

## **Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”**

**Hosts:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

**Episode 35 — Guest:** Kristen Kobes DuMez

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Eric Schumacher 0:06

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations, with women and men, on the value of women in the church, home and society. We will not always agree on everything, but we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Welcome to the Worthy podcast. This is Eric Schumacher, and I'm here with my co-host, Elyse Fitzpatrick. And I looked up co-belligerent, which is what she keeps calling me in her introduction of the podcast and I figured out what that means.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:21

It's a good thing!

Eric Schumacher 1:22

And I think I'm honored. Yeah. So, how are you doing today, Elyse?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:30

I'm good. Thanks, Eric, my co-belligerent.

Eric Schumacher 1:33

Yes, yeah. Well, I'm excited about today's podcast. We're gonna be talking about Jesus and John Wayne. So do you think I should do this in a cowboy accent?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:45

Listen to me. When Eric first told me I needed to read this book, "Jesus and John Wayne," I'm thinking he's kidding, or something. And then what I said was, my husband Phil loves the Duke. Okay, I should show you he has an actual statue of the Duke on his desk that our daughter, Jessica, gave him for Christmas one year. She found it at the Salvation Army or something, and she thought it would be funny. And he kept it. So there you go.

Eric Schumacher 2:17

Well, there we go. And he also loves Jesus.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:20

He does.

Eric Schumacher 2:21

Yeah, that's important to add

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:22

And he loves me too, which, yeah.

Eric Schumacher 2:24

So listen here a little lady. No, we won't do that.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 2:29

No, please don't.

Eric Schumacher 2:29

So, our guest today is Dr. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and she is a professor of History, Gender Studies and Urban Studies at Calvin University. Is that right, Kristin? Calvin University?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 2:43

It is, absolutely.

Eric Schumacher 2:43

All right. And she has a BA in History and German from Dordt College, which is in the great state of Iowa, which is where I'm sitting right now just a few hours away from Dordt. And Kristin, you are an Iowa native, is that right?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 3:00

I am, yes. Born in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Eric Schumacher 3:03

All right. So the Iowans outnumber the Californian today. This is very good. So she also has a PhD in American History with specialties in Women's History and Religious History at the University of Notre Dame, which I think means that, Elyse, this is another one of these episodes where our guest is smarter than both of us combined.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:28

She's a certified smart person.

Eric Schumacher 3:31

Yeah, we like having them on because, they can just answer questions, and we can sit back and listen and learn.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 3:37

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 3:38

She also enjoys working with students on historical walking tours, and that includes a historical walking tour of beer in Grand Rapids. Is that right?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 3:50

It is, it is yeah, you can look it up on the app, GR Walks, and take it virtually or in person.

Eric Schumacher 3:56

Okay, so there you go. I think this is the first person on the podcast who's led a historical beer walk.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 4:02

It should be a thing. It should be more of a thing. It should be more of a thing.

Eric Schumacher 4:05

Yes. Well, it's better than a beer drive. I suppose.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 4:09

Exactly, that's what we thought.

Eric Schumacher 4:11

Yeah. So responsible there. We are really excited to have Kristin on the show with us today. Both Elyse and I have read her latest book, which is "Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation." And so I'm not sure where--I think I saw this on Facebook. Someone posted this, and I thought that sounds really interesting. And it examines evangelical views of masculinity from the Cold War, up to the president--up, up to the present--and the president--

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 4:48

Both.

Eric Schumacher 4:50

--culminating in the election of Donald Trump. And so if you're listening to this podcast, if you've listened much you know that I and Elyse have both been thinking a lot about gender, and we would fit in the evangelical category, I think. I can affirm the National Association of Evangelicals Confession of Faith, and I'm also white, for those of you who aren't on the Zoom call listening to me.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 5:21

You're really white.

Eric Schumacher 5:22

I'm really white. I'm from Iowa, yeah. So I thought, I've got to listen to this, and John Wayne was also born in Iowa, over in Winterset, not too far away from where I'm at right now. And so I got this book, I got the audiobook, actually. And I listened to it fairly quickly, and I was fascinated. It would be hard for me to say it was a book I enjoyed, because a lot of it was somewhat disturbing. And I'm not a historian. I don't have a PhD in history. But I do have a lot of experience both living in Iowa, and the periods that you cover and the people that you cover are people, are things that I've been connected with, whether it's listening to Rush Limbaugh when I was in high school, learning complementarianism from John Piper as a college student. I went to Stand in the Gap out in Washington, DC. I went to Southern Seminary. I was a student of Dr. Moore, who is in the book quite a bit. And I know several of the Southern Baptists that I went to seminary with that feature prominently in the book. And all the things that you walk through just felt very familiar with me. And as I listened to it, I just felt like she is nailing what I have sensed in this culture. So without being a historian who can sit back and critique it from that angle, as a person who's lived in these circles, I just felt, yes, a lot of this is what I've been feeling and seeing, and I think this discussion needs to be had. So Kristin, thank you for joining us. Welcome to the podcast.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 7:22

Thank you so much for having me. I'm thrilled to be here.

