

## *From Canada*

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### **JESUS AND JOHN WAYNE:**

***Book review of: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation***<sup>A</sup>

**Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020, 356 pp. Book Review**

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**by Wayne Northey**

*This is a highly disturbing book.*

In an interview with Religion & Politics, the author discusses how she came to its writing:

*Yes! Since about 2010, I had been giving talks on evangelicalism and masculinity and had been approached by publishers, but there were two things at that point that made me a little hesitant to dive into a book project. For one, the things that I was uncovering were very depressing. I wasn't sure that I wanted to live with that for the years that I knew it would take to write a book. For another, I wasn't sure at first how mainstream it all was. As a Christian myself, I wanted to be careful about shining a bright light on this dark underbelly of American Christianity if it was merely a fringe phenomenon . . . However, just before the election, things clicked for me. The Access Hollywood tape came out, white evangelical elites continued to defend Trump, his support among white evangelical voters remained strong, and I thought, "Ugh, I think I know what's going to happen and I think I know why." That's when I pulled some of that old research and wrote "**Donald Trump and Militant Evangelical Masculinity**."*<sup>B</sup>

And then the book published in 2020.

The words "dark underbelly" and "Ugh" hardly begin to express the *blatant evil* majority American White evangelicalism has embraced during the past 50 years that the author uncovers.

This reviewer was 22 years of age 50 years ago, and had been raised in a ("quintessential fundamentalist" – historian Ernest Sandeen in ***The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism***)<sup>C</sup> sect known as *Plymouth or Christian Brethren*. Two years later, under the auspices of a mission arm of said group – *Literature Crusades* (now International Teams)

– I embarked with 12 late-teens-and-20-somethings on a two-year evangelistic gig to West Berlin, Germany. That experience was to change the direction of my life ever after.

Most, if not all, of us felt traumatized during our time there. Several left during the first of our two-year commitment. Five stayed on until the bitter end. Only two of us debriefed enroute home at their Headquarters in Prospect Heights, Illinois, so disgusted by the (lack of) leadership. There I felt unheard and rebuffed. One of us in West Berlin developed promiscuous sexual behaviour and later died of AIDS. One of two couples fled home the moment they had pregnancy complications: their free ticket out. The other newly-wed couple told me later that their marriage nearly broke up during those years. The other two teams sent out at the same time were (mostly) recalled home within a year.

I worked through my ordeal in part by writing a novel about it. You may read more here: *Chrysalis Crucible*<sup>D</sup>. Though all but its situational scaffolding is fictitious, the ethos of the struggle and sense of betrayal is accurately captured. After I left I spent two months decompressing at two *L'Abri* (founded by Francis and Edith Schaeffer) locations in Europe. I could not return home until I'd better regained a sense of what had happened. Truth told: my dogmatic fundamentalist self was part of the problem! – still is at times ... Then I spent two years at Regent College, Vancouver Canada, still trying to come to terms with the ordeal. For me, something was rotten in the state of white evangelicalism (whose books I had devoured, my favourite author overall, disgraced Francis Schaeffer<sup>1</sup> back then – just as the present author's tale begins.

The much younger author begins with her own experience of being raised in a Christian Reformed, fundamentalist environment: a Trump rally in 2016 at Dordt College, Sioux Center Iowa. As she mused on the white evangelical enthusiastic embrace of the man she mused:

How could evangelicals who'd turned WWJD ("What Would Jesus Do?") into a national phenomenon justify their support for a man who seemed the very antithesis of the savior they claimed to emulate? (p. 3)

Pundits trying to explain the sick phenomenon largely had failed to catch that this was culmination of embrace of "militant masculinity"<sup>2</sup>, such that by the advent of Trump as a conservative white evangelical saviour, every Christian privileging of humility had been banished, in favour of emulating ...the Jesus of the Gospels [as] a vengeful warrior Christ.

Du Mez further avers that:

Donald Trump did not trigger this militant turn; his rise was symptomatic of a long-standing condition. (p. 3)

Therefore,

For evangelicals, domestic and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin, Christian nationalism-the belief that America is God's chosen nation and must be defended as such – serves as a powerful predictor of intolerance towards immigrants, racial minorities, and non-Christians. (p. 4)

The author draws on the American National Association of Evangelicals to name the (theoretical) four distinctives of Evangelical theological belief:

- the Bible as one's ultimate authority
- the centrality of Christ's atonement
- belief in a born-again conversion experience
- active work to spread this good news and reform society accordingly. (p. 5)

She however questions that these theological assertions are primary in American evangelicalism. Rather, one is counted as (American) evangelical if one:

- watches Fox News
- considers oneself religious
- votes Republican (p. 6).

