

early-christianity-is-actually-kind-of-interesting

Wed, 3/17 5:09PM 42:50

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

christianity, jesus, religion, imperialism, book, early, hear, new testament, christian, called, people, nerds, gospels, catholic, india, christians, waiting, messy, vladimir, bit

SPEAKERS

Megan Goodwin, Krusty the Clown, Simpsons, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Letterkenny, Detox



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping it 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. This season our work is made possible in part through a generous grant from the New England Humanities Consortium, and with additional support from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We are grateful to live, teach, and record on the ancestral and unseeded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki, and Aucocisco peoples.



Megan Goodwin 00:39

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



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:44

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia. We're halfway through the semester, and not just because March definitely never actually ended. So...so you nerds know the drill by now. We're giving you quick intros to topics we don't specialize in, and then ask the real experts to show us how it's done.



Megan Goodwin 01:12

And boy, are we ever not experts in today's topic.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:15

Oh, certainly not.



Megan Goodwin 01:17

Sure not. On this episode, we're talking about Christianity, or at least the very earliest bits of it. Buckle up buttercups.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:25

What's the buzz? Tell me what's-a-happenin': It's time for the LESSON PLAN.



Megan Goodwin 01:28

Yes! I'm so happy I made you do that. Okay, to be fair, we do know some things about Christianity, in part because it's nearly impossible to live in what's now the United States and not absorb some information about Christianity, just like, by osmosis. In larger part, I know things about Christianity because I grew up Catholic, which I might have mentioned once or twice on this here pod. And also because I actually taught history of Christianity a couple times, though, it has been several minutes. So please, please don't quiz me.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:05

I won't. I promise.



Megan Goodwin 02:07

Please don't. It's so- so long. But- but while like us many of our listeners probably know some stuff about Christianity, there's also a lot to know. And some of the stuff you think you know, is probably wrong. Sorry, but also not sorry. That's our brand. So- and also, we can't talk about Christianity without talking about imperialism, so even if we're a little bit beyond our comfort zone today, at least we'll still be yelling about imperialism. Thank goodness.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:32

Oh! Thank goodness, indeed. Also, maybe let's not assume that our listeners know stuff about Christianity- assuming everybody should already know stuff about Christianity is a little bit of imperialism too.



Megan Goodwin 02:47

A little bit, a little bit.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:48

So in the spirit of, "hey, maybe you don't know stuff about Christianity, and even if you do, we bet some of what you know or think you know, is wrong." We're offering you a three pronged thesis, like a like a trident, or a shrimp fork. That's definitely not kosher. But traif is super yum, amiright?



Megan Goodwin 03:10

Remember- remember when your little guy said- I don't know if we can put this on the pod or not, but remember when he said the berakah about ham? I giggle about that all the time.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:19

We can put it on the pod, it's okay, Jews are complicated and manifold and meat and ham are in my life for reasons I don't understand. And he does- he said- he said the berakah on bacon. Proud day. Proud mom. Anyway, we digress. Today's thesis is: Christianity? It's complicated. And early Christianity is both complicated, and actually, admittedly, kind of interesting because one, Christianity was kind of an accident. Two, the New Testament is a messy bitch who lives for drama.



Megan Goodwin 03:56

See what happens when you let me write the pod.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:59

And, three, and this one may shock you: Christianity is imperialism.



Megan Goodwin 04:05

Yup. The 101: ON TODAY. The section where we do some Professor work. Okay, I volunteered to do the heavy lifting because I've taught this class, and also to apologize to Ilyse on behalf of all of the random Christians who've tried to convert her over the years, that just- that seems fair.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:22

That's a fair trade. It's a fair trade.



Megan Goodwin 04:26

So for the first prong in this thesis trident, like a very Jason Momoa-Aquaman space (except, well, he's terrible it turns out). Anyway, Christianity was kind of an accident. So okay, Jesus, who you've probably heard of, gets born in roughly five BCE. BCE...



Detox 04:45

It's our secret word of the day.



Megan Goodwin 04:48

"Before the Common Era," which is an attempt to mark time in a nonChristian imperialist way. Because before BCE came BC, which stood for "Before Christ" and after BC came AD, which stood for "Anno Domini," which is Latin for "in the year of our Lord," "our Lord" being- yeah, you know who. We now use BCE and CE (Before the Common Era and the Common Era) to pretend that Western history isn't massively Christian imperialist, even in the way keeps track of time.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:19

It's so thin- it's such a thin veneer, but it's- like, fine, add those E's. Whatever.



