're coming out swinging. One more kind of introductory question. Beginning of the 20th century again, Europe accounts for a quarter of the world's population. Through their empires they're ruling perhaps as much as a third of the remaining globe-- a third or more of the remaining surface of the earth and population. They have all the major militaries. By far, the most powerful navy is British. The most important land forces are Russian and German. Today, 7 percent of the population, of economic importance but not dominant and of no military importance.

>> Absolutely not.

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>> To us whatsoever, why should Americans care what happens in Europe?

>> Well, because they are our cousins, our cultural cousins. They do have, you know, political freedom and representative government and they do represent a powerful economic force in the world, and they should be our ally and they should be contributing more so that the west can stand united against these threats.

>> Do you -- would you subscribe to the notion that if Europe drifts away, if Europe becomes weak or Islamicized, the temperature in the room goes up for us.

>> Absolutely.

>> Alright. The tide of faith goes out. You write, "Europeans may not have become outright atheist but their surviving faithful tend to be concentrated among the aged, the rural, and some Eastern European countries". Again, why should we care? Europe is still democratic. It still has free markets. Why should we care about the particular religious beliefs?

>> Well, if there wasn't the whole issue of radical Islam and Muslim immigrants who are fecund in reproducing and disaffected and under employed, and ripe for Jihadist recruitment, probably we wouldn't care that much. But what are they going to call upon, what spiritual or if that word's not suitable, what cultural resources are they gonna call upon to resist a fanatical faith? If all of their goods are material, right, what material good is worth dying for and what material good is worth killing for?

>> So it matters because they're in a clash of values first and you can't beat something with nothing?

>> Exactly.

>> All right. Now here's where this -- there are basically two narratives in my judgment about the role of Christianity in Europe. First is the Thornton thesis. I'm quoting you. "The Christian tradition helped to create all the ideals Europe professes to respect: human rights, equality, tolerance, separation of church and state, respect for individuals". Christianity helped to create that. Now that's one. The other is let's call it the Voltaire/Christopher Hitchens thesis, which is the opposite.

>> The enlightenment.

>> Which is it just starts during the Renaissance especially during the enlightenment. Europe wins its beliefs, its understanding and the importance of human rights, equality, tolerance and so forth by struggling against oppression and superstition by the church. Now, how do you refute Voltaire and Christopher Hitchens? And believe me I wanna watch this happen.

>> Well, you know, that's the dominant enlightenment narrative that was created by Voltaire and his descendants and that has become sort of the received wisdom. I don't think historically

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it holds up to scrutiny. Ortega y Gasset had a wonderful phrase in The Revolt of the Masses, I believe, excuse me, The Tragic Sense of Life, spiritual parasites. The enlightenment was parasitic on Christianity. It took over the high value on the individual, for example, and then slowly removed all of the spiritual or religious aspects of that. But that's its historical origins. I think that's an issue that can be settled just by cultural history. And let me be clear about one thing if I may.

>> Right.

>> I don't subscribe to the thesis that all of these things were created by Christianity. I wrote a book called Greek Ways: How the Greeks Created Western Civilization and I document that that's the beginning of these. But it is how Christianity holds those forward into its theology and its ideology and brings them into Europe and then they develop.

>> Okay, so would you -- I'm trying to, I don't know [Leo] Strauss well enough to give him a fair representation here. But do you subscribe to the Athens and Jerusalem thesis?

>> Alright. Well, Athens, Roman, Jerusalem, the three cities.

>> Alright, so it's the Greek insistence on rationality, the spiritual insights of Jerusalem—

>> That's correct.

>> Hebrew and then Christian tradition.

>> That's correct. All of these interacting in what is then the failing Roman Empire. Alright. Did you -- suppose you're a high school student or college student who has just finished reading Christopher Hitchens, or is about to be assigned Voltaire, what do you -- can you name a book or two that they ought to read to refute this?

>> Oh, Christopher Dawson.

>> Christopher Dawson.

>> I mean, he wrote several books in this century that laid this all out. Of course, he is not as well known because he falls outside of the dominant enlightenment narrative that has affected, you know, curriculum and that determines how people think.

>> Christopher Dawson wrote about 20 books, maybe.

>> At least.

>> Which one would you—

>> Yeah, there's a reprint, Christianity and, I don't know.

