

# Christianity Beyond Whiteness

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## SPEAKERS

If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Dr. Jorge Juan Rodríguez V, Megan Goodwin, Bonus Ending, Simpsons, A Little Bit Leave It, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

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Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:18

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. In 2021-2022, our work is made possible through a Public Humanities Fellowship from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We're grateful to live, teach, and record on the current, ancestral, and unceded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki, and Aucocisco peoples. As always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website.



Megan Goodwin 00:40

What's up, nerds?! Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of Azmerican religions, race, and gender.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:46

Hi, hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia.




Megan Goodwin 00:52


Are... we really gonna do another episode on Christianity and race? I feel like we got yelled at last time...?





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:59


Okay. First of all, nobody yelled at YOU.


 Megan Goodwin 01:02  
\*snickers\*


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:04  
Even though \*I\* am the youngest sibling of our chosen family here, I still get oldest sister treatment??? Because you cause ALL the ruckus and I get all the detention! Or, in this case, a few very well intentioned, if occasionally strong worded emails and DMs. But second of all, you know that part of public scholarship is being accountable to, like, you know, the public...?


 Megan Goodwin 01:30  
Oh, yeah.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:31  
So, our nerds really just push us to do better, and we appreciate them for it.


 Megan Goodwin 01:35  
You're right, you're right. I know you're right. And, so were the nerds who asked us not to shorthand the relationship between Christians and their bible. Just like in any religious tradition, Christianity is way more than "bible says X, so Christians do Y." I mean, I often ask why Christians do things, especially white Christians, but we're not focusing on white Christians today!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:56  
Indeed, we are NOT, friend! Today is Christianity BEYOND whiteness-- beyond what today's guest calls the "cookie cutter" model of Christianity under European colonialism. Because, even though the US understanding of religion and race is directly tied to white supremacist Christian Euro-colonialism...

 Megan Goodwin 02:17  
As we covered in episodes 201, 203, AND the infamous 3pisode 304, for starters.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:24  
Love me a callback queen! But as I was saying, American understandings of race and religion are, yes, absolutely factually tied to white supremacy AND the transatlantic slave trade. AND ALSO, Christianity is about as much more than whiteness as America. So, let's get into it. Like


ALSO, Christianity is about so much more than whiteness or America. So, let's get into it. Like, why don't we just do that?

 Megan Goodwin 02:48

Yeah! Let's do that, yes! As many of our listeners know, we're often talking about the impact of Christianity, and more specifically, the ways that white imperialist Christianity has set the tone for, well, uhh... many, many, MANY things that we take for granted. Like calendars-- we know, we know! And the US, and the whole frickin model of world religions, and also definitions of race, and gender, and sexuality, and probably, like, what even an able-body means! Ahhhhh. I was thinking I might talk about muscular Christianity, but no! That's more whiteness. New things! New things. Stay tuned to find out where we're going, nerds.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:28


We do. We-- like frankly, we do talk about white imperialist Christianity a lot. And listening back through episodes for some of these grant apps I'm submitting, I have soooooo many "Christmas makes it clear that Jews are conditional Americans" baggage. \*laughs\*

 Megan Goodwin 03:46

\*laughs\* Yeah. You do. It's understandable. At least you didn't try to placate Nazis by putting a dead evergreen in your house, unlike some fathers of modern psychology I know.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:56

\*laughs\* So what does that mean for us today? What are we actually doing? More BOOOOOO white imperialist Christianity?

 Megan Goodwin 04:06

Only on the inside. On the outside, today we're talking NOT your mainstream white Christianity, by which we mean: we're talking about how Christianity is done in mostly NOT-what's-now-the-US AND in not-white communities. We're going to take our critique seriously and try to highlight how Christians have made sense of Christianity and communities that likely came to Christianity under mission work, through enslavement, or just through the ways imperialism works-- but without making whiteness or European colonialism the central narrative.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:38

Well then, giddy up! I didn't get a harumph OR a lesson plan out of that guy!

 Megan Goodwin 04:50

Megan Goodwin 05:58

I am tired. Anyway, we've said it before and we'll say it again, because repetition is actually great pedagogy: today, we're talking about Christianity for two reasons. First, because like we've been telling you for, truly, all the episodes, religion is imperial, and modern imperialism is tied to Christianity. Second, we think you can't call yourself religiously literate without actually knowing how Christianity is practiced in communities that don't spring to mind when you hear the word Christian. And, given the tenor of American Christianity, we know that we don't picture brown and black folks as Christian because of how white Christianities and white Christians tie their religion to racism and white supremacy. So in short, we're working against that racism and white supremacy on purpose, and instead diving into some Christian practices and communities that don't usually get airtime!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:37

Yeah! So, I guess our thesis is, even though Christianity is tied up with modern imperialism, and a lot, a LOT, A LOT of violence, especially maybe in communities of color, right? That doesn't erase the faith, communities, or practices of Christians of color in the US or elsewhere.