Megan Goodwin 05:27

Like Louis CK is gross. And I stopped using this clip in class because he's gross. But he has this whole shtick about Christianity, just like- just winning. And you can tell because all of our time is Jesus plus one, Jesus plus two, Jesus and it- uh yeah. So anyway, we're four

minutes into the podcast, right? And I've already both derailed us into talking about calendars and imperialism again, but sorry, not sorry, we measure Western history in relationship to when Jesus was born, or at least when we used to think he was born before we got more specific carbon dating tools. Anyway-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:00

Listen, let's not get bogged down in every imperialism joke, because we will never finish this episode. And if I'm saying that you are on thin ice lady.



Megan Goodwin 06:11

That's true, if you're pivoting us away from calendars... yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:16

Thin ice! Thin ice.



Megan Goodwin 06:20

Okay, right. So Jesus he got born, we have scant but pretty well verified evidence that he historically existed and good for him. He caused something of a ruckus during his lifetime by insisting that we value the lives of all human beings, and then he was executed by the state. Here's what he did not do: start a new religion, or at least not on purpose. So the stories that we have about Jesus were all written down long after his death, decades and almost a century in some cases. But what we do have suggests that he was trying to fix existing systems, not start something completely new. Christianity doesn't become a thing until well after Jesus's death. Early Jesus people became what I, and a number of other scholars might refer to as an apocalyptic new religious movement. The apocalyptic part is important. Early Jesus people- (not Christians, because there's no such thing yet) early Jesus people were expecting Jesus to return and the world to end in their lifetimes, which is why we have so many writings encouraging them to live together, to share everything in common, and remain celibate, no need to pass on wealth to future generations, and definitely no need to make future generations if the world's gonna end like next month.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:29

Oh, I get it. This must be the start of a time-honored Christian tradition, constantly and inaccurately predicting the end of the world.



Megan Goodwin 07:38

Yep, yep, can confirm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:40

So what I hear you saying, if I could recap-



Megan Goodwin 07:42

Please do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:43

is that the earliest moments after a dude named Jesus, who we have some evidence actually existed, created a community of followers who are not Christians at that moment, but are Jesus people?



Megan Goodwin 08:00

Yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:01

And this religious movement that the early Jesus people create is apocalyptic.



Megan Goodwin 08:08


Yup.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:08


Insofar as they are expecting Jesus to return / the world to end before they're dead, like, in their lifetime.


 Megan Goodwin 08:18
100%


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:19
Okay.


 Megan Goodwin 08:19
That is correct.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:20
Okay.

 Megan Goodwin 08:21
So, Jesus did not start a new religion. People who were excited about Jesus's teachings, after his death, started a movement that later became a new religion. So Christianity, or what we think of now as Christianity, gets started as an apocalyptic new religious movement, and was kind of an accident.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:40
Awesome.

 Megan Goodwin 08:42
Awesome indeed. Prong the second, the New Testament is a messy bitch who lives for drama. There I said it. The New Testament is the original Regina George telling the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and a bunch of other books that they can't sit with her.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:56
Listen, you know that I never get these "Mean Girls" references. What are you talking about lady?



Megan Goodwin 09:02

The Bible! Okay, so we talked about the Bible or the New Testament, like it's one book, like Jesus just sat down and caffeinated up and wrote the whole thing in like one sitting. But that is not correct for a number of reasons. For starters, Jesus wrote exactly none of the Bible, which actually I just realized means that together Ilyse and I have written 200% more books than Jesus.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:30

Can that go on my CV?



Megan Goodwin 09:32

Yeah, I'm gonna start there now.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:35

Okay, we're gonna get a lot of emails about this episode, and you, Megan, are responsible for responding to all of them because this is- that we are 200% more productive than Jesus is a look. That is a look.



Megan Goodwin 09:49

Book wise! He did a lot, you know, but not- he didn't- he doesn't have a book and we both have books. So, just saying. Anyway- we did!




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:56


Just saying, you're on email patrol. That's- that's you.




Megan Goodwin 09:58

That's- that's fair. I accept that. Anyway, the so-called New Testament is a collection of books (a COLLECTION of books, not one book) that Jesus people tacked on to the Hebrew Bible, which they just did. They did- they just made it about them. Christians do that a lot. So in addition to sacred histories and poetry borrowed from the Jews, the Christian Bible- the Christian Bible includes gospels,


 Detox 10:24
It's our secret word of the day!


