

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 35 – Dr. R. Marie Griffith

Transcript

Matthias: Hey friends. This is Matthias Roberts and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is episode 35.

Dr. Griffith: I say in the book, it's almost like we have two completely separate Christianities at this point. You've really got the one that is convinced that the Bible condemns homosexuality, and then you've got folks on the other side saying, "What are you talking about?"

Matthias: Dr. R. Marie Griffith is the John C. Danforth distinguished professor in the humanities at Washington University in St Louis. She's also the director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, and is the editor of the center's journal *Religion & Politics*.

She obtained her undergraduate degree at University of Virginia in political and social thought, and then did her PhD in the study of religion from Harvard University. Before moving to Washington University in 2011 she served as professor of religion and the director of the women and gender studies program at Princeton, and then later as a John A Bartlett professor of New England church history at Harvard.

She's the author or editor of six books, including *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*, and her newly released book, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*. That's what we're talking about today, we're talking about her new book and the intersection of sex, gender, religion and politics. Fascinating interview. So excited to share it with you.

Before we dive in two things. First, I have two new people who hit the producer level of Patreon. Wanted to give quick shout-outs. Sean McDorman and Tim Schraeder, and then Natalie England who has been at that level for a little while. So grateful for your support and for everyone's support over on Patreon. That's how I keep this show going, so thank you, thank you, thank you.

Second, I wanted to share with you about a new podcast that's starting this week actually. My friend Debbie has been working really hard over the last many months to put this show together. It's called Kaleidoscope. I'm going to play the trailer for you all because that explains it a little bit better than I can. So listen to this.

Deborah Jian Lee: Welcome to Kaleidoscope. I'm your host Deborah Jian Lee.

Speaker 4: So I'm the only brown guy at this White Christian party, and this drunk guy stumbles towards me. He looks at the beanie I'm wearing and he says, "Why don't you take that hat off? You look like a terrorist."

Speaker 5: He very calmly took the Bible and tapped on it and showed me the verses that spoke to women shall have no authority over men in the church.

Speaker 6: You know, when you are in such a sad lonely place, then you ask your deepest, darkest questions.

Speaker 7: Like, I'm Black, I'm a lesbian and a Christian. Is there a church for me?

Deborah Jian Lee: I've been reporting on the margins of faith for years.

Speaker 8: All right, I'm just going to test the sound on ...

Deborah Jian Lee: And on this podcast I'll explore questions of identity, existence and social engagement.

Speaker 8: I thought we could just start by talking about the faith of your youth.

Deborah Jian Lee: I'll be hosting conversations with people from across a spectrum of belief and non-belief, and we'll travel to the moments that taught them how to engage life and the world in fulfilling ways.

Speaker 9: I was like, "All right, I'm going to out and I'm going to go to a queer bar, as a queer person, and I'm just going to try it on and see how it feels."

Speaker 10: You realize that you are contributing essentially to White Supremacy. It causes you to really second guess what you're giving your life to.

Deborah Jian Lee: Join me and my guests as we expand the conversation about how we can be more fully ourselves.

Speaker 11: So it did feel kind of weird that my first tattoo wasn't a Christian tattoo, but then I have this big gay tattoo.

Deborah Jian Lee: More fully awake.

Speaker 12: It's hard. I mean it's hard to tell the truth, but it has never seem more urgent than it does right now.

Deborah Jian Lee: And more fully engaged in this new era.

Speaker 13: We need to be actually challenging the policies that are hurting the marginalized.

Deborah Jian Lee: You'll feel all the feels.

Speaker 14: My heart's going like a rabbit.

Deborah Jian Lee: And see the constantly changing pattern of existence.

Speaker 15: There are still so many things that are hard, but now I feel fantastic.

Deborah Jian Lee: So subscribe today and take a look into the Kaleidoscope.

Speaker 16: Let the world see you. When they do they'll never be the same.

Matthias: Like chills, right? The first time I heard that I just sat on my couch and was like, "I cannot wait to hear this." I asked Debbie if I could share this with you. She didn't ask me to share it, I just thought, "Everyone needs to list to this podcast because it's going to be so good." If you haven't read Debbie's book, *Rescuing Jesus: How Women, People of Color, and Queer Christians Are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*, go pick up that book too. I love her work.