Megan Goodwin 05:59

Yes. Yes, that is the goal. And to achieve that goal, we have a guest expert! The fantastic Dr. Jorge J. Rodriguez V, Associate Director for Strategic Programming at the Hispanic Summer Program. He will be joining us later on to talk about Latinx Christianity in what's now the US. He'll introduce himself a bit later on, so for now, let's move on to the 101 on today! \*clicks tongue\* The section where we do professor work.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:24

Alright, Goodwin! How are we going to organize ourselves here? Because I... I kind of want to do it through the cunning use of maps (which is both my brain and notoriously unhelpful for an audio medium), but I'm wondering if perhaps a few locations would help us show how Christianity is what Christians do, even if Christianity became a global world order through varying levels of, frankly, white supremacist violence.



Megan Goodwin 06:50

Yes. I, generously, will allow this use of maps and ordering us. Way to executive function. I need all the help I can get. Where to first, IRMF?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:03

So, I know this is probably too big and too much, but hear me out-- let's talk about Christianity in South America and Africa.





Megan Goodwin 07:10

Oh. Oh... is that all?! Those are huge continents! What is... what is your plan?! What is happening on this auditory dirigible trip around the globe?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:22

So like, I know these are continents.



Megan Goodwin 07:24

I know you know.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:25

Like, I'm aware. Here's what I'm thinking, though. I'd like for us to talk about these ginormous places' relationship to Christianity, and then take a few examples from specific countries.



Megan Goodwin 07:37

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:37

Because obviously-- we cannot say this enough-- neither Africa nor South America are countries.



Megan Goodwin 07:42

No.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:44

But if we start in these specific-- if we start in these really big places and then zoom in on specific examples, we might be able to flesh out lived Christianity in these two enormous populous, ethnically, racially linguistically diverse places with eons of history that are conveniently left out of the world religions paradigm. And, specifically, they're useful for us today because data suggests that if you ignore the US, which is currently the most Christian place in the world, the next most Christian places, the next most Christian nation-states, are in Africa, South, and Central America.



Megan Goodwin 08:24



Megan Goodwin 08:44

Hmm. Alright, I am suspicious. This seems like a lot. But I think I hear you. By showing the internal diversity of Christianity in some of the most Christian places in the world, but also the places where white American Christians are likely to ignore, or write off, or dismiss entirely, we can push back against the idea that Christianity is only a white Euro-American religion.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:45

By George, I think you've got it.



Megan Goodwin 08:56

Let's start with Africa-- the giant continent of Africa-- then? I guess? I think Africa helps us think about two things that are important to us on the pod. Okay, so first, we actually fill in the blanks where we've been unable to, or where the world religions paradigm leaves off, or falls short. Like, we started this megaseason with African Diasporic Religions, but even that prioritizes the diaspora, not Africa, let alone specific African communities, or nations, or groups. And then, second, what's neat about Christianity in Africa is that, depending on where we're talking about (again, the continent of Africa is gigantic), we're talking about Christianity predating European imperialism and missionaries, OR, we're talking about the rather violent enforcement of Christianity as part of white Christian European imperialism.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:47

Okay, wait. Say that last part again. So what you're saying is that, even ON the ginormous African continent, the relationship to Christianity and imperialism varies by location?!



Megan Goodwin 10:00

What I'm saying is that even on the African continent, the relationship to Christianity and imperialism varies by location. That's exactly what I'm saying.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:09

Shocking.



Megan Goodwin 10:10

I know!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:12

So then, alright. Let me start.



Megan Goodwin 10:13

Okay!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:13

I want to fully admit, as we've talked about, frankly, in the last couple of episodes, that, like when we talk about African religions, my jam is usually Islam, and often in North Africa, and sometimes West Africa, because of how PhDs and Islamic studies work. And like we talked about in the last episode, how those ideas about authenticity and Islam function. But I digress, or like, go tune into that episode. So, let's say that, for the record, in case you didn't listen to the last episode, we here at Keeping It 101 believe that North Africa is part of Africa. We do believe that. Yes. Yes, we do. \*giggles\* AND, it is ridiculously important to Abrahamic religions, which include Christianity.



Megan Goodwin 11:00

So, Christianity is an important religion in North Africa, which is part of Africa.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:07

Uh, yeah.



Megan Goodwin 11:08

Okay, this is shocking. Shocking! But nevertheless, true!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:11

Yes! And we talked, last time, about anti-Blackness in Islamic studies and vaguely got at anti-Blackness in Muslim communities. And we could definitely talk about-- some other time-- about ethnic and racial identities in North Africa, the way that Africanness is either embraced or obscured, but for now, I'm just gonna say some facts, which is, for example, Egypt and Sudan, which are countries in North Africa, are home to a BUNCH of Christianities and Christians, among them Coptic Christians-- \*Secret Word of the Day\* --who are the largest ethnic and Christian minority in northern Africa-- and they're specifically the largest in Egypt, something like 5 to 10% of the population, based on various studies, I think.