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>> Alright.

>> So thank goodness for Amazon.

>> Christopher Dawson. Alright, now, take it down one more level.

>> Ummm.

>> "The sea of faith was once, too, at the full", you know what I'm quoting.

>> Right.

>> "And round earth's shore but now I only hear its melancholy long withdrawing roar". Matthew Arnold published Dover Beach in 1867. So the tide of faith has been going out, and of course it starts in the enlightenment. It's an 18th century phenomenon that begins there. The tide of faith has been going out for a long, long time. Why? Answer that question.

>> Well, there are a lot of reasons for that. One has been, I think, the incredible success of modern science in altering the material world and improving people's lives materially because that's -- that you can't ignore.

>> It works.

>> It works and the material is more immediate to us than spirituality, right. It's easier to grasp but, you know, and that success I think made it easier for people to start, you know, shrinking the role of the spiritual. Now other obvious influences; Darwin, Marx, you know, all of the determinisms, materialist-based determinisms that begin to sort of chip away at spiritual belief. I think that's one big reason why this happens.

>> Alright. I'll come back to this in a moment but what we have then is a phenomenon that's been going on for at least two centuries with very deep cultural and intellectual roots. So. But one portion we'll be bringing at work on the question how do we reverse that? And we'll come back right in a moment. The decline of Christianity, the decline of the nation, the nation state, you write again, "A factor that could fuel a hyper-nationalist revival". You're writing about the kind of thing that -- of course the great example here is Nazi Germany.

>> Right.

>> "That could fuel a hyper-nationalist revival is the animus against genuine patriotic sentiment that characterizes the jet-setting post national EU elites". Alright. There are a lot going on in that sentence. Let's just -- let's just pause for a moment to take that -- that's our text for a moment or two here.

>> Okay.

>> Distinguish between hyper-nationalism and genuine patriotic sentiment.

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>> Well, mystic nationalism, I think, is another way of putting it, you know, which is one of the roots of fascism, a kind of a blood and soil attitude towards the nation as tied to a certain ethnic group and blood, which is exclusive.

>> Right.

>> As opposed to a genuine and sincere pride in one's own way because it is one's own and because it's worthy of your admiration and your defense. But it is open and is not predicated on any kind of ethnic determinism. I think that's the distinction. But if patriotism is denigrated and is not given respect, it's possible that it could sort of evolve into that other as a reaction.

>> And part of your thesis here in Decline and Fall is that the European Union superstate is what? Doing what? Undermining the old nation state of England, of France and Germany?

>> Absolutely. I mean the whole idea was that the horrors of the 20th century were because of nationalism.

>> Right.

>> Because of particularism and the enlightenment universalism is the superior way of organizing peoples implying that nationalism is some sort of atavistic, or like religion, a superstition that people need to grow out of instead, you know, relying on the transnational institutions of the EU or such organizations to resolve disputes. But this assumes or implies that nationalist sentiment that is your affection for your own, for the people who live like you would believe like you do is either reprehensible or something that can just disappear rather than being a deep-seated need that people have and a good one.

>> Good, alright. Now since you're a classicist, since you start with the Greeks and when Europe is in some ways that is cultural and intellectual zenith, it's Christendom. It's not Germany and France and England.

>>That's right.

>> It's Christendom. It's something that precedes the nation state. So Rome falls. There is the Holy Roman Empire. There is a sense of culture. Everybody speaks Latin. There is a shared sense of learning, a shared sense of frankly religious and spiritual enterprise centered in Rome. We know that the Holy Roman Empire from Charlemagne and it sputters along and gets put back together and falls apart and gets put back together. That's a kind of recurring European dream to put it back together.

>> Right.

>> Napoleon, I've heard French -- I'm no great fan of Napoleon myself but I've heard Frenchmen who love him, argue that Napoleon's fundamental impulse was to reestablish or unify Europe.

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So, if -- when Europe was at its zenith, it was Europe not nation states, why is that not a valid dream?

>> Well—

>> Why shouldn't they be trying to edge their way back toward then?

>> But at that point it also wasn't democratic. I mean, it took the nation state to create the condition for parliamentary sort of government and democratic regimes, political freedom and so that was-- the nation state was the community that fostered those developments. It wasn't gonna happen in the -- it wasn't gonna happen in the feudal or aristocratic based [inaudible].

