



AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL JOHNSON PAUL JOHNSON

DENNIS PRAGER: Alright, here I am with the great historian Paul Johnson at his home in London and I'm going to ask you a few questions and get your thoughts. First, why do you think religion in Europe has become so unpopular?

PAUL JOHNSON: Well, there is a very big secular movement in Europe -- socialism, social democracy and so on -- however, there are still vast numbers of Christians in Europe -- as well as Jews, of course -- and I don't think religion is dying out there at all. There could well be a religious revival over the next twenty years.

DENNIS PRAGER: If you were to give one powerful argument for being a religious person, as opposed to a secular person, what would it be?

PAUL JOHNSON: If you want to be a happy person, I don't say that being religious will make you happy, but certainly nothing else will. And I think, if you've got a genuine religion of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it enables you to meet misfortune face to face and overcome it, and adapt yourself to it, and to see the brighter side of life.

DENNIS PRAGER: Do you pray?

PAUL JOHNSON: Oh yes, certainly. I always kneel down by my bed before getting into it and I pray for people and all kinds of things. There are about sixty people on my prayer list at the moment.

DENNIS PRAGER: Do you have a favorite book in the Bible?

PAUL JOHNSON: Yes, I think the best book in the Bible is the book of Job and that's a very mysterious book, in some ways. It's well worth reading and rereading because there's all kinds of beautiful things in it, and the story of this unfortunate man and the terrible things that happened to him, and the way he survived over them, and of course it has a happy ending -- the happy ending is least convincing thing in it, actually. But it is a wonderful book.

DENNIS PRAGER: How do you react when an American says that, "America is the last, best hope of humanity", as Lincoln put it, do you think that's arrogant?

PAUL JOHNSON: No, I often say it myself and I think it's true. I don't regard America and England as different countries, I regard them both as family. So anything that's good for America is good for me, as an Englishman. And anything which is bad for America is bad for me, as an Englishman. If America is rich, and happy, and prosperous, and doing the right thing

in the world, then there's no one more delighted than I am.

DENNIS PRAGER: How do you explain anti-Americanism?

PAUL JOHNSON: It's a disease like anti-Semitism. It's an intellectual disease and some of these diseases are impossible to fathom. All one knows is that it can be cured and the best way to cure it is for people to go to America and meet Americans.

DENNIS PRAGER: Do you think there is a great threat today?

PAUL JOHNSON: What I would like to see is the spread of freedom in China because China is becoming a very important force in the world, and it's still run by a very narrowly-based communist dictatorship. They don't believe in communism anymore, (who ever did?), but they believe in retaining power and I would like to see power devolve on the people of China -- because there's nothing wrong with the Chinese people, it's their rulers.

DENNIS PRAGER: What do you know now that you didn't know thirty years ago?

PAUL JOHNSON: I think it is terribly, terribly important to get chronology right. Remember the dates. Fix people with the dates. I think, with a weakness in chronology, it's impossible to write good history.

DENNIS PRAGER: What gave you the most satisfaction in your life?

PAUL JOHNSON: The most satisfaction I've had is being able to conceive, work on, and then write really big books on big subjects. If you set yourself a big subject, and you then have to do careful reading and note-taking, and organizing your thoughts about the subject -- that's the way you really get to know the subject and matches a process of self-education which has gone on all my life. And it still continues and I think learning is the greatest thing in life.

DENNIS PRAGER: If you could talk to the world's youth for a minute, what would you like to say to them?

PAUL JOHNSON: I'd like to say three things: First, never be discouraged if you don't pass the exams and do brilliantly at school. Secondly, always aim high. It doesn't matter what you're doing in life, you always ought to aim high and set yourself the highest possible standards. Thirdly, do the good things in life. Don't waste your time on the mean things. Try and be magnanimous; big-hearted. Those are the three things I would say.

DENNIS PRAGER: Well, it's an honor to be with you. Thank you, Paul Johnson.

PAUL JOHNSON: It's an honor to have you in my house.