Eric Schumacher 7:26

Oh, good. Good. And where are you at right now?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 7:28

I'm in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Eric Schumacher 7:30

All right, wonderful. So tell our listeners just a little bit about you and maybe about your faith journey and how you ended up teaching at Calvin University.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 7:42

Sure, like I said, I was born in Sioux Center, Iowa, and grew up in a very Christian home. My dad is a minister, ordained minister and theology professor until recently at Dordt. He just retired a couple years ago. And so I just grew up in a kind of deeply religious Reformed Christian enclave. And I went to Christian schools, throughout much of my childhood, except for a brief period when we lived in Florida for two years, and then I went to a Christian College. At that time, Dordt was still a college. And, you know, I didn't really identify as an evangelical. I was thoroughly Reformed. Again, you know, my dad was a theologian. So I kind of had a--I was rooted in that tradition. And then, after college, I decided to go off to graduate school and study American Religious and Intellectual History. And it was there I met some card-carrying evangelicals, people who were coming from Wheaton and from Moody and from Bob Jones. And I started to understand, you know, similarities and differences between my own experience and theirs, but I think our greatest points of connection, looking back, I realized were through popular culture, because even though I grew up in a kind of distinctively Reformed tradition enclave, we had one bookstore in my small town, and it was a Christian bookstore. I only listened to Christian contemporary music growing up. And so I was immersed in this kind of evangelical popular culture, even though denominationally maybe, and certainly according to tradition, I didn't necessarily identify as evangelical. So that's my kind of religious background. And I think that if you read the book, you can see some of that kind of being explored in the pages of "Jesus and John Wayne." Oh, and then how I got to Calvin, I guess. I forget that part. Yeah, when I was applying for jobs, back in the day when people had multiple job offers. This was one of them and I didn't actually--it wasn't anywhere near the top of my list. I thought my calling was to be a Christian professor at a secular university or college. And that year there weren't a lot of jobs available. There were a few. I had some interviews. And after visiting Calvin's campus, I absolutely fell in love with the faculty there. They were some of the wisest, smartest and kindest people I had ever met, and I just wanted to work with them.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:23

So how long have you been there now?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 10:26

I think I'm at around 16 years.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:29

How wonderful.

Eric Schumacher 10:30

Wonderful.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:30

That's great. That's really beautiful. So Kristin, I too want to say thank you for being here. And I was so happy when I reached out to you, and you actually pinged me back, and I went "Oh! Oh! It's exciting!" Okay. So as we've said, you know, what drew us together to talk to you is your book, "Jesus and John Wayne." The subtitle will help people understand it better, "how white evangelicals corrupted a faith

and fractured a nation." And I want to talk about that subtitle. But before we do, let's talk about that title. How did you get that title? And was that a title that your publisher gave you? Because I've written enough books to know that we don't get to--