 Megan Goodwin 10:27
which are four accounts of the life and times of Jesus. These were written down decades after Jesus died. Mark is probably the earliest and even that was probably not recorded until about 70 CE, but all of them were revised a bunch of times, and sometimes well into the second century. Matthew and Luke borrow from Mark, but they don't totally agree on everything Jesus did and said, and John has like his own entire thing going on. And these, also, were not the only Gospels. The New Testament wasn't finalized until about the fifth century CE, so if you're keeping track that is many hundreds of years after Jesus was born, and then died. There are a bunch of books known as apocrypha

 Detox 11:06
It's our secret word of the day!

 Megan Goodwin 11:09
that were once considered scripture by some Jesus people, but got left out of what became the Christian canon.

 Detox 11:14
It's our secret word of the day!

 Megan Goodwin 11:17
or official collection of sacred texts.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:20
Okay, can I sound like a dumb-dumb for a minute.

 Megan Goodwin 11:27
Probably not, I don't think you're a dumb-dumb.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:30

Well, like, this is my grant-funded research based podcast and I need to say out loud, having had multiple degrees in religion, I really thought the New Testament was just the four Gospels. First of all-



Megan Goodwin 11:44

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:44

I did not realize that there was- I've heard the word apocrypha, but I did not realize that these were- I just assumed those were like, outside of Scripture, and always had been outside of Scripture, but were like, I don't know, like "secret" books, as opposed to, like, one time, scriptural. I don't want to say canon, cuz I know that means something really specific here, but Scriptural and now are, I don't know, debated or outside.



Megan Goodwin 12:11

Yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:12

So wait, you're telling me. So let me just say, and I'm going to put this in the voice of our listeners, but I think they know more than me on this one. Are you telling me that early Christians couldn't even agree on which gospels are gospels?



Megan Goodwin 12:25

Yes, that is correct. I am saying that, yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:27

And that the Gospels themselves are sort of doing their own thing.



Megan Goodwin 12:33

They are in process for decades, if not centuries. And also while three of them kind of

share a narrative, there's no- like, there are a bunch of places they disagree on because they were for different audiences, working different angles, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:50

Okay, that sounds messy.



Megan Goodwin 12:52

I told you, she's a messy bitch.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:54

You did.



Megan Goodwin 12:54

But wait, there's more. Yeah, more- more than just Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who, when I played sports (and you know that was a million years ago) blessed the field we played upon, because yeah, that's- that would happen in Catholic sports. Yeah. So after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we get the Acts of the Apostles, which is about what Jesus's best bros did after he died and came back, and then left again. We get the epistles,



Detox 13:20

It's our secret word of the day!



Megan Goodwin 13:23

which are letters from Jesus's chattiest follower Paul, to all the communities he traveled around setting up.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:28

Well, cuz Christianity is imperialist... so- put a pin in Paul.



Megan Goodwin 13:32

Yeah. Wait- wait for it. Yeah. And then the book of Revelation (singular Revelation) which scholars generally read as a warning to early Jesus people not to be like the Greeks or the Romans, but mostly gets used as a prop in Keanu Reeves-esque disaster films.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:50

Okay, so what I hear you say is that- that's a lot.



Megan Goodwin 13:55

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:56

So there's gospels, apocrypha, apostles, epis-bles?



Megan Goodwin 14:04

Epistles.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:07

Listen I thought apostles and epistles were like the same thing, until like, 30 seconds ago,



Megan Goodwin 14:13

Okay, we are learning today!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:13

because, again, I do not care about Christianity.



Megan Goodwin 14:24

Okay, okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:25

Okay, so there's a lot of- let me let me rephrase.



Megan Goodwin 14:29

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:30

As someone who has done years of textual work in really two other religious traditions, what I hear you saying about early Christianity, and the New Testament broadly, is that there are actually really specific textual debates and that what we think of as one book isn't just one book and what we think of sacred- "The Sacred Source" is actually one part of a series of sacred sources that comprise- um, let's say, Christian textual practice.



Megan Goodwin 15:04

Yes. And also, all Christians don't even actually agree on what is and isn't part of the official Bible, because Catholic Bibles include books that Protestants leave out. And also Catholics and Protestants have their commandments in different order, which I'm still messed up about. And Mormons have a whole third book- a whole third Testament, the Book of Mormon. We told you it was complicated.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:28

This is really complicated and a little bit exhausting.



