

Book Review of “*Jesus and John Wayne: How white evangelicals corrupted a faith and fractured a nation*”, by Kristin Kobes Du Mez

Kristin Du Mez holds a PhD from Notre Dame and is a Professor of history and gender studies at Calvin College in Michigan, a Christian Reformed institution. In this scholarly book, she reviews the last 75 years of the evangelical movement in the United States and explains in detail how white evangelicals moved from an emphasis on personal salvation to a focus on Christian nationalism, and how they replaced the peace-loving Jesus of the Gospels with an aggressive, warrior leader, such as the iconic John Wayne, a tough-talking, combative man.

She shows how the preponderance of evangelical personalities, media, books, films, music and merchandise have shaped the beliefs of several generations of evangelicals and led them to idolize such militaristic people as Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Oliver North and, ultimately, Donald Trump. Their ideology has become one of patriarchy, submission of women, authoritarianism, aggressive militancy, fear of Islam, and, more generally, opposition to anything threatening white male supremacy, including immigration, abortion, the #MeToo movement, Black lives matter and LGBTQ rights.

The author argues that rather than supporting Trump for purely pragmatic reasons, Trump represented the fulfillment of their deeply held values. With his toxic masculinity, Trump was a ‘true’ man in the image of their idol John Wayne.

The book is meticulously researched and an interesting, albeit exhausting, read. It left me wondering how much these values have infiltrated the Canadian evangelical community, how, or even whether, the US will be able to recover, and what Jesus must think of all this.

Submitted by Kathryn Hare