

# Study Questions for Jesus and John Wayne by Kristin Kobes Du Mez: a discussion of American Evangelicalism

## With additional essays, articles and videos for further study

\* These were originally prepared for a discussion group within a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America, a conservative evangelical denomination. Please feel free to use or adapt as you see fit for your own contexts. ~ Chris Hutchinson, 2022

### Introduction

1. On page 3, Du Mez writes, that “evangelical support for Trump was no aberration, nor was it merely a pragmatic choice. It was, rather, the culmination of evangelicals’ embrace of militant masculinity, an ideology that enshrines patriarchal authority and condones the callous display of power, at home and abroad.” This is one of the book’s main ideas. Is it one you are open to considering? If not, why not? If you agree with it, are you willing to consider arguments against?

BONUS: Fill out [this survey to figure out](#) where you may fit into today’s evangelical landscape.

2. On page 10, Du Mez writes, “The products Christians consume shape the faith they inhabit. Today, what it means to be a ‘conservative evangelical’ is as much about culture as it is about theology.” Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? (Note: how you answer this question will likely impact how you interact with the material throughout the book.)

3. On page 13, Du Mez describes evangelical fears in the 2010’s. Are these fears that you have felt? If not, why not? If so, how have you dealt with them? Have you sensed any unhealthy spiritual attitudes on your part towards others in our culture? If so, what have you done about it?

BONUS: Read [this essay by Kevin DeYoung](#). In each of the four areas, which categories best describe your approach?

### Chapter 1: Saddling Up

1. What was the tension that American Christians in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century felt between traditional Christian virtues of gentleness, etc. and the rugged masculinity embodied by men like Teddy Roosevelt? How did they resolve it? (pages 15-19)

BONUS: Read Fosdicks’s sermon, [“Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”](#) Do you see any similar patterns or divisions today?

2. What was the attitude of various Christian groups to American involvement in WWI? What does that tell us about partisan approaches to war and peace among Christians? (page 19)

BONUS: Read Mark Twain's short story, "[The War Prayer.](#)" How does Twain critique tying God's purposes to one's own cause or nation?

3. What was the primary reason for the formation of the National Association Evangelicals (NAE) in 1943? (page 21) What do you know about the NAE's work today?

BONUS: Listen to Harold Ockenga's sermon, "[The New Evangelicalism \(Social Concerns\)](#)" from the Park Street Church's sermon archives.

4. How did Billy Graham fit into the scene? In what ways was Graham a continuity of what came before (e.g. Billy Sunday) and in what ways did he mark a change? How did Graham use media, etc. to market his efforts to spread the Gospel? In what ways has that marketing marked evangelicalism in general? In what ways has it been helpful, and in what ways has it detracted from the ethics from the Gospel, in your opinion? (pages 22-30)

5. With Hamblin, Boone and Wayne, Du Mez introduces the intermingling of evangelicalism and popular culture. Where have you seen evangelical ministries try to imitate or use popular culture for their own purposes? In your opinion was it 1) effective, and 2) Biblically faithful?

## **Chapter 2: John Wayne Will Save Your Ass**

1. How does this chapter belie the common belief that evangelicalism did not become political until the Moral Majority formed in the 1970s?

2. What undermined Billy Graham's meeting with President Truman, and how is that incident representative of evangelicalism's relationship with US political power? (p. 33-34)

3. What was the common foe that united evangelicalism and American political concerns in the 1950s? Do you believe this fear was well founded? (pp. 35-46)

4. What was evangelicalism's relationship to the Civil Rights movement? Do you see any of these attitudes in our day, particularly within conservative Reformed circles? (pp. 37-39)

BONUS: Read King's "[Letter from a Birmingham Jail.](#)" Of the various groups he describes, which one do you believe you would have most likely fit into?

EXTRA BONUS: Watch [this Lutheran documentary](#) on integration entitled, "A Time for Burning." If you were a member of that church, how would you have reacted?

5. What was Graham's attitude towards the Mai Lai massacre, and how does his editorial support Du Mez's overall themes? (pp. 49-50)

BONUS: Read [Graham's editorial on My Lai](#) for yourself. Does Du Mez accurately represent his thinking in her presentation of the facts?