Megan Goodwin 15:31

Yeah, yeah, can confirm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:33

Okay, so we've done two prongs, what was that last prong? Oh, wait, I know.



Megan Goodwin 15:40

I know that you do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:41

Christianity = imperialism. You, Megan, did some hollering on our last episode about "go forth and make disciples of all nations?" And it kind of messed me up.



Megan Goodwin 15:54

Yeah, yeah. So yes, again, I said, Mark. But I meant Matthew, I read Matthew 25, I think, mixing up scriptures in grand Catholic tradition. Thank you to CJ Schmidt for giving me the heads up there. Sorry about it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:09

Okay. But, like, all of this early stuff is just the beginning of Christian imperialism, right? There's a lot of communities in the first few centuries of the Common Era that think Jesus was pretty groovy. But- but if Christianity doesn't really become a thing, until a Roman Emperor Constantine puts imperialism in that same bed with Jesus and starts giving subjects who convert preferential treatment throughout the Roman Empire then it seems like we need to really think about imperialism here, because by the end of the fourth century, Christianity is the Roman Empire's official religion, and, like, the rest is literally history, which is why I can do this bit.



Megan Goodwin 16:54

Specifically, the history of imperialism, which is definitely why you could do this bit. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so the story goes that Constantine was trying to figure out which one was the right religion on the eve of a big battle?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:07

Sure.



Megan Goodwin 17:07

So, you know, like you do. So he phones a friend, he calls on the Christian God. He sees a cross on the sun and gets this message in his head that says "In Hoc Signo Vincas" (in this sign, conquer) he puts the Greek letters ChiRo (for Christ) on his battle standards, and he wins- he wins the day. So the the "IHS" that you see on a lot of crosses actually stands for In Hoc Signo, in this sign, parentheses, yeah, conquer.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:38

Whoa!



Megan Goodwin 17:38

So big imperialism vibes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:42

I didn't know that, but-



Megan Goodwin 17:43

I honestly- I took classes at Drew (shout out to Drew University, I love them)- but I took classes on apocalypse and creation with Catherine Keller, whom we love. And there were folks in- there were there Christian ministers in my class that did not know that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:48

Oh so I don't feel so bad.



Megan Goodwin 18:02

Yeah, it's not just you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:04

But I do know that by this point, like when Constantine is getting- is apparently staring at the sun, which can't be good for his eyes, like he's doing the retina and corneal damage, but he's getting Latin vibes to conquer the world. Christianity at this point has spread throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, through what's now, let's call most of Eastern Europe and North Africa, as well as what we might call the Middle East. But what I know is that Christianity even makes it to India by this time.



Megan Goodwin 18:37

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:38

Particularly the the west coast of the Indian subcontinent. So Christianity is, as we, and especially I, have been yelling about, imperialism. Both in its theological imperative to 'make disciples of all nations' and in its political alliance with one of the most powerful empires in history.



Megan Goodwin 19:00

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:02

So if I may review-



Megan Goodwin 19:04

Please do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:05

Christianity was kind of an accident because Jesus was trying to fix existing problems, not start a new religion, even though trying to fix existing problems is how a lot of religions get started.



Megan Goodwin 19:17

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:18

Second, I can't believe you made me say this twice now. The New Testament is a messy bitch.



Megan Goodwin 19:24

She is.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:25

And third, and my favorite, Christianity = imperialism. That about cover it?



Megan Goodwin 19:32

Yeah, I think it does, good job! Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication, but it's still: STORYTIME.



Krusty the Klown 19:48

Hey, kids it's story time.



Megan Goodwin 19:51

I have to. This- this might be silly, honestly. But the piece I picked for today isn't traditionally considered- or the author I picked for today isn't traditionally considered a theorist of religion. This bit is from 20th century Irish writer Samuel Beckett's play, "Waiting for Godot," in which two characters (Vladimir and Estragon) spend the entire play waiting for a dude to show up. Spoilers. He does not show up, but that does not stop them from waiting. It's an allegory there... something... anyway, while they're waiting, these two characters talk about a bunch of things. And Vladimir does a whole bit about Jesus's crucifixion that gets stuck in my head anytime I have to talk about the Gospels. I am not going to do the whole back and forth. You are welcome. I also briefly considered making you read this with me but that seems mean because I know you're not a theater kid. So here are the pertinent bits. Vladimir says to his companion: "Do you remember the Gospels? Ah, yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story? Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... [stage directions say he searches for the contrary of 'saved'] ...damned. And yet... (pause)... how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there- or thereabouts- and only one speaks of a thief being saved. One out of four. Of the other three, two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him. But one of the four says that one of the two was saved." And Estragon says: "Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it." Vladimir says: "But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?" Estragon says: "Who believes him?" Vladimir [says]: "Everybody. It's the only version they know." I think- yeah. And the Astra God actually says that people are ignorant apes. So-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:44

They do. I know the place.