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 11:22

You know how this goes.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:23

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 11:24

We'll get into that with the subtitle more. This wasn't the title from the beginning at all, but it was a title I'd come up with. And at first, I was playing around with other titles, but they kind of seemed bland and difficult to distinguish from the actual books I was critiquing. So I think my working title for a long time was Onward Christian Warriors. And, but I knew I needed something a little bit better, especially with a name like Kristin Kobes Du Mez. As an author I needed a book title that was a little more memorable and searchable. And so as I was writing, I kept discovering how I was reading dozens and dozens of books on Christian masculinity. And what struck me very early on in this research is how little, in many of the most popular books, how little the Bible was a reference, and how much popular culture was, Hollywood figures, mythical warriors and heroes. And, and I was surprised by how much John Wayne kept popping up. And you know, in book after book and as a kind of icon of Christian masculinity. And so I just started to keep track. I kind of kept a running list, and that list grew longer and longer. And if you know anything about John Wayne and his history in American politics, it just kind of all came together. And so I just, I pulled that thread through, and then I threw it over to my editor and said, you know, what about this for a title. And that's how I ended up with "Jesus and John Wayne." So then the subtitle, that took much longer, and that was a very involved process. I've always just described this through the research process, as a book on evangelical masculinity and militarism. And then I decided to go with a trade publisher for a variety of reasons. And very quickly, they told me that both of those words were too long to use in a title or a subtitle. And so I was stuck with having to describe my book without using those words. And it took us three months of back and forth, and everybody, it seemed, had to weigh in. And this is what we ultimately came up with. And I'm actually really happy with it. I really liked the discussions that it provokes. It is a provocative title. But it's a provocative book. And it was important to me in the tone of this book, not to show a certain kind of deference that I think is very common within evangelical circles, and a deference that ends up propping up abusive systems of power and abusers of power. And so that was an intentional choice. And that comes through, I think, fairly clearly in my writing style, and some of my chapter titles. And I think I wanted to signal that just a little bit, that there's an edge to this work. But also, the "how white evangelicals corrupted a faith." There's a normative claim. I'm a practicing Christian. I care about this deeply. And so there is a claim as part of that subtitle that, you know, I'm going to suggest--this is not the historian speaking, this is the Christian speaking--that this is not biblical Christianity. And that this is something--there is a corruption that happens and that's what I tried to demonstrate in the book itself. And I've been surprised how conservative Christians themselves have thanked me for that part of the subtitle to say, you know, thank you for signaling that this is not the entire faith and that this is a corruption of biblical Christianity. And so I think it works.

Eric Schumacher 15:09

Yeah, I think it's a great title, because I think the title attracts readers, and then the subtitle makes you go, "Oh! What's this about?" Yeah. And so I, you know, speaking as a conservative Christian, and as a

complementarian, I really appreciated how you drew out this thread of sort of militant masculinity and how it's been used, and in some ways exploited for political purposes. And that, that, I think, is a really helpful contribution in the book about how a certain view of masculinity has been linked to political ends. And I would agree. I don't think that view of masculinity, that militant view, is the biblical view. And that's something Elyse and I have been very sensitive to, particularly in how certain views of masculinity and femininity can prop up abuse and abusive situations. And I think it's an important conversation to have. And even as I listened to it, I kept thinking, "oh this is such an important conversation." And then I kept thinking, "oh, so many conservatives are just gonna toss this aside." And I hope they don't. I hope they read and listen carefully. I'm interested in what you just said about many conservatives, conservative Christians, thanking you. Can you give any specifics on what they've been thankful for? And then are they willing to--are they speaking to that publicly?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 16:59

It depends. It depends.

Eric Schumacher 17:01

Okay.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 17:02

Yeah, I did not anticipate this level of response among white evangelicals themselves. The book has been out for two months now. And I've just received dozens and dozens of letters. I think I'm probably around 150 right now. I haven't really kept track. Gorgeous letters of--so this is a cultural history, right? This is a history of popular evangelical faith as it's kind of received and consumed by ordinary evangelicals. And there are leaders in here, there are organizations. But this is a story that I think anybody who's moved in and out of evangelical communities will recognize or at least pieces of it, they will have bumped up against. And so I think so many readers, I mean, like you were saying, kind of can map their own lives on to this history that I tell. And so the reception of this book has actually been very deeply personal. And so many people will write me and say, you know, I'm writing you right now with tears streaming down my face, for the people who have been hurt by aspects of this history. Others who have been complicit in it or even participated in this, especially many men. One really capture this well, the sentiments of many of the letters when he said, "I bumped up against so many of these trees, but I never saw the forest until I read this book." And I think that's the most common response I've received, people who thought, you know, James Dobson isn't so bad, or, you know, this organization or that or that book was kind of meaningful to me, not understanding how it was part of a much bigger picture, and a very harmful, even destructive one.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:49

Yeah, me, you know, I was so much a part of that whole Moral Majority thing. I can remember we had a party the night that Ronald Reagan was elected. I actually repented of voting for Jimmy Carter, because I voted for him because he said he was a Christian.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 19:15

Yeah, a Sunday school teacher!