Interestingly, only 25% of African Americans who subscribe to the theological points above consider themselves evangelicals. Rather, they see white evangelicalism of that sort as strictly a white man's religion, For conservative white evangelicals, the "good news" of the Christian gospel has become inextricably linked to a staunch commitment to patriarchal authority, gender difference, and Christian nationalism, and all of these are intertwined with white racial identity." (pp. 6 & 7)

Du Mez says therefore that these distinctives cut across a range of sociological divides, whereby white evangelicalism

"has become a polarizing force in American politics and society" (p. 7)

In white evangelicalism's offering certainty in times of social change – overwhelmingly so during this pandemic as I write – promising security against external global enemies, affirmation of the moral superiority of a white "Christian" America, conservative evangelicalism has captured/ dominated the imagination of a broad swath of American Christians.

We read:

Yet the power of conservative white evangelicalism is apparent both in the size of its market share and its influence over religious distribution channels. As a diffuse movement, evangelicalism lacks clear institutional authority structures, but the evangelical marketplace itself helps define who is inside and who is outside the fold. (p. 9)

In essence therefore, being “conservative evangelical” “is as much about culture as it is about theology.” (p. 9) And therein lies its execrable shadow cast over American culture. Ironically, while spending two years in the early 1970s in Germany doing “evangelism”, a theological student once rightly challenged me: “Can any good thing come out of [American white evangelicalism]?” I had been citing Francis Schaeffer. I was deeply offended at the time. I long since have been disabused of taking offence. On the contrary! This book meticulously explains why; also developed in the coming-of-age fictional novel mentioned above. (I have no way of thanking that theologian nearly 50 years later! Too bad. Just in case though: huge thanks! You got me thinking ...)

Du Mez states that many militant American heroes (William Wallace, Teddy Roosevelt, Generals Douglas MacArthur and George S. Patton – and (only an) actor, John Wayne)

came to define not only Christian manhood but Christianity itself. But these ideal men’s Real Men stretch back much further in American history [more on this from me below]; but coalesced around the rise of evangelist Billy Graham in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>3</sup> It also coalesced around “family values” politics, but family values were always intertwined with ideas about sex, power, race, and nation. (p. 12).

Patriarchy therefore was not only a rallying cry for the family but as much for the nation. When in the 1980s evangelicals began to be a political force, mobilization was enormously effective due to decades of cultural formation through vast distribution networks of books, audiovisuals, and star performers from Billy Graham to Pat Boone to Roy and Dale Rogers to ... You meet many many more along the way in du Mez’ book. For one who grew up within it (though also somewhat removed as a (nonetheless white male) Canadian), the back story of so many evangelical leaders was fascinating – and profoundly disturbing!

The author captures the quintessential patriarchy of all this thus:

For decades to come, militant masculinity (and a sweet, submissive femininity) would remain entrenched in the evangelical imagination, shaping conceptions of what was good and true. (p. 12)

It was also, ironically enough, “hand in hand with a culture of fear:...(p. 12), in particular *vis à vis* communism. The author further develops this as the earlier threat morphed to one of a shifting American culture away from “traditional Christian values”. The likes of James Dobson, Bill Gothard, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Mark Driscoll, Franklin Graham, and countless lesser knowns stoked fears of feminists, liberals, secular humanists, homosexuals, the United Nations, big government, Muslims, immigrants – with Trump a kind of apotheosis of all that ugliness and so much more. But du Mez forebodes that it did not begin with Trump, nor will it end with him off the world stage. (To which I say for the umpteenth time: *How long O Lord?*, and *Lord, have mercy!*)

The above was from the Introduction. The remainder of this well-researched book gives the details. But I pause. Many of the youth I grew up with followed Charles Templeton at least in their rejection of, or simply drifting away from, Christian faith. I consider that as tragic as my (only) surmising that more people have been turned away by preaching a hell of eternal conscious torment than have ever been won to an authentic faith by any kind of preaching. A perusal of some of my *website posts*<sup>E</sup> about hell expatiates on that.

In my novel for instance, at a moment of searing enlightenment, after longstanding wrestling with telling others of the dangers of hell if they do not accept Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour, we read about protagonist Andy:

The parallels overwhelmed. *God is Hitler. The ovens are God's specially built chambers of eternal conscious torment*, to which human victims by the multiplied billions are fed ... Jesus the Jilted Lover, whose cry of wrath echoes throughout the Corrupted Cosmos. Only unlike Daniel and his companions in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, these victims would experience the full suffering of the oven for ever and ever, God be praised, amen! For there even the worm “dieth not.” This was Christendom's “god.” This was Evangelicals' hell. This was what Billy Graham warned his listeners about... This was the deep dark open secret about ... Evangelicals' “God who loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

.....

“Open House at Adolf Hitler’s today. Come, get to know him, whom to know is to love,” the personal invitations all read ... The small print reads, “But we’re constrained to say: If you turn down the invitation today, tomorrow it’s into the ovens. Sorry. ‘His mercy lasts for a moment ...but his wrath is everlasting.’ Have a nice day and a bright forever – though it may not be quite the kind of ‘brightness’ you imagined...”