Megan Goodwin 21:45

I know, I know how you do. I love this play. And also, as a kid who A) grew up Catholic, again, have mentioned several times, but also is exactly the sort of person who would focus on these details. This- this really stuck with me. And I think in large part, I still reflect on it because it reflects my own, again, admittedly limited experience with teaching History of Christianity, especially in North Carolina. So like, nearly all of my students came in knowing the story of Jesus's resurrection, or so they said, but one of the things that I do in the first week of class, because I'm a jerk, and also I think everything can be improved with performance. I have them act out the resurrection narratives in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, according to what it says in the text, and they're always- yeah, they're always surprised to find that, like, different sources tell different stories, they emphasize different things, they leave things out, they disagree. And I'm- it- it boggles my mind that a religion that is so deeply wedded to texts, has so many contradictions and so many folks who have like already decided what the story's about, regardless of what the text actually says. So I don't- I don't want to fall down a scriptural literalism rabbit hole. But I am always struck by arguments about reading the Bible literally, because the Bible literally argues for things that contradict each other, like gender hierarchy in 2 Timothy 12, but gender equality in Galatians 3:28. These are- I have like six Bible verses memorized because again, grew up Catholic, but 2 Timothy 12, talks about not suffering a woman to teach, because Eve fell first and tricked Adam, but Galatians 3:28 says, "in Christ, there is no male or female." Or, you know, many Christians don't subscribe to a lot of stuff that is in the New Testament, like, I don't know, celibacy, or, for example, snake handling, which does show up in Mark 16. Anyway, Christianity, it's complicated. Ilyse, what do you think?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:52

So I also love "Waiting for Godot," but for all sorts of, I guess, other reasons, because as like a little Jewish kid reading this and like, whatever AP literature or some crap a gajillion years ago, I remember feeling like, what are you waiting around for God for? Like, this doesn't make a lot of sense to me as a Jewish person, because like, God ain't coming, you're supposed to just do good stuff, like waiting around is not the answer. You're supposed to be doing stuff, and you are not doing anything as you wait around and shoot the shit.



Megan Goodwin 24:21

They are not.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:22

Listen- waiting around and shooting the shit- great one stage play. Like- like, the Jewish version of this, I imagine, would be like, alright, we'll walk, like- like this guy is not coming.



Megan Goodwin 24:33

It's late, we've got stuff to do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:36

Like, I gotta go get my cart and like sing "Fiddler" on the way. Like, we are a "Fiddler" people.



Megan Goodwin 24:45

Yes. Important stuff.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:46

Well, like, you have to- like, what are you doing? You have stuff to do, and like there's days of the week, you can't just stay here all the time. And there's times of the day like our day is ordered and there are expectations and nobody but nobody is supposed to come in the way of that, as my son who's said the Berakah on- on ham could tell you, right? If you're eating you say the Berakah, it does not matter if the thing you're eating is not allowed. So I think, um, as a grown ass adult with a PhD in religious studies, I think it's interesting to hear the, like- what I had absolutely not remembered as the like, straight up engagement with Christianity. Because my memory of that play is like, it's an allegory, not: there is like, of course, it's an allegory, but also like there's straight engagement with the thing that is supposed to be an allegory of. Like, this isn't parallel, like these are intersections here.



Megan Goodwin 25:40

Yes, it's right here.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:42

So, of course, I didn't remember it because again, I do not care for Christianity, or because like I'm sure tiny Ilyse in AP Lit was like "More Christianity? Cool. Cool, cool, cool. I don't understand any of this."



Megan Goodwin 25:57

Something new for us.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:58

I'm relying on osmosis to make sense of this entire thing and get a grade on it that helps my entrance into college. What up Christian imperialism. So I guess-



Megan Goodwin 26:06

Yowch. OOH.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:07

I guess that's my response.