Megan Goodwin 11:55

Mkay, that's like, a big chunk of the population.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:57

BIG chunk.



Megan Goodwin 11:58

Kay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:59

The word "Copt" has an even longer history than we have time for today, but, like, nerds, here's the deal. Copts, or Coptic Christians, refer to indigenous Christians in north Africa, especially in the regions that today we recognize as Egypt and Sudan. Most ethnic Copts today are Coptic Orthodox, which traces its own history to the first century of the Common Era, and to Mark, who I don't know but who I learned from Dr. Shaily Patel back in season three is pretty important and one of the main authors of the Gospels.



Megan Goodwin 12:33

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:34

So, the history here is way more complicated than just, like, "some dude people called St. Mark came to Alexandria," which is a city in Egypt, OR "lots of biblical experts literally learn Coptic, the language, precisely because this form of Christianity and it's written archive is so freakin important to all of Christianity, period." But like, those the only sentences I can say. Beyond that, it's my-- it's like, above my paygrade. What I am trying to say is actually quite simple. Copts represent one of the oldest Christian denominations in the whole world, and it is 1000 gajillion percent not foreign to the whole ass continent of Africa, but is rather indigenous to it. It has a long history, but this community is not ancient, nor extinct. These are living people who trace their religious origins, traditions, practices to the literal dawn of Christianity itself. And so, its contributions to early Christianity-- like, like, all of it, like wherever you are in the Christian spectrum-- its contributions to THAT are manifold. Its living practitioners are part of vibrant and sizable communities. And yet, when Americans think Christianity, we often think white folks in bible churches or Protestant denominations, and maybe, sometimes, Catholics, depending on where in the US you live.



Megan Goodwin 13:58

I mean... I, as you know, am always thinking about Catholics. But... but not willingly. Also, I appreciate that you always find us a way to show how brown folks' stuff has always been here, but it's just deeply discredited or ignored. I like your consistency.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:15

Welcome.



Megan Goodwin 14:16

Thanks. I will just add that when we see why conservative evangelicals get bent out of shape, that the, quote unquote, "Middle East" oppresses Christians, they're often talking about how folks like Copts are treated. And the kernel of truth here is that, yes, in some Middle Eastern nations, Christians have experienced oppression and prejudice. The thing that gets me, though, is that white evangelicals use this as a way to discriminate against Muslims-- without actually helping, say, Arab Christians in the US deal with their own experiences of racism or oppression or discrimination. So it's not just that white US Christians "don't know" about brown, Middle Eastern, or African Christians-- which hi, hello, JESUS, kind of from there, whatever-- it's that white US Christians use brown, Middle Eastern, and African Christians to further their own anti-Black and often Islamophobic worldviews.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:04

Yeah. And I know that that's barely the tip of the iceberg on Christianity that has nothing to do with European imperialists, right? Like, this is a community that is Christian NOT because of mission work, but because of, like, the development of Christianity in the Roman Empires. But we gotta-- like, I want to keep moving. I did say we were covering two gigantic continents today.



Megan Goodwin 15:26

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:26

So, Goodwin, what do you want to make sure we talk about while we're still in this particular gigantic continent?



Megan Goodwin 15:34

Yeah. So, so, SO much to say here, and I feel bad that we're not touching on Ethiopia. BUT, I want to just briefly mention that a coalition of Christian and Muslim women in Liberia, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, helped end the Second Liberian Civilwar in 2003. Liberian Peace Activist (and Christian!) Leymah Gbowee-- sometimes affectionately referred to as General Gbowee-- helped organize peaceful resistance to years of violent upheaval, and helped install Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president of Liberia AND the first elected female head of state in Africa. There's an amazing documentary about this movement called "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" that I often use in my Global Religions class. I both really like it, and I get very

frustrated that it starts with "Look at these people, these women specifically, meeting in churches, using religion to organize this movement, and then we're never going to talk about religion again in the rest of the documentary." Choices. I will link to it. It works really well in class, even if part of what I use it for is yelling at it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:12

I mean...



Megan Goodwin 16:21

You know how I do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:38

Straw men have purposes, sometimes.



Megan Goodwin 16:41

It's also just nice to look at a story where-- I mean, you've seen my syllabi. I teach sad, bummary things all the time. Where, like, this is a space where real momentous change was made, and was made through Christian and Muslim solidarity and coalition building. So, it's, it's nice to have a win.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:01

Yeah! And I think we often think about, particularly like, religious minorit-- like, minoritized religions, especially in places that we (and by we, I mean white people) imagine as not quite-- let's use the phrasing of like, first world, third world, developed nations, right? Like, it's interesting to see folks using religion for good...



Megan Goodwin 17:25

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:25

When we often think that religion is just bad. So, all of those things sound like they would work beautifully pedagogically.