The rest of du Mez’ book fills in the details of this tragic story. There is so much insightful detail that I’ll try not to summarize so much as highlight.

The author claims that early in the 20th century, a rugged American masculinity united northern and southern white men and transformed American Christianity.

First, as mentioned, the post-War emergence of Billy Graham unified a rather disparate and, since the Scopes Monkey Trial in the late 1920s, marginalized/despised Fundamentalism, that morphed into a rebranded “Evangelicalism”. Already by then, it was turning towards a “more militant – and militaristic – model of masculinity” ... (p. 23); and “Graham preached a gospel of heroic [idolatrous] Christian nationalism” ... (p. 25). Through the electrifying conversion of cowboy singer Stuart Hamblen, the American white man’s nostalgia for frontier America where the white man rode tall in the saddle was:

channelled into a powerful new religious and cultural identity, an identity [a few decades later] harnessed for political ends. (p. 28).

With others such as Pat Boone, second in popularity in America only to Elvis Presley, Graham spearheaded a vibrant entrepreneurial media empire that spawned a vast religious consumer culture; one in which singers, actors, authors, popular pastors and revivalists both reflected and shaped a larger-than-life generic evangelical culture that transcended denominational lines

Enter then actor John Wayne, in 1949 America’s most celebrated thespian. Thrice married, twice divorced, highly sensationalized affairs, hard-drinking, chain-smoking, no “born-again” experience,

Wayne would capture the hearts and imaginations of American evangelicals. The affinity was based not on theology [or Christian morality!], but rather on a shared masculine ideal.

.....

Wayne’s embodiment of heroic masculinity would come to serve as the touchstone for authentic Christian manhood. (pp. 31, 32)

By the beginning of the 1960s, rising evangelical Christian nationalism had taken a decisive militaristic turn: never to look back! And evangelicals had become thoroughly ensconced within the political and cultural mainstream of the nation – their highest aspiration.

But as civil rights activism arose under the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964,

Many evangelicals, too, found it hard to accept that the sin of racism ran deep through the nation's history. To concede this seemed unpatriotic. Having embraced the idea of America as a "Christian nation," it was hard to accept a critique of the nation as fundamental as that advanced by the civil rights movement. (p. 38)

It still is.

Du Mez writes tellingly:

Invariably, however, the heroic Christian man was a white man, and not infrequently a white man who defended against the threat of nonwhite men and foreigners. (p. 39)

Very quickly in the 1960s, no small help from Graham, white evangelicals transferred allegiance to the Republican Party, where it has remained ever since. And while the Viet Nam War fully supported by the GOP

demolished myths of American greatness and goodness[,]  
American power [more widely] came to be viewed with suspicion, if not revulsion, and a pervasive antimilitarism took hold ... ,  
Evangelicals, however, drew the opposite lesson: it was the absence of American power that led to catastrophe ... With the fate of the nation hanging in the balance, conservative evangelicals "assumed the role of the church militant." (p. 50)

Graham himself in 1969 sent a thirteen-page letter to President Nixon advocating possibly bombing the extensive dikes of North Vietnam to bring that economy to a halt, potentially as well thereby killing as many as a million civilians (Nixon's estimate). See on this: ***When Billy Graham Planned To Kill One Million People.***<sup>F</sup>

In American white evangelical Christianity throughout the last half of last century iconically represented by Billy Graham, the Cross is invariably *unsheathed* (as opposed to: "When Jesus told Peter to 'put up your sword' he thereby disarmed the Church forever" – Tertullian), *brandished then worldwide*, throughout the so-called post-War "American Century" (*but ...*)<sup>F</sup>, and exchanged for an idolatrous "Christian" Nationalism.<sup>4</sup>

In 1972, Billy Graham was awarded by West Point Academy its Sylvanus Thayer Award for a citizen “who exhibits the ideals of ‘Duty, Honor, Country’”. *Cross and Flag* thereby representatively in Graham met and kissed (to purposely *mis-paraphrase/travestize*” Psalm 85:10), and amongst white American evangelicals that union has remained solidly in place.

A much smaller evangelical Left remonstrated to be sure, sharing as it did the same evangelical heritage and theology, but was hugely marginalized in white evangelical America that increasingly embraced, ironically, non-evangelical, even secular, conservatism. And John Wayne became ultimate manifestation of rugged Christian masculinity. Wayne was:

- virulently imperialist
- in favour of a realized masculinity through violence
- embodiment of a white male ideal: “I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated to a point of responsibility. I don’t believe in giving authority and positions of leadership and judgment to irresponsible people.” – John Wayne, *Playboy*, 1971 (quoted on p. 57) Similar attitudes were exhibited towards Native Americans.
- a model of “masculine strength, aggression, and redemptive violence”
- one who “will save your ass”, or “In the words of Baptist scholar Alan Bean, the unspoken mantra of post-war evangelicalism was simple: Jesus can save your soul; but John Wayne will save your ass.” (p. 59)

There you have it: *Jesus and John Wayne* – evangelical saviours in tandem ...