Megan Goodwin 26:09

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:11

But I do appreciate that you've expanded us beyond just some theorists here. I do think that thinking about not just pop culture, but like- yeah, I think a play like "Waiting for Godot" and a playwright like Beckett who show up in our high school curriculum as gems that ought to be studied. I think it's interesting to see how even those gems that ought to be studied, definitely, definitely articulate how Christianity is ubiquitous in Western contexts. And- and that those sources of literature and I guess, pop culture to a certain degree, are wrestling with really intense truths about religions that get glossed over and smoothed out in other contexts. Like this play is telling us that there's multiplicity.



Megan Goodwin 27:10

Mmhmm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:11

But we often only hear about singularity. And so it's interesting that we know that there's multiplicity, we see it in even the, like, high culture / low culture, whatever kinds of things we consume, but then we- we forget that. We go away from that. So I think- I think that's what's interesting to me about early Christianity and New Testament studies is like, the Christianity that you can get by doing a deep dive is always so different than the Christianity you're going to get in other places, particularly mainstream conceptualizations.



Megan Goodwin 27:47

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:48

I brought it around.



Megan Goodwin 27:49

Love it. I love it. Well played.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:58

You've heard from us now hear about us: it's PRIMARY SOURCES.



Megan Goodwin 28:01

[singing] Primary sources!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:06

Alright, since we're talking Christianity, and since- and since we mentioned that- that under the Roman Empire, Christianity shows up on the west coast of India, let me talk about a church in India that I have visited not on the west coast, actually on the East

Coast called Luz church in Chennai, not "loose", it's spelled like that, like "the light" in Spanish, but "Luz" because local pronunciations and English transliterations and all sorts of fun language politics. So when I went to Luz church in Chennai, which is a city in the state of Tamil Nadu, in the- on the East Coast, near the Bay of Bengal, I- I was like a 20 year old, you know, punk, never left the country before here I am in India. And there's just religion everywhere. And it's awesome. And it's new, and it's weird. And there were some Catholic kids in our study abroad group. And we had walked past this church on our way to school every day. And they were like, do you think we could go to Mass? And I was like, "that sounds fun! I'll do that. I'm game. Why not? Like this is cool. I would never do that in the States. But like, we're in India, I'll do everything. I'm neo-orientalist. Let me get my notebook out! I'm a guy with pens." And, so we go to this Mass. And I had been to two Masses in my life before then. One was for, like a friend's confirmation and one was because we were doing some interfaith crap and I ended up as a Jew on Good Friday in a Catholic Church, which was horrible and I do not recommend.



Megan Goodwin 29:45

I'm still traumatized by that. I'm like traumatized by that story. I'm sorry.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:48

I remember leaving being like "Oh, they do all hate us. This is bad. This is really bad." But- Anyway- um, anyway, so we go into this mess and, you know, I'm not, like, familiar with Mass, let me put it that way. It's not like a thing I'm good at, or have any memory of except maybe- maybe Christians, and Catholics in particular, hate Jews. And we go to this Mass and there's this Jesus statue, which I was like, cool. I grew up in New Jersey, there's a lot of like, Italian and Irish Catholic folks around that have like Jesus and Mary on their front lawn and like the little



Megan Goodwin 30:19

And the bath tub!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:20

Yeah, exactly. So like, whatever that is. It's like lawn ornament Jesus and Mary. And I kind of- like, I was like, "Alright, cool." And we're in India. So there's murtis or images everywhere. And I was like: "cool, cool, cool." And then Jesus gets a puja done to him, like as part- My memory of this and like, listen, scholars of Christianity in South Asia, please

don't yell at me. I'm like remembering this as a 20 year old, I can absolutely go point you to people's work like Eliza Kent's work. And Amy Alloco has some really good work on,



Megan Goodwin 30:40

Whaaaaat, what? We love her.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:54

on things that we should cite here. But like, so don't- don't yell at me, this is my memory. But my memory of this is that we're in this Mass and the Father is, you know, dressed up like you see on TV for me, and they're doing-



Megan Goodwin 31:09

Like Father Brown.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:10

Like Father Brown, and they're doing the incense thing. And all of a sudden, they're like, giving a tilak like a dot to Jesus on his forehead, and there's garlands around Jesus's neck. And I left feeling like, I'm pretty sure that they just did Puja, like the traditional Hindu phraseology for worship, to Jesus. And it was one of these moments as like a baby religion major that I was like, this is amazing. Religion is different depending on where you are! And different iterations of practice have to do with like, translation and adaptation, and associations, and appropriations, and adoptions. Like all of those things are happening at once. But like truly one of my- it was maybe my second week in India. And it was like, okay, there is Jesus puja at the, at one point Spanish Jesuit Catholic Church, in this city. That was British control for however many years in a neighborhood that was like, overwhelmingly Hindu. Like it broke my little brain in all the best ways.