Megan Goodwin 17:32

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:33

Alright. Well, obviously, that's not all of Africa.



Megan Goodwin 17:35

\*laughs\* Nope.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:37

But... I'm gonna shuffle us anyway! \*laughs\* I'm going to move us right along to the examples of Egypt, Sudan and Liberia under our wing. Let us fly to South America. Now, this is not my expertise at all. Like, we are... we are beyond the limits of what I can do. But! What I do know is that Christianity comes to South America through Spanish and Portuguese colonization, which was, frankly, brutal. I don't-- I... there's not even a way to communicate with words how brutal it was, but... disgusting, horrific, genocidal.



Megan Goodwin 18:17

Yeah. Yeah, it sure was. And that colonization was explicitly Catholic. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI told Spain and Portugal they could basically dibs the, quote unquote, "new world," just like divy it up among themselves and take all of their land, and resources, and people, and, you know... have them? And that went about as well as you might expect for the indigenous peoples already living in what's now South America.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:44

\*scoffs\* Yeah, yeah. We are not centering European violence here, but... holy fuck.



Megan Goodwin 18:53


\*sighs\* Yeah.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:54


The level to which I need our listeners to know this is not us saying Christians did this. This is like, the heads of Christianity being like, "Hey, you know what Christianity says is dope? Rape and murder."





 Megan Goodwin 19:09  
Murder. So much murder, and a bunch of sexual violence.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:13  
Yeah.


 Megan Goodwin 19:13  
And more murder, and then a lot of theft!


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:16  
All of the theft!


 Megan Goodwin 19:16  
Because Jesus? Question mark? Anyway.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:19  
Anyway. Leaving that aside for a second, I also know-- I know two things. One, brutal colonizational practice in the name of Catholicism, and with like, the explicit permission of the Pope--


 Megan Goodwin 19:36  
Not even just permission, that was the thing! Like, ordered!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:39  
Ordered. The order. By order of the Pope.

 Megan Goodwin 19:43  
Uh huh.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:43  
But I also know that South American, Latinx and Hispanic Christianities represent not only some

of the largest groups of Catholics, as well as a rising number of pentecostal Christians, but that some of my favorite Christian theology originates in these communities. That's right, nerds! Sound a bell, give me a sound effect. I am in fact saying I like something Christian! And namely, that is liberation theology. \*Secret Word of the Day!\*

 Megan Goodwin 20:10

Yaaaasssss! I mean, like, liberation theology gets truly half a day in my global religions class. We do two days on Christianity and a solid quarter of what we're talking about is liberation theology. As we have discussed at length on this pod, I am no longer Catholic, but--

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:30

\*gasps\* Shocking.

 Megan Goodwin 20:31

I know, I know. Spoilers! But liberation theology is the closest I get to still feeling in the spirit of that tradition. So, yes. SO, so much to talk about here. But the shortest version of this I can offer is to say that one of the biggest religious events of the 20th century in the, quote unquote, "western world" was John XXIII's convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. This is, sadly, not the time for my mother's, like, conspiracy theory that John XXIII was assassinated for trying to change the church too much, too quickly-- no, I'm for real-- but suffice it to say that John XXIII threw the Roman Catholic Church into a tizzy when he declared aggiornamento-- you have to do the arms when you do it. It's a throwing open of the windows for a breath of fresher and more just air. For our purposes, this matters because John XXIII insisted that the Roman Catholic Church should-- ne, MUST-- have what he called a "preferential option for the poor." That the church should be the servant of its most vulnerable members. Which, its most vulnerable members, as you might imagine, really frickin appreciated. So in South America, these were mostly very poor folks working the lands of very wealthy folks-- people who did agricultural work all day, for example, but who couldn't afford to feed their families. Which is where the Marxism comes in. \*Secret Word of the Day!\* Also super shorthanding here, but Marx argued that under capitalism, the worker is alienated from the product of their labor (which is why he wants us to seize the means of production, don't let me get started down this rant hole). Anyway. Again, I want you to be thinking about people who are working all day to gather food, but whose families are starving. Liberation theology, as theorized by folks like Gustavo Gutierrez, combines the Second Vatican Council's preferential option for the poor with Marx's concern about workers alienated from the products of their labor. And I think the best way to see this in action, IRMF, is...

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:32

Oh, no. Oh, no. No!

 Megan Goodwin 22:34

Oh, yes. Oh, yes! It's time for PRIMARY SOURCES! Different. Yes. Today's SURPRISE primary source isn't us sharing our stories (except the small bit about how my mom thinks John XXIII was assassinated). It is an actual, factual primary source-- from Cesar Chavez's "the Mexican American and the Church," which he presented in Sacramento in March 1968. Chavez spoke passionately on behalf of farm workers, many of whom were Latinx Catholics, who would work long days for exploitative, multinational corporations, only to hear homilies on Sunday praising those corporations, praising those bosses, and telling farm workers to work harder and just do like they're told.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:17

Ugh.