As one progresses from chapter to chapter, one encounters multiple players such as anit-feminists (evangelicals) Marabel Morgan and Elizabeth Elliot, and (Catholic) Phyllis Schlafly; evangelicals Bill Gothard and James Dobson; Timothy and Beverly LaHaye (Timothy author of over 85 books, some co-authored including the *Left Behind Series* that has sold over 75 million copies). In LaHaye’s writings, there was denounced

abortion-on-demand, legalization of homosexual rights . . . the size and power of big government, elimination of capital punishment, national disarmament, increased taxes, women in combat, passage of ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], unnecessary busing [to white schools].” For LaHaye, these were all facets of the same [liberal, humanist] project. (p. 93)

LaHaye was inspired by Christian Reconstructionism (R. J. Rushdoony), and worked tirelessly to build the Christian Right as an organized political powerhouse. LaHaye shared and echoed many similar themes as Jerry



Falwell, who in 1979 launched the “Moral Majority” , and embraced overt political activism – and militarism. He went on also to found the very conservative Liberty University.

Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan in 1980 thrilled the Religious Right with his classically sycophantic:

“I know that you can’t endorse me. But I want you to know that I endorse you and your program.” (quoted on p. 103)

Many said that was “the moment the Christian Right came into its own” . (p. 106) From Reagan on, no Democrat has ever won majority white evangelical approval. The Republican Party had become the party of conservatives, traditionalists – and segregationists.

The author delves in some detail into this Reagan-era white evangelical ascendancy, discussing for instance (white evangelical) Oliver North’s illegal diversion of money towards support of the Nicaraguan Contras, and eventually lying to Congress. The lesson learned from this was the end justifies the means: Oliver North is his illegal activities and lies; ruthless take-over by conservatives of the Southern Baptist Convention, etc. Du Mez writes:

Like North, conservative evangelicals defined the greater good in terms of Christian nationalism. It was this conflation of God and country that heroic Christian men would advance zealously, and by any means necessary, with their resurgent religious and political power. (p. 117)

And for North, he enjoyed a season of “*Olliemanía*”: notwithstanding his crimes and lies. Is it any surprise that the Religious Right similarly gives Trump multitudes of “Get Out of Jail Free/We’ll Look the Other Way” cards?

For majority white evangelicalism, “to be Christlike, to be a man, required ‘a certain ruthlessness’ . (p. 125) As well, charted by du Mez, it seemed also to indulge sex scandals amongst its white male leadership. She summarizes:

Sex, church secretaries, fraud, intrigue, prostitution, conspicuous consumption of the most tawdry sort – the revelations tarnished the image of evangelicalism generally, revealing the dark side of a religious movement driven by celebrity. (p. 127)

And evangelical ruthlessness became widely transferred to the military through James Dobson. Military personnel were fully embraced, rendering it beyond critique, supplying war a moral bearing as well. Jesus may have taught followers to “love their enemies” – but not *His* enemies! Pre-emptive, crusading war was in fact called for; the ends again justifying the means.

Enter a towering crusader, Pat Robertson, who, despite lies to cover up that his wife had been seven months pregnant when they married, and that his Senator dad had pulled strings to keep him out of Vietnam, Robertson espoused militarism to rout godless communists, support the Contras, and generally prosecute a Christian crusade through his Christian Broadcasting Network.

Under Pat Buchanan, the Religious Right launched a war for the soul of America: an internal cultural war as critical as the Cold War. Later, Fox News quickly became the new conservative kid on the media block, eventually rendering white evangelicalism and that “news” channel inseparable. White evangelicals embraced the culture wars with full-scale hateful gusto.

In 1997, Promise Keepers burst onto the white evangelical scene. White evangelical leadership piled on in support of this seeming apolitical movement. However,

“To critics, Promise Keepers simply marketed ‘male supremacy with a beatific smile.’ ” (p. 154);

something even more insidious than a straight-up domination play. Eventually the “soft patriarchy” of the movement led to its decline just a few years after surfacing. Its lasting legacy however was a huge market spawned for endless publications on Christian masculinity. The author discusses several such instances.

An evangelical purity movement also arose, led by pseudo-intellectual Josh McDowell. A bestseller was written by twenty-one-year-old Josh Harris. It too enabled reassertion of patriarchal authority. (Twenty years later, older and wiser, he asked his publisher to withdraw it.)

In 2001 John Eldridge published a runaway bestseller: *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*. Masculinity in his Christian worldview was thoroughly militaristic. It germinated multiple copycats, and helped frame for years white evangelical perceptions of masculinity.