Elyse Fitzpatrick 19:16

Yeah, yes. And then we got involved in the whole Ronald Reagan, Religious Right, Moral Majority thing. And I mean you wrote my history. But first of all, let me say thank you for the research you did. It was massive. I'd like to know how long it took you to do that. But then also, let me say and then you can

answer that question. The book was shocking and clarifying for me, because I keep asking the question, "how is it that Christians, Christian friends of mine, close Christian friends love Donald Trump?" How do you get there? That's what I kept asking that question I couldn't understand. And your book helped me understand. Now I know why we got there. But tell me about the process. I mean, Kristin, it must have been crazy.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 20:21

The process of writing the book itself?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 20:24

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 20:24

Okay, so this book actually started more than 15 years ago. And it started when my own students at Calvin brought me a book after I had lectured on Teddy Roosevelt, and lectured on how gender is connected to foreign policy and to race and to religion. And they said, Professor Du Mez, you're really gonna want to read this book. And it was John Eldridge's "Wild at Heart." And it was all the rage. This was in 2005-2006. Right, on college campuses and church small groups everywhere, and it ended up selling more than 6 million copies, I think. So I read that book, and I was astonished. And they were absolutely right. You know, this is the same language that we saw around Teddy Roosevelt in the early 20th century. Muscular Christianity and aggressive foreign policy was kind of encapsulated in that book, not in the foreign policy part so much in the book, but this was right during the Iraq war. And this is right at the time, when we started seeing surveys coming out showing that conservative evangelicals were real outliers in terms of their enthusiastic support for the Iraq war, for pre-emptive war generally, for aggressive foreign policy condoning the use of torture. And so I just wanted to bring gender, kind of family masculinity and femininity, into conversation with these broader issues of foreign policy and the American nation. So I researched for about a year and a half with the help of a research assistant who was actually in the military at the time, and I started to compile all of this literature. And then I ended up setting the book aside. I had to finish my first book. I had two kids in quick succession. But there's also a reason--what I was uncovering in this research was incredibly disturbing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 22:24

Yes, disturbing.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 22:25

It was. And I was not clear at that point how mainstream this was, right? I wasn't sure if I--so as a person of faith, I was not eager to shine this bright light on what might be the darkest underbelly of American Christianity, of, you know, really my own faith tradition. And honestly, it seemed like a noble thing at the time. And now I'm troubled by that hesitation. So for a variety of reasons, I set this aside, but I never stopped paying attention. I kept kind of gathering sources just on the side. And in ensuing years, I watched as one after another kind of my main characters, proponents of a very militant masculinity became embroiled in scandals of sexual abuse directly or indirectly, in covering those up or defending abusers. So I took note. I was following the blogosphere. And before any of this, before #metoo, before the national media picked this up, I was tracking this all very carefully. And then I was working on another book in 2015-2016. And Access Hollywood happened. And we watched right? Two to three days, a couple of evangelical leaders briefly wavered in their support for Donald Trump. And then they were right back where they were before. And that's when it clicked for me. I realized we had seen this before. We had seen in so many churches, organizations, families--abusers excused or dismissed, and

victims blamed. And I suddenly thought, it just all came together at that point, and I brushed off that old research on masculinity. I pulled it out again. And I ended up publishing a piece timed to Trump's inauguration on evangelical masculinity and militarism. And that went viral. And then I decided I needed to write a book. The actual writing of the book, I did another year of research with fabulous research assistants at Calvin, and then the actual writing of the book was an 18-month process. It was incredibly intensive. I still feel like I'm recovering from that, but we knew it had to be out in time for the 2020 election and to be part of the conversation right now.

Eric Schumacher 24:53

Yeah, well, that's quite a story.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 24:57

Thank you!

Eric Schumacher 24:57

Yeah. I'm just thinking how much even that story resonates with me, because that we're both from Iowa and grew up in different circles. And I very much made--I grew up Lutheran, and in college, you know, with campus ministries, very much became in the evangelical, sort of mainstream, and then made my way to Southern Seminary and so forth. And I felt the same way, cutting my teeth on theology from a hard complementarian perspective, and then sort of growing uncomfortable and going, some of these applications and implications and what's being characterized as masculinity and femininity just don't seem to be flowing from the text of Scripture and asking, why is that? You know, I don't like baseball and all the books about how to be a man require you to play baseball and teach your sons baseball. And I thought, well, then I'm out, you know, and I've got four boys. So this is very troublesome. And so I resonate with that and start watching. And then I think, as #metoo and #churchtoo all arose and going, wait a minute, why aren't the leaders that I have respected in teaching me that men are the protectors of women, and we're warriors and blah, blah, blah, why aren't they going to war for these women? And it was a disturbing, disturbing thing. And your book helped show this is not new. This is, this is--and I want to point out too something you said earlier. You said that this was, in some ways a look at popular level evangelicalism, like "Wild at Heart" and those sorts of things. And so I'm sure that there will be complementarian scholars who will look at this and go, "Oh, she's totally misrepresenting evangelical views."