>> So you're objection to Brussels today is that it's a bureaucratic super state.

>> Exactly.

>> That it's muffling the wishes of the people which through long tradition, hard won political and constitutional victories. England, I suppose, the mother of parliaments would be the leading example that representative democracy does not have a place at the level of the super state.

>> Absolutely.

>> Well, now is there a way of -- so is it merely -- is your objection to -- what I'm trying to get to here is what is your objection with the European Union? Is this some sort of deep cultural objection or is it merely a matter of institutional arrangements? If they produced a constitution whereby there really were a European parliament that was popularly elected in a way we could figure out. We could figure out whether it's by country or by region, but there might be a way of satisfying you, is that right or not?

>> Well, I'm not sure because look at the variety and diversity of the people of Europe and the languages. I mean, it's counter to reality is my biggest objection. It's the old enlightenment ideal of an abstract super elite of guardians that Plato dreamed about in The Republic.

>> These are the jet-setting post national EU elites.

>> Right, right. You know for a certain stratum it works wonderfully. They can buzz around here and there, but, you know, average people are rooted in the community, alright, it's the local. It's not the abstract.

>> You're pulling Aristotle versus Plato on me right now, aren't you?

>> Absolutely.

>> There's a little Karl Popper working in here?

>> Absolutely.

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>> Okay, so the EU, go ahead and pursue that for a minute. The EU is platonic.

>> Well, it's abstract, let's say. I mean it works in terms of abstract rules. It's totalizing, if not totalitarian, because it will suck in more and more regulatory power because the more variety you have, the more power you have to have to smooth differences and variety out. So it works against particularly, against the local, and that necessarily, as we've seen will work against freedom.

>> Okay.

>> That's I think the main objection, and it's just not gonna work.

>> And it ain't gonna work.

>> Just on the practical level. I don't think this will work.

>> Okay. Demographic suicide. You write a lot about the Muslim immigration to Europe but first the antecedent problem which is the hollowing out of Europe by sheer infertility. I Googled around yesterday and as best I can tell, there is only one exception to the following rule. Every nation in Europe, every non-Muslim population in every nation in Europe has a birth rate below replacement levels. And the only exception is Malta. Alright, so the question is why are Europeans so insistently declining to reproduce?

>> Well, that's an interesting question. Children are expensive. Children require that you sacrifice your time and your interest in your own comfort. Children are an investment in the future. If you have, you know, what—

>> Europe is richer than it's ever been though so they presumably -- if children were a luxury good, there would be more, right?

>> But they are, you know—

>> The trouble.

>> A detriment to the enjoyment of life now. The dolce vita lifestyle does not include children, right? If your highest good is pleasure, if your highest good is the sophisticated life, then children get in the way of all of that. If you're indifferent to the future because you think when you die that's it, there's nothing more anyway. Then why would you invest in the future and children? Why would you spend so much money, so much energy, so much psychic energy in children if the highest good is simply material good. And I think that's the sort of spiritual dimension of the problem.

>> So the loss of faith or belief leads to a-- is replaced by something as shallow as mere materialism, pleasure, children are a pain no matter how much money you have, well, within certain

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limits, if you can fob them all off on nannies I suppose but children, changing diapers is unpleasant work.

>> Yeah, absolutely.

>> So you have few children or no children, and that in turn means that you're not thinking--it's really children who link us to the longer perspective that gets people thinking—

>> Absolutely

>> --beyond their own lifetime about the health of the nation—

>> The community.

>> The community. Got it.

>> What you owe to the larger community.

>> So the infertility in Europe is actually horrifying for what it says about the European set of values today let alone what about -- what it suggests about the future.

>> I think now, see, this is different from Russia. There is a lot of reason why Russia is even worse in terms of its fertility rate but they have, you know, all sorts of other issues which make it more understandable.

>> Such as?

>> You know, the economic dislocation.

>> They've been through a rough time.

>> Yeah, they have been through very, very hard time.

>> But the Italians haven't. The Italians since the end of the Second World War have been and the French have not and the British have not.

>> No, I think it's just a consequence of affluence.

>> Immigration. Europe's evolution, you quote the scholar, Bat Ye'Or, am I pronouncing this correctly?