In her chapter titled “Holy Balls” , we meet a continuing array of kick-ass white evangelical types embracing an array of “militant masculine” pursuits, including Christian mixed martial arts with hundreds of engaged churches/ministries; a continuing militantly patriarchal Christian Homeschool movement; elevation of Robert Lewis Dabney, a Christian Reconstructionist original who amongst other despicables was pro-slavery; Patrick Henry College for the homeschooled training students for high government positions; Vision Forum that fed hypermasculinity and authoritarianism; pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill notoriety, whose “gospel” was infused

with militant masculinity and products like his 2008 Porn-again Christian, and saying God created women to be “penis-homes” for lonely penises, etc. ad nauseum. The likes of John Piper, Tim Keller, D.A. Carson, Albert Mohler, Josh Harris, C.J. Mahaney, Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Denny Burk, Justin Taylor all embraced a “New Calvinism” that Time magazine in 2009 dubbed one of the 10 ideas changing the world right then.

”Biblical hatred” towards slavery abolitionists reflected militant masculinity that painted past slave-owners as genteel brothers in Christ. Almost incestuous cross-pollination of white evangelical leaders smoothed over doctrinal differences

in the interest of promoting ‘watershed issues’ like complementarianism, the prohibition of homosexuality, the existence of hell, substitutionary atonement. Most foundationally, they were united in a mutual commitment to patriarchal power. (p. 204)

White militant evangelicalism became entrenched in Colorado Springs, expanding simultaneously with the growth of the military in the region: eventually housing three air force bases, an army fort, and the North American Defence Command. A huge array of evangelical colleges, churches, ministries (nearly 100), nonprofits and businesses arose. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family relocated there, and soon Dobson had resigned from it to engage in right wing political exploits directly. He did so with gusto, wielding enormous political influence, though largely unknown outside those circles

New Life Church under Tim Haggard also flourished, becoming a hotbed of militant evangelicalism. Together with Dobson, they worked hard – and successfully – to spread their militant faith throughout the U.S. military.

In the aftermath of 9/11, “Muslims” became equivalent to “Evil Empire”. Christian Zionism similarly was on the rise. Jerry Falwell caused international furor when he claimed, “I think Mohammed was a terrorist”. The Caner brothers, Ergun and Emir, became the toast of the white evangelical circuit with their books, speaking engagements and academic postings denouncing Islam. They were the vanguard of Islamophobia – from within. The only problem, much of their claims constituted a pack of lies. Others such as Walid Shoebat, Zachariah Anani, and Kamal Saleem became travelling anti-Muslim evangelists – as well master tall-tale spinners. They also were the toast of white evangelicalism. Their ex-terrorist stories were however full of holes others exposed

Du Mez observes that why these liars were so successful in such circles was the politics of fear they stoked. She writes:

It's not hard to see what this titillating narrative of imagined violence got the "ex-terrorists." They sold books, collected speaking fees, and padded their own pockets. But what did it do for evangelicals who promoted their books, engaged them as speakers, and gave them a platform? (p. 225)

Stoking such fears played into the hands of their handlers/promoters: white evangelical leaders. They "ratcheted up a sense of threat" as both reflective of, and contributor to, militarized masculinity; one largely informed by fear.

By inciting fears of an Islamic threat, men like Falwell, Patterson, Vines, and Dobson heightened the value of the "protection" they promised – and with it, their own power. (p. 226)

Thankfully other white evangelical leaders such as Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, David Neff, Brian McLaren, Jim Wallis and Richard Mouw – about 300 leaders in all – signed the "Yale Letter" and published it in the New York Times, calling on Christians and Muslims to work together for peace.

Du Mez observes:

The widespread embrace of a militant Christian nationalism would have far-reaching consequences in the age of terror. (p. 227)

Such webs of lies once embraced predisposed majority white evangelicalism to being anti-Islam due to its (believed) promotion of violence. They were also pro-torture of suspected terrorists – more than any other demographic in America.

Deranged actors like Lt. Gen. William G. (Jerry) Boykin worked the evangelical circuit in support of Bush's War on Terror, and zealously pursued the no-holds-barred carte blanche Bush had given Donald Rumsfeld in response to 9/11. Boykin cast the matter as an epic struggle between Satan and "Christian" America. He also pursued evading the Geneva Conventions in favour of his own notions of (violent) biblical law. He saw himself as placed in God's direct chain of command, President Bush likewise, and therefore with the highest authorization to root out evildoers. He also oversaw the torture horrors at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. Etc., etc

Other neocons, not necessarily evangelical, also promoted the military as exemplars of the highest ideals of the nation. War provided Americans "moral clarity". Du Mez:

With evangelicals in the vanguard, Americans had come to see the military as a bastion of “traditional values and old-fashioned virtue,” a view only possible by turning a blind eye to reports of military misconduct and sexual abuse within its ranks. (p. 231)

In 2010 theologian Wayne Grudem published *Politics – According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. It was a conservative diatribe against not only the likes of President Obama who had been elected in 2008, it was against all the evangelical right’s favourite targets as well.