Megan Goodwin 23:17

So here-- yeah. It's, it's gross. And... no! I mean, it's still happening. This is, if you haven't read this piece, high recommend both because it is just beautifully, beautifully written, but also, it's shady as hell! It's got Chavez being like, "You know who's out in the fields with us? Protestants. Protestants are out there living in this liberation theology. Where the hell are the Catholics? Oh, are the Catholics just taking money from the businesses and wealthy people? Huh." Anyway, here is my absolute favorite description of liberation theology in action. Chavez said, "What do we want the church to do? We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother and sister. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood." Again, I'm not a Catholic, but that shit gets me every time. It is an important reminder that the Church is not the Magisterium. It's not the mostly old, mostly white dudes in charge. The Church is the people, and some of those people do some pretty amazing fucking work.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:19

I'm sorry. Yeah. Okay. Okay, so I hear two things, I think, so far. One of all, I'm hearing that even though we can trace lots of Christian communities to European colonial and imperial sources, that doesn't mean that folks who continue to practice today haven't made Christianity their own! So, people like Chavez who, two of all, called upon Church leadership to do better based on his own understanding and relationship to Christianity or Catholicism in this case. Which I think shows me, as usual, that religion is what people do, even within hugely institutionalized and hierarchical structures, like the Catholic Church.



Megan Goodwin 25:12

Yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:14

So, frankly, this feels like as good a place as any to let Dr. Jorge Juan Rodriguez V give us some expert takes on Latinx Christianity in the US. According to his Twitter bio-- and friends, you must find him on Twitter. It is A+ content-- Dr. Rodriguez is a DiaspoRican Theo-Socio-Storian contextualizing systems historically made Divine. Which is, like, a dope ass bio. His research focuses on Christianity, social movements, and colonization. Specifically, he writes on the Young Lords and their coalition-building efforts in Chicago and New York in the 60s and 70s. So! While we've been really clear that this episode isn't about white mainstream Christianity, and we have tried-- Lord knows, I have tried to keep us out of the US given how often we've talked about it before, frankly, the fact of the matter is is that lots of Hispanic and Latinx Christianities in the US fit exactly into how we're talking about religion on this here episode. So, I will take every opportunity to learn from Dr. Rodriguez, which means, friend, you're up!

D

### Dr. Jorge Juan RodrÃ¡guez V 26:20

I'm Dr. Jorge Juan Rodriguez V, and I'm a historian who focuses on the intersections of religion, specifically Christianity, social movements, and colonialism. In particular, I love learning and teaching about how religion has historically provided language, symbols, and embodied practices for communities of color to imagine alternative visions for a more just society, and through their activism bring that vision into being. As a child of Puerto Rican migrants, so much of my own story is shaped by the very questions I study. This leads me to spend a lot of time exploring the ways Latinx people engage Christianity to push against an unjust society. What's funny is that many people often automatically read Latinos religiously. Indeed, for a lot of folks, Latinx and Catholic are synonymous, or at minimum, super closely related. And I think part of this is because of colonialism. The Spanish and Portuguese Catholic Church were central to colonizing what we now call the Americas. Part of it is demographic-- a lot of Latinos are Catholic! Part of it is also lowkey, not so lowkey, racism. Latinx people are treated monolithically in this nation, which functions as a way of invisibilising their complexity as an ethnic group. And the reality is that Latinx religiosity is hella complicated. And even Latinx Christianity is hella complicated! Now, aside from the fact that there are Latinx Pentecostals and Protestants and Catholics, Latinos often embody multiple religious traditions simultaneously. As scholar Sam Cruz argues in his book "Masked Africanisms," there's a clear connection between Puerto Rican Pentecostalism and African Diasporic Religions like Santeria and the Creolized versions of Espiritismo. As scholar Daisy Machado has argued, there are many Mexican Catholics on the US Mexico border who are going to Mass on Sunday, and the Curandero on Monday, the communal faith healer who provides relief for their visitors. Shit! Even Latinx evangelicals often talk about embodying their faith through dreams and connections to the spirits, things white evangelicals sometimes called demonic, or at minimum, not, quote unquote, "rational" and thus not okay to do. So, it's super hard to talk about Latinx religion and Latinx Christianity because there's so much nuance in it that stems from the ways people have negotiated and resisted multiple colonial impositions over hundreds of years. Nonetheless, I think it's important to explore how Latinx people engage, embody, and speak through the languages of Christianity to make meaning in the world and specifically fight against racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression. One example is the Young Lords, a radical group of Puerto Rican youth who, in the 1960s and 70s, fought for the independence of Puerto Rico and creation of a socialist society. Though founded in Chicago, I've spent a lot of time studying the New York chapter of the Young Lords who, in 1969, occupied the first Spanish United Methodist Church, a historically Puerto Rican church, in order to establish free breakfast for children, medical testing, and cultural events. Amidst many of these activists being self-described atheists, they all constantly talked about Jesus when they established programs in the occupied church. One of their pamphlets read that it was the duty of the Church to take