So anyway, that first episode drops on Friday, February 9th. Go subscribe to it. It's wherever you get your podcasts. It's going to be so good.

Okay. Dr. R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*. Let's go ahead and dive in. Dr. Griffith, hi.

Dr. Griffith: Hi Matthias.

Matthias: Thank you so, so much for joining me today. I'm really excited about this.

Dr. Griffith: It's really a pleasure. It's nice to know about your podcast.

Matthias: Yeah. So to start, this is a question I start every episode with, but how do you identify? And then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Dr. Griffith: Yes, well I guess I would say I identify now as a progressive Christian. Not one who's very active in church as is true of many progressive Christians. I was raised Southern Baptist actually, and so I came from a very, very conservative evangelical background and sort of left church altogether for a while and wound up coming back through the Episcopal Church. But have always really identified I guess with the teachings of Jesus, which I see as the core of Christianity. Which is boiled to love one another, and that turns out to be the hardest thing in the world for human beings to actually do well. But that's really where I identify

now. I think that my faith has certainly carried me through, given some sense of hope that maybe is hard to come by these days.

Matthias: Yeah. I think you mentioned that progressive Christianity and having a hard time in church, and I think as so many people I know, I relate with that. I think so many people listening to this podcast can absolutely relate with that.

Dr. Griffith: Yeah. Well you know, even just me as a girl growing up and feeling at an early age the sexism and the patriarchal culture of the Southern Baptist denomination. So I think that was part of my own struggle, getting out of the church and then making some peace and finding different ways of being Christian and coming back in.

Matthias: Yeah. That's a journey I feel like so many people go on of ... Especially when you're at the edges of patriarchy, when you don't fit into that it's a journey I think so many of us in our particular ways have to make to escape that system. And then some of us find our ways back, but ...

Dr. Griffith: Right, a lot of people don't. Sure.

Matthias: A lot of people don't, fair enough. You just released a new book call Moral Combat talking kind of about these issues of patriarchy and sexism and everything that has happened in American politics, and the way that sex has influenced that and gender has influenced that over the last 100 years. I just finished reading it. It was so fascinating.

Dr. Griffith: Thank you.

Matthias: You open the book with Women's Rights and you track it all the way up to Women's March of last year. Tracking gender, sexuality, LGBT people, transgender rights. I think maybe a good place to start would be, I'm often in circles of LGBT-queer spaces where there are a lot of people of faith. So many of us, especially those of us I think in what I would consider my generation, those of us who were born in the nineties, who don't have this historical perspective of the movement. We always look at each other and look like, "Why do people hate us so much? Why is this such a big deal?" So maybe you could start with walking us back into history a little bit. I lot of us look at the seventies but you track it even further back, to the twenties and even before. How did this all start?

Dr. Griffith: Yeah, as you say I had the same question. The question that I started with was really why has sex been such an obsession? I mean, women's sexual behavior prior to marriage, female chastity, but of course also LGBTQ people, any sort of non-normative sexuality outside of so-called traditional heterosexual monogamous marriage. Why has this been such an obsession over time for so many Christians and really has such a vast impact on our politics and our polarization that we live with now?

And yes, the answer I eventually came to was it didn't just start in the seventies, or the sixties. You really have to go back to the fight over women's suffrage. Which the suffrage side won in 1920, when women across America got the right to vote, but there had been a very active anti-suffrage movement. Composed I want to say by not only men but women too who didn't want women to get the vote. Those folks were really angry that women did get the vote in 1920.

From there I think you can really trace out deep divisions in America that really didn't exist prior to that. It was kind of more of a consensus prior to that. I mean, you know, that gender looks like this and hierarchy and all of this. Of course queer people did not fit into that, nor did feminists. But after 1920 the divisions become apparent and they deepen and deepen over time with the fight over birth control and fights over interracial marriage, sex education, abortion, you know, so many things across the twentieth century.

The queer, I think your question of why do they hate us so much? Which just makes me so sad to hear it put that way. I think that it has really gone a lot with a hatred of women, or a fear of women and non-normative people of many kinds.