>> Yeah.

>> "Europe's evolution from a Judeo-Christian civilization into a post-Judeo-Christian civilization that is subservient to the ideology of Jihad and the Islamic powers have propagated". You have large numbers of Muslims immigrating into Europe but isn't Bat Ye'or-- isn't that a little alarmist? They are not all Jihadists. In other words, what's the problem here?

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>> Well, how do we know? I mean—

>> Well for example the Turks in Germany—

>> Right.

>> They are pretty well assimilated to modernity if not to German life, wouldn't you say?

>> Well, the premier of Turkey just made a trip to Germany and said that assimilation to German culture was a crime against humanity for Turks. I'm not sure they are.

>> I withdraw my [inaudible].

>> You have enclaves all across Europe in which there are non-permeable borders between many of these communities and the larger world in which they live, and in which they feel little loyalty to those values, to the notions of tolerance, political freedom, free speech, et cetera. And when those quintessential European values, western values, are challenged by people who are living in Europe benefiting from its prosperity, its freedom and you look at Europe's reaction. I mean it's amazing. You know, you have the cartoon controversy.

>> Right.

>> Now you have a parliament -- parliamentarian in the Netherlands Geert Wilders, I'm not sure I'm pronouncing it correctly who has made a film critical of Islam and the government of the Netherlands is meeting with the Islamic council in a way of saying, "well, how do we, you know, how do we deal with this" instead of saying, "Hey, tough, you know, this is the west. We have free speech, right?" And that willingness to kowtow seems to me--it sends a signal that, you know what, we have all of these ideals that we say we believe in, but we don't really believe in them because we will trim and we will compromise them at the first threat.

>> Can I -- I wanna go back one more moment to this demographic problem. The -- Mark Steyn points out that if you have a country with a population, 90 percent of which has a birth rate of about 1, and 10 percent of which has a birth rate of about 3, then the populations become 50/50 within just two generations and that is an accurate description of France today. So even without the immigration about which you write about—

>> Oh, absolutely.

>> Okay.

>> Absolutely.

>> Question. Immigration aside and as I say you write about that at great length, is it likely to be the case that the Muslim population of Europe reproduces at this higher rate even through two generations? Isn't it -- I keep going back but aren't -- isn't the Turkish population in Germany, hasn't that—

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>> Right, right. There's a valid point that over time, over generations, Muslim reproduction rates begin to lower.

>> Right.

>> But you still have the snake and the python, or excuse me, the mouse and the python. You still have this democratic bulge moving through over a course of decades and what can happen as it moves. Just look at the baby boomers in this country.

>> Right, right, right.

>> And the impact that the boomers have had on this country as they move through time.

>> Right.

>> So, you know, that may be in a hundred years but a lot can happen between now and then.

>> Now, you write about something in the book that was new to me and that is the Dream of El Andalus, that is that -- so would you just comment on that. First of all, tell us what the dream is and then go ahead and debunk it as you do so robustly.

>> It's a 19th century myth that it was actually as I believe—

>> It's still current today.

>> Oh absolutely.

>> Alright, alright.

>> It was started by many Jews to sort of chastise growing anti-Semitism in Europe by saying, "Look, the Muslims treated us better in Andalus."

>> They occupy -- Muslims occupy the Iberian Peninsula for about 700 years and the notion is that life was pretty good there.

>> Right.

>> And that it was an open cosmopolitan kind of society.

>> Right.

>> Christians live there, Jews live there, and it was -- and fear not because that's the Muslim world of the future and you're saying—

>> Well, of course, that's historically false.

>> It is.

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>> I mean there were brief moments when Jewish scholars, even Jewish, you know, viziers or whatever could have some sort of influence but in 1066, 5000 Jews were massacred in Granada, you know. The analogy that I use—

>> You point out, which I didn't know that Maimonides who is one of the great Jewish scholars of all the centuries was a refugee from Andalusia.

>> The analogy I use is with the Jim Crow South and you can go back and look at Black culture in the South in 1900 and 1960 and you can find poets and you can find business owners and you can find people getting college degrees. Nobody based on that—

>> But nobody wants to go back there.

>> Would go back and say, "Oh it was wonderful" -- and in fact the old segregationists used to make that argument. I can remember them making it, right?