Eric Metaxas emerged as a new voice in support of militant Christian masculinity, launching, in 2015, *The Eric Metaxas Show*. A 2013 book defined what a man was and what made him great by pointing to none other than John Wayne as the “icon of manhood and manliness”.

The *Duck Dynasty* TV show debuted in 2013 as well, that upheld all the white evangelical values. It blossomed into a gigantic financial success.

Then John McDougall published *Jesus Was an Airborne Ranger: Find your Purpose Following the Warrior Christ*. Jesus was also a (Made-in-America) *bad-ass*. He declared you can’t spell “Ranger” without the word “anger”. Du Mez comments it was claimed that:

Both Christian theology and “this constitutional republic” reserved “a high and honored place for the warrior.” (p. 248)

Then in 2015 along came Trump, seemingly out of nowhere. This is described in a chapter titled “A New High Priest”. *But not in fact out of nowhere* – far from it! In du Mez’ understanding, Religious Right Leadership for fifty years had been stoking fears and pitching white-supremacy American exceptionalism that had its climax (*orgasm* even more appropriately dubbed) in Trump. His religious biographers claim he was “the ultimate fighting champion for evangelicals.” (p. 253) The Ultimate Ugly American too. The Ultimate American Evil-Doer too.

Du Mez writes forcefully:

Journalists struggled to explain the baffling phenomenon of evangelical support for “the brash Manhattan billionaire” who seemed to stand for everything they despised. What could compel “family values” evangelicals to flock to this “immodest, arrogant, foul-mouthed, money-obsessed, thrice married [like John Wayne], and until recently, pro-choice” candidate? (p. 254)

Bottom line: not unlike Reagan before him “believing in them” , bottom line: Trump would “protect them” . Jerry Falwell Jr. and Robert Jeffress were the first big-name evangelical endorsers. Trump like Wayne was also an unapologetic racist. Evangelicals like Russell Moore spoke out against Trump, but others like Wayne Grudem claimed Trump – and a gaggle of sycophants with him – to be a “morally good choice” . Eric Metaxas hailed Trump as a great leader, seeing no connection at all with Hitler. Though Metaxas had been a (seriously distorted – yes, I read it) Dietrich Bonhoeffer biographer.

Catholic anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly penned her final book: *The Conservative Case for Trump*.

Du Mez understates:

Remarkably, Trump had become the standard-bearer of the Christian Right. (p. 263)

Even the infamous *Access Hollywood* video where Trump acknowledged sexual abuse of women did not cause most white evangelical Christians to miss a beat. However Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of Wheaton’s Billy Graham Center declared:

If you find that you have overlooked or dismissed many of the morals and values that you have held dear in the past, then it just may be that your character has been Trumped. (p. 265)

As it turned out, 81% of white evangelicals had indeed been Trumped, as gleaned in the 2016 Elections exit polls. Sadly too, some like Russell Moore recanted, to stay in the fold. *The Faith of Donald J. Trump: A Spiritual Biography* was subsequently released to try to bolster Trump’s evangelical credentials, one du Mez considered done by authors who went to no small creative lengths to pretty up the Trump (non)evangelical stench.

Du Mez tellingly writes:

Evangelicals hadn’t betrayed their values. Donald Trump was the culmination of their half-century-long pursuit of a militant Christian masculinity. He was the reincarnation of John Wayne, sitting tall in the saddle, a man who wasn’t afraid to resort to violence to bring order, who protected those deemed worthy of protection, who wouldn’t let political correctness get in the way of saying what had to be said or the norms of democratic society keep him from doing what had to be done. Unencumbered by traditional Christian virtue, he was a warrior in the tradition (if not the actual physical form) of

Mel Gibson's William Wallace. He was a hero for God-and-country Christians in the line of Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan and Oliver North, one suited for Duck Dynasty Americans and American Christians. He was the latest and greatest high priest of the evangelical cult of masculinity. (p. 271)

Trump in his own right spawned a *massive cult following*<sup>H</sup>, majority amongst them, white evangelical Americans.