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 27:06

I anticipated that, yes.

Eric Schumacher 27:07

Because they have very nuanced scholarly articles and all that. But it's so important for us to understand how our doctrine is received and integrated in a popular culture. And even if that's not what we've ever taught, you're coming out of these movements where everything, there have been so many movements where masculinity is this grunt and chop down a tree and make a cross and get yourself a sword sort of thing. And yeah, we need to be very, very careful about those things. Could you summarize for us what the thesis of your book is?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 27:48

Sure. So like I said, it's an exploration of white evangelical masculinity and militarism. And really tracing from the 1960s and 70s. I mean, I go back further, a quick glance back to the 19th century, spend a little time in the early 20th century with Roosevelt and muscular Christianity, the First World War, which is

important, because at that point, you had liberal Christians who had embraced this muscular Christianity every bit as enthusiastically as conservative Christians, and you had liberal Christians who actually embraced militarism, more enthusiastically than many conservative Protestants did. And that was just important to me, as a historian, to say "things haven't always been the way they are now." Right. So we need to understand, how did they come together in this particular way? And so by the 1940s and 50s, with Billy Graham and the National Association of Evangelicals, we kind of see this embrace of Christian nationalism among white evangelicals and an embrace of what they would call traditional family values. And it's that combination that was important to me, to see how family values evangelicalism was intimately linked to Christian nationalism. And in the Cold War era, when communism seemed this dire threat to Christian America and to American families, the response was a militant one, a militaristic one. You need to be prepared to defend your country because it's God's country and defend your family against this great military threat. And so all of these things really come together, certainly by the 1960s. And then you can throw in feminism and the civil rights movement, both of which in different ways are undermining the authority of white men, white patriarchal authority. And so this is kind of the historical context against which an emphasis on this militant--this tough, rugged Christian manhood--really comes into being, especially against the backdrop of the Vietnam War. And so you have conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists pointing to America's failures on the battlefields of Vietnam and suggesting that this is the weakness of American manhood. And it's because of feminists and liberals, and it's up to us as this Faithful Remnant, as they were increasingly being kind of displaced--this is 1960s. It's up to us as conservative evangelicals to reinforce traditional gender roles to protect Christian America, to keep America pure and strong, and to do that, we need strong masculine men who are willing to fight for their country and fight for their faith. And this is--when I started reading books on masculinity and femininity and child rearing, it was shocking how frequently the American nation was brought into this, right? You do this for the sake of the nation. It's not just--I think often we think of gender as a private matter. And okay, that's what we do in our own homes. That's how we organize our families. In fact, it was just intimately linked to these broader political questions, and it has been for decades. And so we have to hold these together. And we have to understand how they're interrelated. So essentially, the book traces the evolution of this idea of militant masculinity, patriarchal authority, and all that entails and how it is disseminated both through more traditional theologies and also through popular culture, and how it positions evangelicalism to respond in particular ways, to 9/11, for example, to the threat of terrorism, to the presidency of Barack Obama, and ultimately to Donald Trump.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:58

So well, thank you for that.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 32:02

The book in a nutshell.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 32:04

Yes. And again, it was so clarifying for me. It was shocking. It was actually kind of terrifying to think, good grief, that's where I've been thinking. I mean, over the last three or four years, I've come to understand a little bit about white privilege, which if you would have said to me, you have no idea. Five years ago, I would have said you're crazy, you know. Through a series of circumstances, I'm trying to understand my white privilege now, and part of what that means being a Republican, you know, white privileged woman. Yeah, so that was so helpful for me, but I want to say to you, I'm so proud of you. I mean, I really am. You're so courageous to do this. And I know you had a little itch to do this thing, and then it

became something. So yeah. So thank you. Thank you for being so courageous. I know when Eric and I wrote the Worthy book, we knew we were going to get pushback.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 33:23

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:24

We've been sort of surprised about the kind of pushback we've gotten. But, you know, it takes a certain amount of manly courage. It takes a certain amount of courage for you, Kristin, to do this. And I mean, I can't even imagine the kind of pushback you thought you might get. So tell us what the reception has been like?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 33:56