>> Right, okay. Now we come to the section where we'll talk about what is to be done. Let me ask first about a couple of historic American policies and then I'll ask if they were mistakes. From at least the administration of Dwight Eisenhower. It has been official American policy to encourage the political union of Europe. We have been officially—

>> Absolutely.

>> Among the European Union's biggest fans.

>> That's correct.

>> Terrible mistake?

>> Well, not at the time. I mean, at the time we're in the Cold War and there's-- a unified Europe is a better ally. You have friends in Italy, strong communist parties in France and Italy that represents the possibility that Europe could slowly be lost to the democratic camp. But a unified Europe would be a stronger Europe. So I think it made sense at the time.

>> But we need to adjust.

>> Well—

>> What about NATO? As long ago as the 1980s, Irving Crystal used to say, "Wait a moment. It made sense for us to be defending Europe after the war when they were still getting back on their feet." But per capita -- in the 1980, I can't remember, his general argument was, "They're fine now. They are at least as wealthy as the United States now. They should be shouldering more of their burdens".

>> Absolutely.

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>> And why not purely for economic reasons. Irving Crystal would warn, a quarter of a century ago, that we were going to infantilize the Europeans. We were going to make them incapable of facing reality and dependent on us. And it sounds to me as though that's part of the thesis right here.

>> Absolutely.

>> So NATO was a mistake?

>> Well, I think now it's outlived its usefulness.

>> So why do we have 50,000 troops in Germany even now?

>> I don't know.

>> This is ridiculous on the face of it.

>> I think so. I think that we need some tough love with Europe.

>> Okay, tell me what the United States should do if there's anything that can be done?

>> Okay, the EU says, "we're -- it's not a bipolar world anymore, it's a multipolar world and we're one of the major poles because of our population, of our wealth, et cetera, our influence."

>> Right.

>> Okay, but look guys, the only thing that makes you significant in global politics is in military, bottom line. Your ability to project force to work your will. Now, the disaster again in the '90s, in the Balkans exposed -- exposed the pathetic weakness.

>> Should we have refused to go in and force the Europeans to deal with that mess on their own?

>> I think there's a good argument to be made for that.

>> What about Kosovo today?

>> Kosovo today has a 90 percent Albanian ethnic population—

>> Muslim.

>> And Muslim population. The Serbs have historic claims to Kosovo. It's a mess and that population has just declared independence.

>> Right.

>> And we and the British, and the French, the Germans, I think, recognized this new country within 48 hours or so. It is utterly defenseless against the Serbs.

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>> Absolutely.

>> Should we say to the Europeans, "Okay fine, you take care of that problem"?

>> Well, let's say that the Russians begin to mass some divisions on the border.

>> Right.

>> At that point it would take, "Okay boys, it's time to step up to the plate", you know what I mean?

>> To the Germans and the French?

>> Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely, because they are a free rider on NATO. Let's be clear, they are a free rider. We pretend that NATO is this alliance where everybody--the United States provides the vast bulk of everything that makes NATO work. And at some point, we need to say "If you want this to continue, the contributions have to be equal." Look at Afghanistan now. The NATO troops from Germany-- they don't wanna put them in harm's way and the Canadians are like, "Hey wait a minute" you know.

>> The Canadians are taking casualties right?

>> Exactly. It's like everybody contributes equally and we're letting them have a free ride. Let me make one—

>> Sure.

>> Another point I think that's important. If we have a globalized world, which we do, no question, a globalized economy, there has to be a policeman, right? Somebody has to make sure that transports can sail the seas and who's going to play that role? Right now, the United States is playing that role. Europe is a free rider on that, right? They benefit from our security that we provide.

>> Right.

>> And so it's time to say, "We all have to contribute. We all have to provide the weapons, spend the money on battleships, you know, and all of those sorts of material for this to work."

>> Digging around here -- this question, you mentioned that the Canadians are actually putting their troops in harm's way and I believe for the last couple of months that the Canadians are taking more casualties per capita even than we are in Afghanistan. Okay. Question. What you've been talking about in Decline and Fall predominantly a continental European phenomenon? Should the United States be scrambling right now to put together some kind of set of relationships and what's -- you see this written about is the Anglosphere?

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>> Absolutely.

>> The English speaking world. The Canadians are solid relatively speaking.