Matthias: Yeah. It's so interesting to link it all under this idea of patriarchy and authoritarianism and a hierarchy, or power structure at least, within the church. It seems like all of these things, women's rights and LGBT people, is a challenge to that power structure. It seems like so much of this revolves around who gets the power.

Dr. Griffith: Yeah. Yeah, you know I sometimes say, "I don't want to just reduce it to power struggles," and I don't. I want to say that theologies run deep and people have deeply held beliefs that they think come from their biblical reading or whatnot. But the power struggles have been real, and it's not a surprise that the same denominations and church communities that do not allow women to serve in positions of senior leadership tend just about always to also be the same congregations that have a real problem with queer folks and have had different ways of dealing with both women and folks in the LGBTQ community over time. Sometimes treating them as sinners or treating them with compassion, and other times treating them as sort of sick people to be ministered to, or whatever, but always a problem in some way. So I do think these things are deeply, deeply tied together.

Matthias: One thing that I noticed in your book is how you highlight this deepening gap between more conservative traditional beliefs and then more liberal and progressive beliefs, and how perpetually since the twenties they've been getting wider and wider apart. And then you highlight in each one of these movements that you're tracking the overall movement, these claims that by challenging traditional teaching, how it undermines the authority of the scripture, and the doomsday predictions that come out of that. Which is something that I think so many of us are used to hearing, like we are going to ruin America, ruin the world

if queer people get rights, if women get rights. Could you talk about that a little bit, those doomsday predictions?

Dr. Griffith:

Yeah. Great question. I think you're absolutely right, that this has often been a way that some leaders I think have galvanized ordinary people in the pews and across the country with fear. One of the greatest fears that's been repeated over and over again is the decline of America, this vision that America once was great and was the chosen nation of God. And now because of sin, and specifically because of sexual sin, America is falling into a decline from which she will never recover. The blame for that gets put on feminists. It gets put on gay people. It gets put on again folks outside of the traditional monogamous heterosexual marriage model.

And just to give you some examples, you may know that after 9/11 Jerry Falwell was on the Pat Robertson's television show a couple days later. He said, "I blame," he basically said, "the feminists, the pagans, the gays and the lesbians, all of those people. I point the finger in your face and say, 'You helped this happen.'" I mean 9/11, the terrorist attacks.

His point was there is so much sin and America is allowing all of this sexual sin, God has turned His back on us, and He will no longer protect us from terrorists like we see there. So we must repent and turn around.

More recently the shooting in Aurora, Colorado, even the Newtown, Sandy Hook elementary school shootings. Leaders like James Dobson and Mike Huckabee and others have stood up and said, "We can look at our own sexual sin and our toleration for that as the reason why God is not protecting us from these mass slaughters." It's astonishing.

Matthias:

Yeah, it is so astonishing because I think, I just keep thinking about how all of those claims, and I think we see those things flying everywhere it seems like any time something catastrophic happens in the world. People love to blame gay people for that. I think those of us who are gay or queer and sit around and look at them like, "How is it our fault?"

Dr. Griffith:

I know. I know. Yeah. Well and it's, you all get blamed and then a tolerant nation, those even who might be straight, might not be gay, but who are allies or who are inclusive, who want to be open to people of all kinds, get blamed too because they're tolerating sin.

Yeah, you're absolutely right. I think that theme has recurred over and over again through what we call the religious right, older figures like Tim and Beverly LaHaye from the 1970's, of course Anita Bryant who was a major anti-gay celebrity activist of the 1970's, on up through today.

Matthias:

You write, I have a sentence here around LGTB right. You write, "This was not a justice issue or an equal rights issue or a compassion issue. The matter was far

deeper and far greater than those human interventions. The issue was obedience to core teachings that had been passed down for thousands of years, humble compliance with the will of God."

I think that highlights, those are the stakes I think that we're dealing with of a group of, well both group of people thinking they're following the teaching of God. But one them saying, "This is what God requires," and it doesn't matter, nothing else matters.