6. How does John Wayne serve as a metaphor for the sentiments that characterized many American Christians of this era? Are there any ways you would push back on the metaphor? (pp. 52-59)

### **Chapter 3: God's Gift to Man**

1. What impact did Marabel Morgan's book, *The Total Woman*, have on the conservative Christian movement? What are similar books that have influenced you? (pp. 60-66)

2. Who is Phyllis Schlafly? What denomination is she, and why is that important in terms of the theme of this book, i.e. evangelicalism defined more by culture than theology? (pp. 66-73)

3. What was the ERA? Why did many conservative Christians oppose it? In what ways was its ultimate failure to become ratified the end of an era (Great Society progressivism)? BONUS: What do you know about Great Society goals and programs? Are your attitudes towards them generally positive or negative? Why?

### **Chapter 4: Discipline and Command**

1. Who is Bill Gothard? Did you have any exposure to him growing up? If so, would you say it was a positive or negative influence, or some combination? Why? (pp. 74-8)

2. Who was Rousas John Rushdoony? Where have you seen his influence in the PCA or other Reformed denominations? (pp. 75-76)

3. Who is James Dobson? Did your church ever use the Family Research Council's "voter guides" or bulletin inserts? If so, what did you think about them? (pp. 78-87)

4. How do both Gothard and Dobson reinforce the evangelical themes of authority and discipline? In what ways do you think evangelicals have been influenced by different sides of the culture as they have sought to apply New Testament passages on pastoral authority and church discipline (cf. I Tim 2-3, Matthew 18, etc.)?

### **Chapter 5: Slaves and Soldiers**

1. Who is Tim LaHaye and what influence did he have upon evangelicals? What is it that is largely peculiar to conservative evangelicalism that causes them to speak authoritatively into every area of life, including specific marital instructions? (pp. 89-94)

BONUS: Read ["The Insufficiency of Scripture"](#) by T. David Gordon. Where have you seen Christians "over-apply" Scripture in your opinion?

2. What issues caused Jerry Falwell to change his mind about Christians becoming more politically involved, i.e. what changed between c. 1965-1980?

3. In a sentence or two, describe evangelicals complicated relationship with Jimmy Carter. What was the White House Conference on Families and how was it a pivotal event in evangelical's shift in their partisan alliances? (pp. 100-102)

### **Chapter 6: Going For the Juggler**

1. If you were around in the 1980s, what do you remember about the rise of the religious right? To what extent were you part of it or parallel to it?

2. What is the GOP "southern strategy?" (p. 107) How have you seen it play out? What are ways we see those sorts of political divisions influence the way we think about people different than us?

3. How did the "battle for inerrancy" help evangelicals enforce a conformity on many other social issues of the day? (p. 109) What are ways that we tend to neatly line up people in the church into one camp or the other? What role should Christian freedom play in these areas (Romans 14, I Corinthians 8-10)?

4. How did the religious right use the threat of communism as a way to ally evangelicals with American patriotism and a military buildup? (pp. 111-115; cf. pp. 130-133) Regardless of the political goals, in what ways has militarism worked its way into the general evangelical sub-culture? How does that match up with what we read in the New Testament about the early church?

### **Chapter 7: The Greatest American Hero**

1. In what ways have you seen celebrity culture influence American Christianity? Why do you think this is? How does it compare to what Jesus, Paul, and other NT writers teach about celebrity in the church?

2. How is North's behavior while at Quantico relevant to the thesis of this book? (p. 120-121) In what ways has evangelicalism addressed, or not addressed, the ethics of means and ends?

3. How has the culture of "tough, manly husbands" impacted evangelicalism? (p. 125) What is it in reaction to? In what ways have you seen that played out in your circles?

4. In what ways do you believe that conservative religious circles are more prone to sexual scandal and abuse than more progressive churches? (p. 128) If so, why? What can we do to both prevent sexual scandal and bring healing to victims? (hint: see <https://dasacommittee.org/>).

### **Chapter 8: War For the Soul**

1. How did the AIDS epidemic effect the religious right's outlook towards the wider culture? (p. 135) How was the later "compassionate conservatism" a continuation or reaction to that (e.g. PEPFAR)? How and why was compassionate conservatism later dismantled, c. 2016?