>> The Australians relatively.

>> The Australians, the British, the Indians. It's not an ethnic matter.

>> No.

>> Somehow rather it's the culture, the political culture and the attitude toward free markets, democracy that somehow where they got transmitted with the English language. Does that make sense to you?

>> I think so, yeah. I think so but here is what I would say, I think, that we should not be committed to permanent alliances anywhere. I see no reason for that. I mean, historically, what -- what are the reasons for that? I think that's a hold over from, you know, balance, early 1970 balance of power sorts of thinking. I think now we need to -- I would say India is of course the world's largest -- has problems but compared to Pakistan. You know Mexico right on our border. I mean, I think we need to be doing much more there. And to say to Europe, you guys are rich. You wanna be a big important player.

>> And you're on your own.

>> Spend the money on the military and then we'll deal with it.

>> Last question about American policy with regard to Europe. Considered in light of Europe, does the war in Iraq become more important? That is to say -- I have no idea. We've never discussed this. We don't want talk about whether it was right or not to go into Iraq. So this is a real flyer of a question here, but the Bush plan from the outset, which has run into a few obstacles, needless to say, was to create a more or less democratic functioning government with more or less free markets. If you managed to achieve -- if they, themselves, manage to achieve economic growth in the Arab, in the Muslim world, that takes the pressure off on immigration to Europe? If there is an example of a genuine democracy, that again, takes some of the pressure off this dream of recapturing -- of rebuilding the Caliphate or El Andalus. Does it have -- how does that play into Europe or not at all?

>> I don't think so. I don't think so. I think for 14 centuries, there has been a collision of Islam and what used to be Christendom and it didn't stop until 1683 and then Islam began to retreat.

>> What we've been seeing starting in the early 20th century after World War I and loss of the Caliphate has been various attempts to reverse that tide and to push back against it. And it's not a question of material goods. It's not a question of, you know, we want more internet service and we want more porn channels, you know. Again, we're back to where we've started with the attempt to negotiate spiritual goods in exchange for material ones, and it never works.

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>> Let me name a few names, you give me once sentence on whether each of these people makes you feel more optimistic or less so about Europe.

>> German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

>> Less optimistic. She's had two years and has accomplished nothing she set out to do in terms just in the economic sphere.

>> Okay, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero.

>> Depressingly pessimistic.

>> I'm hoping to find a little uptick here. French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

>> A little bit more optimistic, but again, the obstacles in making these changes are so great that he's not gonna be able to, I think, do anything significant. He's already dropped in popularity so much.

>> Pope Benedict XVI.

>> The one -- the one figure I think in Europe that makes you feel some optimism although the news that he's gonna sit down with the Muslims [inaudible].

>> He did sit down with the Muslims. I have -- this is from yesterday. They announced that, excuse me, he did not himself yet but there was some sort of official event at the Vatican saying that there is going to be the establishment of the Catholic-Muslim forum which the Pope will get around to addressing. Now why is it that -- you said Nicolas Sarkozy, it's impossible for him to make any change. He's the President of the Fifth Republic but the Pope can make -- why does the Pope encourage you, at his disposal?

>> Because he has seen in his works and his writing as did John Paul II. Both have seen the spiritual crisis that lies at the heart of the European crisis. And they are talking about that and nobody else wants to talk about that because we're all Voltaire. We're all rationalists. We're all [inaudible].

>> So counter Christopher Hitchens, if you want to ask who is the greatest realist, not fabulist, but realist in Europe today, you would knock on those big bronze doors at the papal apartments.

>> Absolutely.

>> Alright, last question Bruce. If you could give the next President of the United States, one -- two at the most sentences of instruction about what to do concerning Europe, what would you say?

>> Well, we've already said it. Sit down and re-negotiate NATO and re-negotiate any sorts of mutual defense treaties in which we foot all of the bill and they don't. Show some tough love.

Bruce Thornton --Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow Motion Suicide  
interviewed March 6, 2008

Make them start putting their money where their mouth is if they wanna be a big boy in global politics.

>> Bruce Thornton, thank you very much.

>> Thank you.

>> Bruce Thornton's book, Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow Motion Suicide. I'm Peter Robinson at the Hoover Institution for *Uncommon Knowledge*. Thanks for joining us.