Dr. Griffith: Absolutely. I say in the book, it's almost like we have two completely separate Christianities at this point. You've really got the one that is convinced that the Bible condemns homosexuality and other things, but you know that in particular. And they've got all their ways of interpreting particular passages, and this, to say, this is a central thing, that it really matters to God. And then you've got folks on the other side saying, "What are you talking about? Jesus never talked about this. Jesus emphasized caring for the poor, loving the neighbor, caring about people in prison and who are hungry. This was not a big theme who was in love with whom." So you really have this deep divide in what people think the core of Christianity really is.

Matthias: I'm thinking about the particular context of that this podcast sits in, which is people who identify as being of faith and who identify as queer or ally, or questioning or whatever, but that kind of locus. I think sometimes, I know I kind of got this idea when I first came out and was realizing that I was gay and wanted to hold onto my faith, that there were no other people in the world who were doing this kind of work and that this kind of queer-Christian movement that I think has risen up in the last 10 years, kind of like what I said in my first question, is a new thing.

But you, you in your last chapter talk about people who've been doing this work for so long. I would love if you could talk about that intersection of faith and minority sexuality, and how those have kind of been wedded together for quite some time.

Dr. Griffith: Absolutely. One thing I want your listeners to really know is that queer people ... Let me say that again. Queer people of faith were instrumental to the larger LGBTQ rights movement from the very beginning. They've always been there. Let me just recommend two books to you and to anyone who's interested in looking at that. One is by Heather White called Reforming Sodom. It's really looking back at the Protestant, the real Christian movements for gay rights, and their activism in the public square going back to the 1950's.

Another is by Anthony Petro, who's writing about Christians and the AIDS epidemic and people of faith who were so instrumental in that movement and as part of the larger gay rights movement around that. So you know, there's a few famous people, like the head of the Metropolitan Community Church, or folks like that, that everybody seems to remember. But there's a lot of forgotten names too of pastors, but also just ordinary people in the pews, who were ...

and many of whom, most of whom, remained Christian, but often times had to find new congregations when they felt unwelcome in their own. So queer people of faith have been a part of the larger gay rights movement from the very beginning.

Matthias: That's something that I feel like ... I know I can only speak from my particular locus because I grew up in a, I call it like kind of the borderlands of fundamentalism. Where all of that history around LGBT people was not taught and this idea of like, that you can be gay and Christian, you can be queer and Christian, was an impossible concept. It wasn't even a consideration. It's so interesting to look at these movements.

I think for a lot of people we did grow up in that conservative world, to then go on that journey that you kind of talked about, of maybe abandoning the faith or seriously reconsidering the faith and coming back to it and finding the progressive movements, finding the Episcopalian Church. The breath of fresh air that comes with a different kind of Christianity is incredible. You write about how that has been a part of Christianity for years as well but is a smaller part. I'm not sure what I'm asking in that.

Dr. Griffith: That's okay. I have things I can say about that.

Matthias: Go ahead, yes.

Dr. Griffith: I just want to say, that was so beautifully put what you just said. And to your listeners, also so many of whom have gone through that journey, just know that people like me are with you. I do want to say that very, very strongly, because I have members of my own family too, my extended family, cousins and all, who grew up in very conservative fundamentalist worlds, and realized at some point in their teens that they were gay and thought they couldn't fit and were afraid of their families, of their church communities.

This is unfortunately still a common story, and how many people have been shipped away to these ex-gay so-called reparative programs and I think often been damaged by that? So it's been a deeply, to me, very disordered part of our culture, to shame people that way. So yes, one the people, again, that I write about and that I'd recommend to folks, some of you I'm sure know him, but is Gene Robinson. He was the first gay bishop in the Episcopal Church.

I focus a chapter on him because his own story is so compelling, and he is so compelling. As someone who knew he was gay from college or younger, and he married a woman, and he was honest with her before they got married. She said, "We'll try to work this out." They had two children and then couldn't stay together and divorced amicably. He has this really beautiful story of how he came to terms with not believing that God loved him anyway despite his sexuality, but that his sexuality was just as normal as anyone else's sexuality. It wasn't something to be ashamed of or to consider himself a variant of normal. It

was something core. And more and more I think people studying sexuality are saying, "Sexuality is a spectrum."