care of the least of these, quoting the Christian gospels. A leader of the organization even said that if Jesus were alive, he would be a Young Lord, because it was the Young Lords who were following the biblical ministry of taking care of the sick, visiting the prisoners, and providing shelter for those without homes. So, regardless of what the Young Lords quote unquote "believed," they engaged and embodied the religious lexicon and imagination offered by Christianity to fight for a more just world. Now, the world religions model often wants to present Christianity as this cookie cutter thing about people who believe in Jesus, and create churches, and read the Bible and shit. Aside from the ways that's tied to colonialism (and for more on this, listen to earlier episodes of Keeping It 101), it simply can't account for people of color and Latinx folk and the ways our lived embodiments of Christianity are super messy, connected to other religious traditions, often engaged in ways that are in opposition to our stated beliefs, and simply can't fit into the constant cookie cutters of coloniality. That is, the ways colonialism keeps living with us. So, why does this matter? Well, when we reduce Christianity to a cookie cutter definition, we miss the ways people generally, and specifically, people of color, have engaged with the tradition to imagine different possibilities for this world, and put those imaginations into practice through occupations, fasts, and pilgrimages. To ignore this, or to at minimum, not hold space for this nuance, is to erase the radical, imaginative possibilities people on the underside of empire have embodied throughout history, as they fought to carve out a better world for them and their families. And in the context of a global pandemic, where people of color are disproportionately affected, where Black and brown children are over two times as likely to have lost a caretaker in their home, I sure as hell want to ask if a different way is possible, what lessons history offers, and how people have engaged religion to radically imagine otherwise. And to miss that nuance is to miss the possibility of a world that is more free, more just, and more full of love. And that, for me, is what's at stake.

M

Megan Goodwin 32:25

I-- I just always learn so much from our guests, and I especially enjoy any opportunity I have to learn from Dr. Rodriguez. We'll share more of his research in the homework, so be sure to check that out. But what I hear him saying in this piece specifically is that, too often, our thinking about Latinx Christianity is constrained and warped by white European colonialism-- what he calls "Cookie Cutter Christianity." People assume that all Latinx people must be Catholic, when, as Dr. Rodriguez compellingly illustrates, there is so, so much more to Latinx Christianity. And every time I hear him talk about his research, I realize I have so much more to learn about Christianity, coalition building, and colonialism. I'm so grateful for him and for his work.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:05

Deeply, deeply, DEEPLY same. I think, I think Jorge is one of the few people who routinely challenges my sense, my ingrained, my learned, sense of "Christianity equals danger" in really interesting ways that, frankly, remind me of all that liberation theology that I liked so much in college when I had to take that class on Christianity, the singular one. Anyway, it's time for A Little Bit Leave It!

A

A Little Bit Leave It 33:42

\*A Little Bit Leave It\*





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:43

Where we're letting you know what we think is the most important, most interesting, or most challenging part of the topic. It's a little bit to leave you with!



Megan Goodwin 33:49

Okay! Little bit, leave it for today? We keep saying religion is what people do. So, Christianity is what Christians do. And while it's easy for us scholars of race and power to get caught up in all the damage done in the name of Christian values, today's episode was an important reminder that Christianity, especially among Christian communities of color, can make space for some truly revolutionary and desperately needed change and healing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:14

I love that.



Megan Goodwin 34:15

I know, I'm like, squishy today. This is what happens when we talk about the liberation theology. It gets me in the feels. Like, don't even start me on Dorothy Day. We'll be... anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:23

No, fair. One of the few people that my grandmother called a good Christian. She was NOT convinced there were many, but Dorothy Day counted.



Megan Goodwin 34:31

I love that!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:32

Anyway, I'm gonna-- I'm gonna do what I normally do, which is jump to another continent altogether and talk about India! As a subcontinent, as it were.



Megan Goodwin 34:41

I was gonna say, is it India? Is it India?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:42

It's about India. I'm gonna say that Christianity in India is one of my favorite things to talk about because there is literally no way it is present without imperialism! And, British imperialists, in particular (though not alone, the Portuguese and the and the French) were fucking horrible--



Megan Goodwin 35:00

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:01

Especially about Indian converts. Often, converting did not protect Indians from racist abuse. Like, we have another podcast altogether that where we could just read the signs, the segregationist white supremacist signs all over Indian cities that would read things like "no dogs or Indians."



Megan Goodwin 35:21

Jesus fucking Christ.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:22

Mhm, mhm.



Megan Goodwin 35:23

Okay, okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:24

But my favorite bit about Christianity in India is that Britains were HELLA confused. Like, could not make sense of what was going on when Indian Christians turned their Christianity-- a gift from them, the Brits-- into anti-colonial and anti-imperial theology. Like, hard, hard, HARD moment and movements rooted in Christianity, and the Brits were like, "But this is not... you're supposed to sing Hallelujah! This is not it!" Anyway, I've got homework about it. It's one of my favorite things where what was expected was not what happened. I think Britain's really saw this as a controlling and civilizational impulse, and a lot of Indian Christians turned around are like, "Nah, you should go home. We're gonna flip some tables."