Yeah, yeah. Um, you know, I think that I have, you know, close family and friends who are conservatives, and who are Republicans. And I think that probably you can relate to this. It's the close relationships that are, I think, the most painful, and the ones that I certainly focused on. You know, I imagined that I would, you know, not be enthusiastically received by certain conservative evangelicals, especially those that I write about, at least some of them, but I thought, you know, hey, this is my country. This is my faith, and I'm going to speak into this. It was more, you know, on the personal side, that stressed me out a lot more. But again, though, so far, I think that the people--it's just been out two months, so it feels--it's still spreading, and it's actually been spreading in marvelous ways through a lot of word of mouth, again, Christians themselves, evangelicals themselves who say, "This is my story, and oh my gosh, you need to read this too." And so there's been a lot of that, and that's been just so rewarding as an author to see the book connecting so deeply and personally. And yeah, I haven't yet had any response from the people who kind of have starring roles in this book. I'm not sure if they've read it. My guess is by this point in time, they're aware of it. And I would be surprised if I don't hear any response in the coming months, but I would like to engage in conversations. And many of the people that I write about are not necessarily at the center of this story but were drawn in wittingly or unwittingly. I write a lot about alliances. When I researched this book with my research assistants, we had three huge pieces of butcher paper set up in my office with sticky notes and Sharpie lines, just connecting, who was blurbing whose book? Who was inviting whom to speak? Who was publishing with LifeWay, and then who got kicked out of that group? And all of this and who's defending whom, when somebody comes under attack for abuse of power, sexual abuse? And so that was a huge part of this process, you know. Evangelicalism is a messy kind of culture, and it's hard to nail down. And so we tried, we tried to map this out as best we could. And so I think many of the people who pop up in this story, you know, they have some role in this, like Christianity Today, you know, kind of establishment evangelicalism. And what I really wanted to do is show affinities, show networks, connections, and kind of hold us all responsible for what has come to pass.

Eric Schumacher 37:09

Yeah. And I think that's so important. Evangelicalism can be sort of a messy world, because you know, for listeners who aren't familiar with that term, the National Association of Evangelicals, I think their statement of faith has six statements in it. And there's a lot of Christians who would identify with those six statements, who may not identify with all the culture that you're describing in the book. And they might not even be part of that association, but they get lumped in with that. And so it can be very messy. And I think part of that mess is what you pointed out earlier was how much this idea of this muscular masculinity gets linked in with politics. Because it's not merely we need this view of masculinity, because this is how we think we should practice our faith in our local church, or this is how

we order our home. It's, if we don't have this pushed in our culture, we will lose our nation and the Marxists are going to come take over. And so, you know, the Russians are back at it, and we need Rocky to take down Ivan Drago. And that statement was made--Trump is our street fighter.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 38:39

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 38:39

And there was the poster of him with his head on Rocky's body, you know, that he was tweeting himself. I mean, yeah, that sort of thing is out there.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 38:48

Once you have eyes to see this, it is everywhere. So now that the book has been out, I have, you know, all sorts of people who are sending me images that illustrate "Jesus and John Wayne" the thesis and, I mean, many of these are horrifying images. Yeah, just before the book released, there was a lovely review of it in the Boston Globe. And they actually commissioned--it was in their Sunday print edition. So they commissioned a painting to illustrate this review. And it's actually up on my Twitter. It's my backdrop and it's of Jesus and Trump and John Wayne. And what's really funny is that image has of course taken a life of its own, taken on a life of its own. So it's now being kind of turned into memes and retweeted by people authentically, because it is so close to this, you know, kind of like authentic artwork that is kind of kitschy but you know, this macho muscular Trump and Jesus. You know what I'm talking about, so it's quite remarkable how this is resonating in very different ways, either among critics who are horrified or among people who just embrace it and say, you know, absolutely,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:07

Right.

Eric Schumacher 40:07

Yeah, I've been reading right now slowly, a book that's been really popular in my circles called "Gentle and Lowly" by Dane Ortlund. And it is an extended look at Jesus' statement that "I am gentle and lowly at heart." And so each chapter is looking into how Jesus presents his own heart and his own self. And so I was reading that as I read your book. And I think, for conservative Christians, for evangelicals who would be suspicious of your book, I'd say get both those books and read them side by side.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:48

Right.

Eric Schumacher 40:49

Because Dane is a conservative. And so, yeah, I'm just throwing that out there. So the question I want to ask is, how do you think--some of this can get very partisan, in terms of, it's connected to politics. And so readers might fall along the lines of, if you're critiquing Trump, then I hate your book. If you're critiquing Trump, then I love your book. How important are conversations across both political lines and theological lines? And do you see that happening in America?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 41:34

Yeah, it's very important, and those conversations are either not happening or, for the most part, are not happening well right now. You know, we've all created our echo chambers. It's hard not to.