Then ... several white evangelical leaders began experiencing falls from grace, including Mark Driscoll, C. J. Mahaney, Darrin Patrick, John MacArthur, James MacDonald. White men who preached militant masculinity, patriarchal authority, female purity and submission were repeatedly caught abusing women, or supporting those who had. Du Mez explains however that ... evangelical family values have always entailed assumptions about sex and power. (p. 277)

She adds a little later:

Immersed in these teachings about sex and power, evangelicals are often unable or unwilling to name abuse, to believe women, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to protect and empower survivors. (p. 278)

Then there were the multiple sex scandals discussed in the penultimate chapter titled: "Evangelical Mulligans: A history." One of the first (in 2006) was Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church, a megachurch in Colorado Springs. A host of white evangelicals immediately jumped to his defence. Pete Newman of Kanakuk Kamps is serving two life sentences for his serial molestation of boys. C. J. Mahaney of Sovereign Grace Ministries, who had already fallen once from grace and later had been reinstated, had a pall of suspicion cast over him for his enabling of multiple sexual abuses at the church. Only a statute of limitation prevented him from being prosecuted.

In 2014, Bill Gothard stepped down from his Institute of Basic Life Principles after more than 30 accusers, some minors, reported molestation and sexual harassment. Doug Phillips stepped down from his Vision Forum Ministries after a lengthy extramarital affair. It was all indeed a series of very sordid affairs ... Others such as Josh Duggar of the TV reality show *19 Kids and Counting* molested four of his sisters. Father and son Jack and Dave Hyles, the father a pastor in the Independent Fundamental Baptist movement, were involved in molestation of women. The replacement pastor after the father's death was Jack Schaap. A cult like culture of sexual abuse was eventually discovered, including pedophilia, sexual molestation, rape, and the abuse of children.

Then when the #MeToo movement came to American evangelicalism, Andy Savage of a Memphis megachurch admitted to sexual assault of a former teen while he was youth minister. He eventually resigned. Then Bill Hybels of Willow Creek megachurch fame (and multiple copycats) had seven women come forward accusing him of sexual misconduct and abuse of power.

At least 187 Independent Baptist Churches were caught up in allegations of sexual misconduct.

Then the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was hit by allegations of covering up sexual abuse and of sexual abuse, implicating highly-placed ministers Paige Patterson and Darrell Gilyard. Further extensive patterns of sexual abuse by as many as 380 perpetrators with at least 700 victims came to light within the SBC.

A veritable volcanic eruption of sexual abuse cases was engulfing white evangelical churches.

A “mulligan” in golf is another chance at a flubbed shot. White evangelicalism was positively rife with the phenomenon – *redemption however absent confession, repentance, making amends, and commitment to “go and sin no more.”* The penultimate chapter is powerful understatement of the travesty of white evangelical mulligans offered as cover and cover-up ubiquitously within a culture of sick militant Christian masculinity.

Du Mez makes clear again in the final chapter that

...evangelicalism must be seen as a cultural and political movement rather than as a community defined chiefly by its theology. (p. 298)

For all Billy Graham’s iconic thundering “*The Bible Says!....*” fifty years ago, indeed fully 70 plus years earlier, “*frankly Scarlet (and Franklin – and a vast array of others of your ilk), white American evangelicals don’t give a damn ...*” Theirs is a ***studied footnote, exception clause (“except our enemies”) theology***<sup>1</sup> in response to John 3:16 that à la W.C. Fields has ever sought and come up with “the loopholes.” *Seek and ye shall find, indeed.*

Du Mez comments near the book’s end:

For many evangelicals, the masculine values men like John Wayne, William Wallace, Ronald Reagan, Rush Limbaugh, Jordan Peterson and Donald Trump embody have come to define evangelicalism itself. (p. 301)



The author ends on a hopeful though tenuous note:

What was once done might also be undone. (p. 304)

*Personal Commentary*

The above story is one of great malaise and evil-doing within white American evangelicalism. “Evangelical” in name, the author repeatedly points out that such white evangelicals largely showed little allegiance to the Jesus of the Gospels, rather to a Jesus of hyped-up toxic masculinity. Which came first in importance: Jesus of the Gospels or a culture of fear à la “Jesus” of toxic masculinity – *without reference to the Gospels*? If you have read this far, you know the author’s answer.

Still, the book would not have been written had the author not become convinced that this “Jesus” had gone mainstream. Crawling through the venomous swamps of such evangelical landscapes, du Mez indicated, as we saw, that she had not wished to do such research if it represented only a kind of lunatic fringe. In fact, the fringe repeatedly became the mainstream, as so often is the case in any kind of extremism.

Reading the book, then writing a detailed book report produced in me repeated profound revulsion. In part, this must be due to my own growing up white evangelical – albeit Canadian – but well within the gravitational pull of the elephant on Turtle Island to the south. It also occasioned the general observation that **kick-ass Christianity ineluctably only served to produce an endless crop of buffoonish jackasses à la Trump**. But not just buffoons to be laughed off the stage. Rather, sick puppies capable of doing/guilty of perpetrating profound evil not just within their own tribe, but to America, by extension the world.

Though details and interpretation can no doubt be disputed, du Mez has produced a superbly researched study, and more so, one with great wisdom to heed.