Megan Goodwin 36:17

Yessssss!!!!

TaaaaSSSS!!!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:17

Which I hear... was a thing I hear Jesus did, but I don't know, cause, not my thing.



Megan Goodwin 36:23

\*laughs\* Amazing! Love it! Fantastic. Gonna read that homework. And if you don't know, now you know! The segment in which we get one factoid each. Okay. My-- oh, I'm excited about this one. So, again, if religion is what people do (and it is), then Catholicism is what Catholics do. And what some Mexican and US-ian Catholics are doing right now is honoring Santa Muerte. The Skinny Lady is especially beloved by trans and queer Catholics, as well as Catholic sex workers. The magisterium-- again, the dudes in charge of the official Roman Catholic Church-- ah! They are big mad about this.



If You Don't Know, Now You Know 36:31

\*If You Don't Know, Now You Know!\*



Megan Goodwin 36:35

One would assume, yes. Like, please stop making cryptosaints, they have said. And, those who love Santa Muerte were like "Lol, nope." Santa Muerte loves all vulnerable people, especially trans people, and she respects pronouns! But not borders, because, as Ilyse says, borders are lies we tell on maps and defend with bombs. Or, in the case of the US/Mexican border, whips and water cannons. And, La Niña Blanca definitely says chinga la migra! End factoid.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:41

\*laughs\* Well, I can't really follow that, but I have to.



Megan Goodwin 37:47


\*cackles\*




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:47


Okay, I'm just gonna-- I'm just gonna restate the thesis here?? It's easy. And like, again, I am a literal historian of imperialism and definitions of race within imperialism, so frankly, it's easy to shit on Christianity. It is! Y'all have done some fucking work around the world! Also, I'm a Jewish woman who gets hate mail daily. And I gotta tell ya, it's never Muslims sending this shit to me.


It is often, though not always, angry white Christians who really, really super hate Jews, and Muslims, and also women (but that's a separate thing, but probably also related because gender matters).


 Megan Goodwin 38:25  
Yeah.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:26  
But even *\*I\** know in the soup of white Christian supremacy that impacts-- I'm not exaggerating, my daily life-- that #NotAllChristians. And, Christianity is also a vibrant and multifaceted religion. And I'll be honest, listeners, since the last time we did an episode on Christianity, y'all were up in my DMs being whiny. I am never going to stop shitting on all of the hateful stuff, because it runs our world and it fucks with my family.

 Megan Goodwin 38:56  
Yeah.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:56  
But it's important that I say and that you hear me say that I really do know that that's not the whole thing. I do! I know that. It's a lot of what I see, given my identities and my work, but I know that that's not the whole thing.

 Megan Goodwin 39:09  
Yeah.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:10  
Mike... Mike drop. But not really because we gotta keep going. But, mike drop, proverbially.  
*\*laughs\**

 Megan Goodwin 39:17  
*\*giggles\** Places down on the stage gently. On that note, don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds!  
It's time for homework.

 Simpsons 39:24

\*What homework?!\*

M

Megan Goodwin 39:29

As always, we've got citations, references, and other goodies, and the obligatory transcripts, stashed at [keepingit101.com](http://keepingit101.com) for every single episode. Check it out! Okay, I did so much talking today. IRMF, you go first!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:43

Oh, alright then. So, first and foremost, you nerds want to read our guest expert, Dr. Jorge Juan Rodriguez V. So, he's got a brand new article. It is out literally this month in a book called "Faith and Power: Latina/o Religious Politics since 1945," and the article in that book is called "Lived Religion in East Harlem: the New York Young Lords Occupy First Spanish-- The People's Church." It looks fabulous.

M

Megan Goodwin 40:13

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:13

If it's hard to get your hands on a book, don't worry. Jorge's on two amazing podcasts: one with friend of the pod, Greg Soden on "Classical Ideas" that I'll link to in the show notes, and a second with friend of the pod, Daniel White Hodge's "Profane Faith," with ANOTHER friend of the pod, James H. Hill Jr. Frankly, Jorge and James are like, thinker BFFAE goals, so you should listen to that podcast. It's a joy, frankly. And, like I've said before, go follow him on Twitter. He is @JJrodV. Beyond Dr. Rodriguez's work, I recommend my former colleague, Dr. Todne Thomas, who is mandatory reading on black evangelicals who, quite frankly, before meeting her, I did not really think much about or know existed. So, her book "Kincraft: The Making of Black Evangelical Sociality" is available through Duke. It just came out last fall. It's super great. And I'll link to a couple of public profiles and podcasts about it. She also has an article in the JAAR, the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, just this past month called "Black Church Arson in the Museum," which is a fantastic article. And she also has a public lecture on the same topic, which I'll link to in the show notes. And former guest expert, Vicki Brennan's "Singing Yoruba Christianity," which is a DOPE book. It's about Nigerian Yoruba Christianity, one of the many countries in Africa we did NOT visit today. It's a great book, and there's also some public scholarship around that that I'll link to. Not South America, nor Africa, but I have a lot of sources on Indian and South Asian Christianities-- So let me hype two! The first is Clara A. B. Joseph's "Christianity in India: the AntiColonial Turn." It came out last year and frankly, it thinks about how South Indian Christians were utterly engaged in anticolonial, anti-imperial work. Super smart.