2. With the fall of the Soviet Union, how did the fight then turn towards the “New World Order?” (p. 138-139) What do you think motivates evangelicals’ need to find a world-wide enemy, a system which ties everything together? Though not dispensationalists, in what ways do Reformed Christians sometimes fall into this form of thinking?

3. At the time, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was opposed by evangelicals (p. 141). What do you think of it as a compromise for the time? What does that say about our view towards secular institutions and the moral climate we believe they should adhere to? How should Christians try to influence these secular institutions, and what limits should we ourselves impose on that influence?

4. What parallels, if any, did you observe between the 1991 Clarence Thomas hearings and the 2018 Brett Kavanaugh hearings? (p. 145) Why is it that the reception to accusations like these are almost always predicable by political allegiances? How can the Church model a better way?

### **Chapter 9: Tender Warriors**

1. How did Promise Keepers both soften and reinforce the masculinity movement within evangelicalism? (pp. 151-156) If you lived through that era, what good do you remember it doing? What errors could you see in the movement?

2. What is helpful and what is unhelpful about using sports metaphors as a primary descriptor of the male Christian life? (pp. 156-158) Where have you seen it done well?

3. Have you read any of the “Christian manhood” authors Du Mez highlights? (pp. 159-166) If so, what did you find helpful about them, and what was unhelpful? Is there a better model available than books marketed to “Christian men” and “Christian women?” What might that look like?

4. What role has CBMW played shaping evangelicalism and denominations such as the PCA and the SBC? (pp. 167ff) How many of your gender role convictions are culturally shaped versus Biblically informed? How do we discover the difference? (BONUS: what does the Westminster Confession assert about a “complementarian” vs. “egalitarian” view of marriage?)

### **Chapter 10: No More Christian Nice Guy**

1. What theological flaws does Du Mez expose in the writings of Eldredge, Dobson, Wilson and Farrar? Which of these authors have you read, and if so, did you notice the flaws at the time? If you are only seeing them now, what has changed?

2. What was the “Land Letter” and what were the denominations/ministries of the men who signed it? (pp. 184-185) What do you believe about the propriety of Christian leaders pronouncing upon the justness of any particular (non-defensive) war? What does that do to the witness of the Gospel? What were your attitudes to the Iraq war at the time?

### **Chapter 11: Holy Balls**

1. How did Christian homeschooling reinforce the Christian patriarchy movement? If you homeschooled or were homeschooled, in what ways did you participate in (or resist) this movement?
2. Who was Doug Philipps and what was Vision Forum? (Bonus if you remember any of their catalogs). Who were some of the historical figures he republished and hailed as heroes of the faith? (pp. 188-190) How does holding these men up as respected figures influence our view towards the current culture wars?
3. What was the Quiverfull movement? (p. 190) In what more subtle ways do we see that play out in today's church? What does this emphasis communicate to singles, childless couples and parents with wayward children? In what ways is it line with, and in what ways is it opposed to, the Gospel?
4. Who is Mark Driscoll? (pp. 193ff) If you had heard of him, what were your initial impressions? What about his fall from grace were idiosyncratic to him and Mars Hill, and what about it reflects the dangers of the "evangelical masculine" movement in general? What similarities do we see with McDonald in Chicago?

BONUS: watch this video discussion between Mark Dever, Driscoll and James MacDonald on multisite churches. <https://vimeo.com/287582281> What do we learn about the character of these men? Hint: you can watch just the first two minutes for this.

5. What was the "New Calvinism?" (pp. 199-204) To what degree did you interact with it, and to what degree has it influenced PCA churches you have been part of?

Side note: what do you think of the strengths and weaknesses of the alliance the PCA has made with conservatives in the SBC, while backing away from older alliances with Anglicans, Dutch Reformed, and Lutherans (cf. Lausanne, NAPARC, White Horse Inn)? Has that helped or weakened our approaches towards cultural issues?

BONUS: Read [the Lausanne Covenant](#) and [Stott's Marks of Evangelicalism](#). In what ways does current evangelicalism reflect or not reflect these commitments? What balance(s) do you see in Lausanne and Stott that are less present in US evangelicalism?

EXTRA BONUS: Listen to the [three lectures by John Stott](#) at Duke Divinity School in 1986. What challenges do these bring to the American Church in our day?