I write this November 3, 2020. At the end of this day, will there (again) be horrified gasp, or (supercharged) relieved exhalation? For Trump not only *did not* “drain the swamp”, he engulfed rather America and the world in a vile tsunami of toxic quagmire filth that I in my nearly seventy-two years never before even came close to experiencing. As many have indicated: ***Trump not once properly responded to the pandemic; he was rather a whole pandemic of the first order unto himself, one for five years foisted upon America and the world.***

In *Less Than Conquerors: The Evangelical Quest for Power in the Early Twentieth Century*<sup>1</sup> (former subtitle: *How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*), theologian Douglas W. Frank tells the back story to du Mez' back story. Though details and players differ, it's really the same sad tale. In the second last paragraph of the book, Frank writes:

Whether in auspicious or declining times, as we have seen, we [evangelicals] display a tenacious commitment to self-deceit. It is true that we are those who like to think we heed Jeremiah's words: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." Our history, however, gives evidence rather of Jeremiah's wisdom in adding these words: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:7, 9). In our very protests of trust in the Lord, we find occasion for our deepest self-deceits. (p. 278)

These identical words could sum up the book under review.

In *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*,<sup>k</sup> authors Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence also present a masterful study along similar lines to the above. They however take us to the back story behind the above-noted two back stories, all the way to the War of Independence and the Founding Fathers.

The authors state that there is deep biblical rootedness in two contradictory strands of American culture, evident from the beginning. "The first tradition is what we call *zealous nationalism*. It seeks to redeem the world by destroying enemies (p. 8)." They point out:

The phenomenon of zeal itself provides a fascinating access to the inner workings of our national psyche: the term itself, as we shall see, is the biblical and cultural counterpart of the Islamic term *jihad* (p. 8)."

Then,

Alongside *zealous nationalism* runs the tradition of *prophetic realism*. It avoids taking the stances of complete innocence and selflessness. It seeks to redeem the world for coexistence by impartial justice that claims no favoured status for individual nations (p. 8)."

No "American exceptionalism" in other words, a term first coined by French American cultural observer Alexis de Tocqueville.

The authors acknowledge that these two strands have coexisted in "uneasy wedlock" in earlier times, but in a time of worldwide militant jihad, zealous nationalism everywhere must be let die.

Our conclusions are that prophetic realism alone should guide an effective response to terrorism and lead us to resolve zealous nationalist conflicts through submission to international law; and that the crusades inspired by zealous nationalism are inherently destructive, not only of the American prospect but of the world itself (p. 9).

All these authors write from within American evangelicalism. All make meticulously researched, compelling, cases. *All in their conclusions are ignored by the vast swath of white American evangelicals...*

I once gave a lecture to all first-year students at Regent College, a seminary affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Canada; one of evangelicalism's academic finest. The topic was a nonviolent reading of the atonement. An expanded version may be found here, titled: ***“The Cross: God’s Peace Work – Towards a Restorative Peacemaking Understanding of the Atonement”***<sup>L</sup>; a chapter also in Volume One of ***Justice That Transforms***;<sup>M</sup> and in ***Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ***.<sup>N</sup> Two Regent profs gave responses. The moment they each pegged the lecture to be merely a subset of pacifism, it was written off ...

If Jewett and Lawrence are right that (white evangelical) American zealous nationalism is “the biblical and cultural counterpart of the Islamic term jihad”; if Frank is right that (slightly changed) “In white American evangelicals’ very protests of trust in the Lord, they find occasion for their deepest self-deceits.”, then perhaps those Regent profs, and a vast array of (white) North American evangelicals, in light of the book reviewed and the other two cited, should be enjoined to think again – *just a little bit harder*. Indeed, *think again – for the very first time...*

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## References

- 1 See my book review of: Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America.
- 2 With an attendant “militarized capitalism” – see *Bully Nation: How the American Establishment Creates a Bullying Society* – though this phenomenon is most pronounced in America, it is ever present in the West and beyond.
- 3 Billy Graham in my novel is the iconic “white male evangelical” who profoundly distorted Christianity and Jesus – to a point beyond recognition by the novel’s protagonist, Andy. This dawning realization was part of his coming of age. Personally for this reviewer, Billy Graham in my formative years was the ultimate evangelical ideal for my parents and church – and me. Canadian Charles Templeton however, an early crusader with Graham was a disturbing defector from this near idolization. For Templeton’s part, he became part of the anti-Christian liberal Canadian Establishment. Though unlike Andy in my novel, Templeton fully exited the tradition, and describes this in *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.
- 4 For a sophisticated (no less sycophantic) Christian apologia for such, please see Jean Bethke Ehlstain’s book, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World*, reviewed by me here.

## Internet Links

- A. <https://www.amazon.ca/Jesus-John-Wayne-Evangelicals-Corrupted/dp/163149905X>
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- N. <https://www.amazon.ca/Stricken-God-Nonviolent-Identification-Victory/dp/080286287X>