Megan Goodwin 32:20

I love it so much. Jesus, puja, I love it. I love it so much. Yeah, that's great. That's so great. This is- Yeah, that's a space where I feel like my global religions students always struggle a little bit because most of them are from what's now the United States. So they assume that, you know, Christianity is Christianity. And Judaism is Judaism and Hinduism is Hinduism. And it turns out in a lot of places in the world, especially in the not best, we see really, multiple religious identities. So the Christianity gets mixed up with the Hinduism

and the Buddhism and all the- Yeah, I love that. That's dope. I want there to be pictures. There's probably not pictures.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:06

I don't have good ones. I didn't have a digital camera. So-



Megan Goodwin 33:09

That's fair.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:10

It was a number of years ago.



Megan Goodwin 33:13

Awesome. Yeah, yeah, I guess that's also the space I'm sitting in with us of the like, what Christianity is, which is messy, and multiple, and shaped by where you are and who your family is, and all of that stuff versus which stories we remember, like, I'm really- I'm stuck in this like, okay, we know the story about the thief. But that's only in one of the four Gospels. I guess. Yeah. I just- having grown up in a predominantly Irish and Polish Catholic Parish outside Philly, and then getting to college, which was like Boston, so lots of Catholics there too. But also, BU at the time was the most international college- or university in the country. And realizing that like what I knew about Christianity was not all there was to know and then getting- then studying religion in the American South and realizing like, "Oh, hey, not everybody is super positive about Catholics, it turns out. They don't actually think Catholics are Christian." That's-



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:23

Yeah, that was shocking for me too, truly.



Megan Goodwin 34:25

And so what- I mean, and it's- it's this weird space in my brain of I'm not Catholic, I haven't been Catholic in decades. But also if I were going to be Christian, like, come on, like, everybody else is just kind of kidding. Like, this is not my scholarly perspective,

obviously. But there's a weird, deep part of my skull that, like, is still kind of convinced that everybody else is doing it wrong, even though that's not where my politics or my scholarship is because religion is messy. Oh, I don't like- I don't have a one firm anecdote here so much as just, I keep being surprised at which stories stick and which ones don't. And- and, you know, I spend all this time being immersed in how religion gets covered in the news, because I'm paying all of this attention to public scholarship and I'm always shocked that when we hear about religion, it's usually conservative. It's usually white. It's almost always Christianity. And we get conversations about "Oh, if only there were a religious left," when there has been a religious left, and Christianity has been part of that religious left for many, many years. But it's not white overwhelmingly, we see folks like James Cone, you know, shape black theology in really radical ways we see Catholic workers pushing for the rights and dignity of all laborers. But that is not the Christianity we think of when we hear Christianity invoked in the news. And that- I don't know, that's a bummer to me. But also, I am grateful for this reminder that Christianity has always been complicated. It's always been multiple. It's always been messy. And I think that's easy to forget when we're just- yeah, going along with whatever the- the mainstream narrative is about it. Hey, hey, hey, Ilyse, what does all this history have to do with our next episode featuring Dr. Shaily Patel?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:30

Well, we have Dr. Shaily Patel on because she teaches courses in New Testament Christian apocryphal texts, orthodoxy and heresy, demonology and exorcism-



Megan Goodwin 36:43

YES!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 36:43

She is an early Christianity expert, and how rad does all of that sound? And frankly, how not what you think when you think about Christianity does all of that sound? Which means for us, how necessary does it sound to tell our beloved nerds all about these not-what-you-think-Christianity-is Christianity stories?



Megan Goodwin 37:10

Yes. Yeah. No. And it was- we just- we had such a blast talking to Dr. Patel about her work, and we cannot wait to share it with you in a fortnight. Hopefully, we gave you enough

background on this episode, so that even if you don't know a lot about early Christianity, you can still get a sense of why her research is so interesting and so important.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:28

Yes, but don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds. You've got: HOMEWORK.