## **Chapter 12: Pilgrim's Progress in Camo**

1. What three institutions made Colorado Springs a hub of evangelical influence in the early 2000s?
2. What forms did the informal alliance between evangelicals and the US military take? (pp. 210-218) What advantages did each provide the other? What are the dangers to Christian witness of a

close association with a nation's military? (BONUS QUESTION: how are we seeing that played out with the Russian Orthodox Church in Putin's Russia today?)

### **Chapter 13: Why We Want to Kill You**

1. In what ways did Islamic extremism replace communism as a focal point of evangelical fears? How did that play out in the Afghan and Iraqi wars? How has that played out in evangelical attitudes towards immigration?

BONUS: Watch this [short video of John MacArthur](#) on the 2020 election. Why does he say that if President Biden were to appoint a Muslim to his cabinet, that would be blasphemous? What holiness is MacArthur trying to protect?

2. If you were around in the 1980s, do you remember evangelical concerns about violence and coarseness in the media? In what ways has that concern continued, and in what ways has it been surpassed by other concerns (abortion, sexuality, gender)? Why do you think this is?

BONUS QUESTION: What do you know about the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 and the way in which many white Christian conservatives lament its consequences? Why do Christian political paleo-cons (like Pat Buchanan) oppose American interventionism overseas, and how is that different than more mainline or liberal Christian opposition to, e.g. the Iraq War?

### **Chapter 14: Spiritual Badasses**

1. How did Barack Obama's candidacy and election bring new fears and give new energy to the Christian right? (pp. 233-241) How have you seen this personally? What did it reveal about many Christians' sense of an America they mourned and felt should be theirs?

BONUS: Read the [PCA's 2017 report on Racial Reconciliation](#). Which part(s) particularly resonate with you? Is there anything you disagree with?

2. Who is Eric Metaxes, and how does he encapsulate some of the political adjustments many evangelicals have made since 2008? (pp. 242-246)

### **Chapter 15: A New High Priest**

1. How did the rise of the Trump candidacy capture so many of these evangelical fears and concerns about "losing" the culture? Did Trump's tough, nativist rhetoric and style manipulate these fears, or did they mimic evangelical concerns (or some combination)? Explain.

2. How is the rise of conservative populism similar to past movements of cultural re-entrenchment in Europe or the United States? How in the past have secular populist strongmen aligned themselves with conservative religious movements for their own purposes?

3. Who were some of the evangelical leaders Du Mez mentions who initially opposed Trump's candidacy but later changed their mind, either for the 2016 general election (or the 2020 election)? What were their reasons?

## **Chapter 16: Evangelical Mulligans: A History**

1. This was a hard chapter for many people to read. There are scandals in every organization. But what is it about human nature that causes us to jump on other tribe's scandals while ignoring or even covering up scandals within our own tribe? How should Christians be different? How should the Gospel inform how we treat our own organizations and witness in the world?

2. Do you think there is something about conservative Christian culture that makes us particularly prone to spiritual and sexual abuse? If so, what is it? What should we do about it? Again, what does the Gospel say to all this?

BONUS: look over the PCA's committee on abuse webpage: <https://dasacommittee.org/> and comment as to its potential usefulness to us as a church or denomination.

## **Conclusion**

1. The conclusion ties the main themes of the book together. In what ways has Du Mez proved her central thesis from the Introduction that "what it means to be a 'conservative evangelical' is as much about culture as it is a specific theology" (p. 10) and that an emphasis on rugged masculinity has been a feature, not a bug, of evangelical culture from the very start (c. 1920's-40s)? In what ways, if any, has she shaped the historical facts to fit her thesis rather than vice versa?

2. Regardless of what you believe about the thesis, what are some lessons you can take away from this book? What are some historical facts you learned that you were previously unaware of?

BONUS: Watch this lecture by George Marsden (Du Mez's doctrinal advisor), "[Humility for American Evangelicals.](#)" What two (fairly disparate) Christian authors does Marsden draw on to help us in our current climate?

3. What do you think about the (tepid) optimism in the last paragraph (p. 304)? What might you do differently in your life as a result of reading this book?

BONUS: Read this series of [four essays by Tim Keller](#) on the current state of American Christianity. What are positive lessons we can glean from these going forward?