M

Megan Goodwin 41:53

What?! Nice!



Ilyse Morgenstern Fuerst 42:12

And then, my colleague and bud Timothy Dobe's book also does smart work! And it's about-- it's called "Hindu Christian Faqir: Modern Monks, Global Christianity, and Indian Sainthood." It's a lot more about the multiplicity of religions, but it is thinking about this global Christianity as a system, and how that functions. So... I'll stop there, but I might sneak sneaky things into shownotes. Who knows.



Megan Goodwin 42:37

Who can say. Okay. I am plus-oneing all things Jorge, frankly. He has a short piece, also, called "Comida de Pobre," where he--



Ilyse Morgenstern Fuerst 42:46

Oh, so good.



Megan Goodwin 42:47

It's so good. I just, I think about it like... maybe once every two weeks? Thinking about food cultures, and coalition-building, and community, and just... and religion, obviously. Just all of the things that that feed us. We also truly have no business talking about Christianity beyond whiteness, without speaking the name of James Cone. If you are new to Dr. Cone's work, start with "The Cross and the Lynching Tree" and just... keep reading from there. I also want to plus one all things James H. Hill Jr. He's got a lot of really fun stuff. I'm gonna put a bunch of stuff in the show notes, so just stay tuned for that-- including the piece that he did about the Watchmen, which I'm still obsessed with. Okay, I mentioned "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" and Gbowee's memoir about Liberian, Christian, and Muslim organizing to end the Liberian war. So, "Pray the Devil Back to Hell." I think we have it on Kanopy. It shows up at a lot of libraries. Highly recommended and fits within 100 minute class period if you need something that will do that for you. One of the reasons that I recommend her memoir, though, is because she is SO clear and consistent about how her Christian commitments inform all of her work. And the fact that all of that got left out of the documentary is an interesting choice that gets made, particularly in secular feminist spaces. So. Cesar Chavez, as I mentioned, has that beautiful piece, "Mexican American and the Church," which is available public-facing and we'll get you a PDF of that. Barbara Sostaita has a number of really interesting articles about religion on the US/Mexican border. The one I'm thinking of is in Bitch magazine. I'll get you a link for that as well. I will get you some more background information on a group that started, I believe, as a Unitarian organization called "No More Deaths" that does radical things like leave food and water on the US/Mexican border for people trying to cross so that they don't die. This group faced criminal charges for trying to keep humans alive. And interestingly, because I do a lot of bitching about how US courts treat religion, the decision was that their Christianity compelled them to try to save lives. So, they actually won that court case. I also have a bunch of sources about Santa Muerte because I am obsessed with her! But one that I found last semester is a

short documentary called "Muerte Querida" that gives you just a really rich and beautiful look into communities who honor the Skinny Lady! There's also a good, short, very teachable Daisy Machado article about reverence for Santa Muerte that I really enjoyed teaching. And that's enough, and I'm sure we'll stash a bunch of other stuff in the notes as well, because that is how we do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:54

So obnoxious.



Megan Goodwin 45:55

\*laughs\* Learn things. Anyway, BIG thanks to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Amazon, and Google. It really helps. And, if you want to be Nerd of the Week, write us a review! That's how we can see your silly handles, you sillies! This week's Nerds are: Abel Meeropol, PuppyFluffy-- sure!-- and hools2.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:14

\*laughs\* I think I'm gonna make you read everybody's names from now on because it brings me joy.



Megan Goodwin 46:21

\*laughs\* Sure. Imma do it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:24

Join us next time, nerds, for more HISTORY OF THE WORLD (RELIGIONS) PART 1, when we chat about Judaisms, and are helped out by guest expert Dr. Shari Rabin.



Megan Goodwin 46:33

Nice! Shoutout to our research assistant, Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible, and therefore, awesome. Need more religion nerderie? You know where to find us! It's Twitter. Still Twitter. It's always Twitter.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:46

You can find Megan on Twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse (that's me!) @ProfIRMF, or the show @keepingit\_101. Find the website and the transcripts at keepingit101.com. Find us on Instagram. And with that, peace out nerds!



Megan Goodwin 47:04

Do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Bonus Ending 47:27

\*History of the World 1981, Mel Brooks waits at The Last Supper\*