Simpsons 37:33

Homework, what homework?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:35

Remember, you can find everything that we're going to assign here and a whole lot more in the show notes for this episode. Links, citations, non-paywalled options for stuff you need a university log in to get to, occasional silly pictures of us, all of that and transcripts because accessibility isn't just good pedagogy. It's mandatory.



Megan Goodwin 37:54

Yes, ma'am. I once again did so very much talking on this episode. And I also, as I have stressed repeatedly am not an expert in early Christianity, but I am hashbrown blessed to know a lot of folks who are experts in New Testament (I'm never letting Kimmy Schmidt go. It sucked after the first season but the first season was really good). Anyway. So I do- I do know a lot of folks who are experts in New Testament and early Christianity, and I recommend that you check them out. So in alphabetical order, actually, Lynn Huber, who's at Elon [University] has a bunch of amazing work about gender, sexuality, and apocalypticism. Her most recent is a volume called "The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Critical Readings," which she co-edited with Rhiannon Greybill. Joe Marchal, whom I also adore, does rad work on gender, sexuality and Paul, Joe honestly writes a book like every 15 minutes, but I am most excited of- He does. It's intimidating. I'm most excited about his 2019 "Appalling Bodies: Queer Figures Before and After Paul's Letters," or as you might know them now Ilyse, epistles.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:57

Thank you.



Megan Goodwin 38:59

You're also probably sensing- You're welcome. You're also, like, probably sensing a theme about the sort of early Christianity / New Testament people I tend to know. Meredith Warren, who's at Sheffield wrote an amazing book called "My Flesh is Meat Indeed," which is not NOT about cannibalism in the early Christian imagination. You're welcome. Oh, and hey, Sarah Porter of Harvard, but also of Sacred Writes, the program on public scholarship on religion that I direct, did a really cool thread on Gnosticism, which is an early form of Christianity that Dan Brown has commandeered to write terrible books that became terrible movies starring America's dad Thomas Hanks. So you should check out that thread too. That's in the show notes as well.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:38

Alright, well, I have- I have to say fewer than normal recommendations because this is not my bag. I just don't have that many but like I said before, I think Eliza Kent's book "Converting Women: Gender and Christianity in Colonial South India" is interesting for its um- It's interesting for a lot of reasons, but for the theme today. And then there's Chidester's book, "Empires of Religion," that's all about Christianity and how it structures what we think about religion. There's- yeah I'll put this in there. There's MC Doss's article, "Indian Christians and the Making of Composite Culture in South India" to think about, I guess some of the stuff I talked about in my primary source. And then I read a book not that long ago that has nothing to do with anything I've just said, but by Emily Conroy-Krotz, called "Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic," which um.. is good.



Megan Goodwin 40:40

You read an America book for fun?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:43

Uh, I was teaching my empire class- Okay. and I wanted something that wasn't just South Asia, so that was good.



Megan Goodwin 40:47

Fair enough, fair enough.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:49

And-



Megan Goodwin 40:50

So you're slumming it, is what I hear you say?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:52

Yeah. And I guess I'll stop there. But I will always plug Tomoko Masuzawa's "The Invention of World Religions" because I think even though we're talking here about Christianity and New Testament, I do want you to hear that later on Christianity becomes real imperialistic even in just the way we think about religion. So I'll- I'll link to that too. Because...



Megan Goodwin 41:19

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:19

It's just mandatory reading. You should read it.



Megan Goodwin 41:22

Yes. Join us next time for our APPLIED LEARNING conversation with Dr. Shaily Patel, who's going to talk to us about early Christianity, magic, and whether Jesus was an actual wizard like Carl Ernst.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:35

Shout out as always, to our awesome research assistant, Katherine Brennan, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible, and therefore awesome. Do you need more religion nerdery in your life? You know where to find us- it's Twitter. The answer is Twitter, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 41:50

You can find Megan, that's me, on twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse @profirnf, or the show

@keepingit_101 . Find the website at keepingit101.com and please and thank you drop us a rating or review in your pod catcher of choice. And with that,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:10

Peace out, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 42:11

And do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Letterkenny 42:31

Hey, I ever tell you guys about the first Easter? It was a long time ago and Jesus invited his friends to his house for dinner, and he said "Hey, why don't you guys hide these chocolate eggs before the Romans come? And Judas, would you mind feeding my pet rabbit? Amen."