Eric Schumacher 41:49

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 41:50

And yes, things are hyperpartisan right now. And as Christians, I think many American Christians, and particularly, I think conservative, white evangelicals have contributed to this partisanship, and for evangelicals, by, you know, identifying one political party as the party of, you know, God's people, and of truth and of righteousness, and the other as the opposite of all of that. And so what has been lost then is the ability to critique at least one party well. And you know that Christians--the heart of the gospel really is so countercultural, right? It's, you know, meekness and self-sacrifice and divesting of power, right? That's the Jesus of the Gospels. And so we should expect that to go against most of our cultural institutions and certainly political parties.

Eric Schumacher 43:00

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 43:00

And so I think it becomes very dangerous when Christianity and all that is lovely and right and true is seamlessly kind of united with any political party. And, you know, if this book seems more critical of the Republican Party, that would simply be because my topic in this particular book was conservative white evangelicals and politics.

Eric Schumacher 43:28

Yeah. I would just say amen to so much of that. I think being able to critique well, and being open to critique is very important. And, you know, I was just thinking, as you said that, I've just observed hearing white evangelicals be very, very forceful about, "We need to honor the emperor." You know, Scripture says we need to respect our leaders, honor our government, and will really crack down on any insults or disrespect shown to Trump. And I respect that, you know. I've seen--Donald Trump is a human being created in the image of God, and there are ways that he's talked about and joked about that are totally not Christian. But then I see the same folks turn around and show rampant disrespect to Democratic candidates. And what shocks me is that one of the core identifiers of evangelicals is they believe that we should be engaging the world in order to win them to faith in Christ. And when we make a political party Jesus' Party and the other one Satan's party, and you have to agree with that, we're almost evangelizing folks with political positions and in very unwinsome and dishonorable ways. And I don't know if evangelicals understand or if they care that this actually runs counter to their witness, you know. We have a Lord who, just like you said, what's at the core of Christianity? The Bible does say the Lord is a warrior, but when he shows up, here he is as a servant!

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 45:31

It's not what they expect, over and over again.

Eric Schumacher 45:33

Yeah, and that's why they killed him--

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 45:36

Yep.

Eric Schumacher 45:36

--because he wasn't that. Here he is saying, "I'm going to take my people's sins. I'm going to surrender myself to judgment in the place of my enemies." And he's even telling his disciples "Put away your sword," and he's telling Pilate, "If my kingdom was of this world, my disciples would be fighting." And that's very different than what we see in campaign years.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 46:05

It is. It is, and it's different, you know, that this whole ideology that stretches back for decades, this militancy, where Christian America, and Christianity itself seems to be at stake. Then that warrants all sorts of responses. Violence is necessary. And this is getting back to the John Wayne mentality, the cowboy mystique that, you know, a cowboy knows how to use violence to bring order. And that's what you need to tame the Wild West. And, you know, that's what you needed in the Cold War, and the ends will justify the means. It's very us versus them. And it thrives on stoking fear of "them," of the other. And you know, and then in this us versus them kind of world, then we are on God's side, and therefore whatever we do is going to be justified. It's going to be, you know, sanctified. And that's actually, you know, I would argue--so Calvinist here--I would argue that that's not, you know, a very healthy understanding of ourselves as a Church, but as individuals either, that, you know, we all have to fight against our own fallenness and can very quickly be fooled by our own conceptions of our own righteousness.

Eric Schumacher 47:35

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 47:35

And if we aren't careful, it can end up doing terrible harm to those that we define outside of our fold. And I think that we've seen that in American politics globally, domestically, and I think we also see that interpersonally.

Eric Schumacher 47:53

Yeah. So let me ask you about a little bit of feedback I saw on your book online. You were talking about the "other." This is a tweet I saw that said, this person said, "I was sent a review copy of the book. Unfortunately, a potentially interesting cultural observation is wasted through invective against the repugnant cultural other."

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 48:17

Ah, turned it back on me.