The categories we've used for this really don't fit for an awful lot of people. People who let themselves think about it and dig deep into their hearts, it might not fit for most of us these categories. So you know, I think there's that kind of opening up, and the progressive churches as you say have been better equipped I think on the whole to open themselves up to that and to really say, "We don't want to be obsessed with sexuality anymore. We want to welcome everyone."

Matthias: I'm curious, because in the book you kind of track, you start to track these two different sides that have different views on sexuality. We've talked about the progressive church, we've talked about the conservative traditional side a little bit. You don't really get into this in the book a whole lot because it's not this kind of book, but if you had to give an answer on why do you think the traditional and conservative side has such a focus and resistance towards sexuality, what would you say are some of the reasons for that?

Dr. Griffith: You mean homosexuality and-

Matthias: Homosexuality or even gender issues.

Dr. Griffith: Well you know, there is a sort of ... I used the word patriarchy before, which is kind of an old-fashioned word now and antiquated. But I do think that there is a tradition in those denominations of reading the Bible, they think they're reading it literally, right? So we'll give them that. Okay, you're reading some passage very literally, and you're paying no attention whatsoever to other passage, so I question your literalism. But okay, we'll give you that for the moment. By their so-called literal translation they see all kinds of places where women are to submit to male authority, their husbands, pastors and all of that, and that God has created gender in a very clear and binary way.

So anything that looks a little different, whether it's women who have more power than they're supposed to, or people who are attracted to folks of the same sex, or many other things, seems to be against God's gendered plan. So I do think some of it is a commitment to a certain kind of reading of the Bible that they may have learned as children. These things have gotten passed down over time and so they just become common sense, so-called, within those communities. If you start questioning that people say, "No, no, no. You can't question that. I know this is true. This is the Bible." It's hard if you've been taught that since you were in Sunday school at three years old, that's hard to unravel, you know, like on.

I do think that that's part of it, that there's something about homosexuality and about feminism that challenges that kind of notion of a God-created gendered order. That is why those things in particular are so threatening and why sexuality then becomes so central for a lot of conservative Christians.

Matthias: You highlight in one of your chapters some of the work of Kinsey and his work around sexuality. It seems like there are multiple points where stuff started to kind of break down, but it seems like that was, his work and his publication of his studies of human sexuality caused some huge waves in the breakdown of what we know about men and women, especially women, in sexuality. Could you talk a little bit that beginning of things breaking down and the waves that happened out of that work?

Dr. Griffith: Sure. Kinsey, Alfred Kinsey was a fascinating figure. He was a biologist at Indiana University. He got really fascinated by people's sexual behavior and shifted his entire research agenda in that direction and gathered teams of researchers to go around the country and interview men and women about their sexual behavior, what they'd done prior to marriage, what their desires were now. All kinds of things, current practice and all of that.

And so in 1948 he published his first study on men, and in 1953 he published one on women. Both books essentially argued that people were having a lot more sex and a lot more different types of sex and they had a lot more desires of a wide variety than they were really letting on, or than the larger American mores really permitted. He had a great deal of evidence for this. He calculated that about half of American women were not virgins when they got married for instance, and lots of women prior to marriage had had same sex sexual experiences, and so had men.

So this kind of blew the roof off of these common assumptions and politeness around sexuality. There was a great deal of reaction against him in very conservative Protestant and Catholic circles.

Billy Graham, the very young Billy Graham railed against Kinsey and said he was probably a communist and that was why he was telling people these lies. Various Catholic leaders also preached against Kinsey because they felt like he was essentially recommending all of these sexual behaviors outside of marriage and was going to, again, destroy America by recommending immorality and debauchery and all of that.

It was hugely controversial. And those studies by the way remain controversial today, he is not forgotten in those circles. There's all sorts of rumors of him being a pedophile and being this kind of awful human being. Stories that have really in some cases been entirely made up out of nothing to discredit everything he ever did.

Matthias: Yeah. It's so interesting that you mention that because I remember learning about Kinsey growing up. I was also homeschooled. I was a product of the conservative machine, and learning about Kinsey, he was an awful person the way I was taught. It was so interesting to read some of your work around him, because it seems like he was just trying to study what was actually happening and then talk about it.