Eric Schumacher 48:19

Yeah. How would you respond to that, to those saying you're turning white evangelicals into the cultural other?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 48:28

Yeah. So that's a really good question, and I think that, in my defense, I would suggest that, you know, like yourselves, so many white evangelicals, who have read this book--and thousands have so far-- have recognized themselves. In fact, I've heard from so many readers that, you know, subtitle aside, which, you know, I think one reviewer called the book "urgent and sharp elbowed," and I really liked that. I think, that's kind of, it felt urgent to write. And yes, I'm not just out there throwing punches for the fun of it. But yeah, there's some sharp elbows here and there. And so I'll own that. But by and large, you know, despite that kind of urgency and the sharp elbows here and there, most people suggest that it's

actually a fairly sympathetic portrayal, at least a careful portrayal. And a couple of reviewers have pointed out something that actually brought me great joy, and that is that--Christian reviewers--that at the heart of this book is love, that this is a lament, and that this is again, that the subtitle, that this is not the way it's supposed to be, and that at the heart of it and at the very end of it, it's a call for Christians to do something different, to do something better and to look very carefully at what we have done.

Eric Schumacher 50:00

Yeah, and there are--I would agree--there are some sharp elbows thrown to the ribs here. I don't recall seeing what I would call cheap shots. I think you're raising valid concerns about things, and sometimes it hurts to read. But I would say for listeners who are concerned about whether you're fair and balanced, you know, Russ Moore is a white evangelical who I feel like is represented very positively throughout the book, as an example of a white evangelical who is pushing back against the things that you're concerned about. And so there's not a broad brush at every white evangelical, every complementarian is, you know, evil. It does have this tone of a lament. On that note, talk to us about how the book ends.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 51:05

Oh, the very, very end? Well, I, in my conclusion, as I'm winding down, first, I have a great little section on Hobby Lobby. I'll give that a shout out--one of my favorites. But I talked about how people have walked away from this, that for a variety of different reasons. And in my interviews with people, as I was researching, I became fascinated by you know, who stayed, who really doubled down, and who felt the need to walk away, and what prompted that? And there were some patterns. For some, it was people who had been kind of trained up in this really strict complementarianism, who met Christian couples, who were--if you want to use the word egalitarian--basically, who just weren't, you know, super strict complementarians and who had lovely marriages, you know, God-glorifying relationships. And were just so clearly, you know--and the way they had been raised, didn't think that was possible, right? That the only way to be a faithful couple was to follow this very strict blueprint of, you know, complementarian gender relations and all the cultural baggage that went with that. So that made some people walk away. Another thing from men themselves. I mean, like you said, not every man--in fact, most men--are not wired to be this rough and tough, you know, rock-climbing, gun-toting specimen of masculinity. That's, as you say, this is not biblical. Jesus was not that.

Eric Schumacher 52:48

Yeah.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 52:48

And so when you hold that up as the model, as the standard, men will inevitably fall short, and some of the men will just walk away from the faith, and many have. This is not for me. Others will stay in but, as one man put it, and I quote in here, "feel like second-class Christians and second-class men emasculated." And so either they, you know, eventually slink off or they end up for some throwing their support behind the men who do seem to follow this or embody this, the alpha male, you know, the Mark Driscoll, the Donald Trump, if you will. And so there are these very interesting dynamics. For many men, it was simply having close relationships to women and spiritual relationships. So in many evangelical communities, you have the men's Bible study and you have the women's Bible study, and you know, you have the small groups and so that's where in those segregated circles, that's where this ideology thrives. If you mix things up, you can very quickly start to see that a lot of this, it's not really holding up. And so many people have walked away and over time have abandoned this as individual choices, but by walking away in many of these communities, then the structure still stands. And so at the very end of the book, I mean my editor said, "Can you give me any hope here, Kristin?" You know

what, and I go back to the historian, you know, in me that once you see how this was built, that this was not always this way. And you can see that individual people made specific choices at particular moments, often in their own self interest. But once you see how that happened over time, first, you see, okay, woah, this is really deeply entrenched here. It's not going to disappear overnight. On the other hand, if it was built like this, it could be undone as well.

Eric Schumacher 54:57

Yeah. Well, Kristin, thank you for coming on the Worthy podcast. I think we're out of time for today's episode, but it has been a wonderful conversation. Where can people find you online?

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 55:09

So I'm on Twitter @kkdumez. I have a Facebook author page, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and kristindumez.com. I post all my writings there.

Eric Schumacher 55:20

Alright, we'll make sure to include all of that in the show notes. So thanks for being with us.

Kristin Kobes Du Mez 55:26

Oh, thank you so much. This was beautiful. I'm so glad we could do this.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 55:29

It was wonderful. Thank you.