Dr. Griffith:

Right. Yeah, that is so interesting, because I know there's all these anti-Kinsey books out there that get circulated in fundamentalist and Catholic circles a lot, just like there are against Margaret Sanger. She's another kind of enemy in those circles about whom many lies have been told.

Yeah, you know I think that he had a stake in saying that people were really much more free and open in their sexual beliefs and behaviors than we thought they were. I think that was a finding he was glad to have. But I don't think he was driven only by that. I think really he was discovering, when he first started asking people these questions, he was sort of amazed at how many people, how many women had had sex prior to marriage and were finally admitting that to an interviewer.

So yeah, really he strove to tell the truth. He really emphasized that, that he really wanted good data and was trying to tell the truth. And the truth was, as he saw it, people are being way too hypocritical and they need to own up to the realities they're living.

Matthias:

Can you talking about a little bit, because you get into this in the book too, how did the church then ... I mean you mentioned conservatives kind of railed against it, but then they were other churches who did step in and accept his work and work alongside Kinsey. Can you talking about that a little bit?

Dr. Griffith:

That's right, yeah. The book's subtitle is, "How sex divided American Christians and fractured American politics." This is a perfect example of that. Even as he's, Kinsey was getting condemned by the conservative Protestant and Catholic leaders, many more, I wouldn't even call them progressive at that time, but sort of more mainline Protestant leaders, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, definitely Unitarian, were writing him fan mail and writing him letters that I had access to.

I've read all of this correspondence that he saved from ministers in tiny towns all over the country, everywhere, not just New York and San Francisco, who were saying, "Thank you for writing these books, because we know that our parishioners have been struggling secretly with their fear they're not living up to the moral law. Now we can, as pastors we've got tools. We can talk to them about that and say, 'You're not abnormal because you have desires, a man has desires for another man.' Or, 'You're not this horrific sinner who had sex prior to marriage.'"

The progressives really began shifting their own sense of sexual morality to some degree and opening up. They invited Kinsey to come to their congregation and speak. He traveled all around the country speaking to YMCA groups and church groups and Jewish groups as well, synagogues, to sort of try and give religious leaders a sense of what was really going on in America, so that they could then use that in a pastoral context, is really quite fascinating.

Matthias: Yeah, it's so interesting. I'm sitting here thinking about this divide. It's so clear and I think obviously. I think so many of us have somatic and felt experiences of what living in such a divided culture feels like around these issues of sex because of the damage that they've wreaked. I'm also curious, I always personally have a hard time with setting up dualisms of traditionalist and progressive. They're there, clearly they're there. Was there a group of people who bridged those worlds? Or has this divide been ... are we just sitting in the middle of a huge divide right now?

Dr. Griffith: I love that question Matthias, because in many ways I think when I began writing the book what I really wanted to do was bridge that divide. I wanted to bridge that divide. I wanted to communicate each side to the other and to really say most people are in the middle and there's really not this divide once you dig deep. But really, the findings were clear, that people pretty much wound of really on one side or the other of so-called traditional morality.

That division explains so much about our current politics. Again, it's bound up in ideas about gender roles and gender hierarchy and all of that. These things are all deeply related. I have no doubt that there's a lot of people who in their hearts are kind of in the middle, or they can see both sides, or all of that. But what I seem to find over and over again was these issues are so [fraud 00:38:37] and so emotional for people that they wound up, whether they wanted to be or not, in one camp or the other.

Matthias: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense I think. Because I think that it's so core, like so much of this gender and sexuality, they're core constructs of to who we are as people, not just ... I mean like you said, it's not just a compassion issue, it's who we are as people. I always get so hesitant with that, because I think a natural desire is to demonize one and praise the other, and it's hard not to when it's such core. I think both sides do it all the time. It's there.

Dr. Griffith: They absolutely do. You know, an analogy to this is the abortion debate. Abortion is not only about sexuality for sure. I mean life, does life begin at conception or not? That's kind of the core question. Does life begin at conception, so that therefor abortion is murder? A person's answer to that is really yes or no? Do you believe that, or do you not believe that? It becomes ... that's a debate that is also so deeply divided along these lines. So I do write about that in Moral Combat as well, because I think that that's been one of the deepest wedge-issues in our politics in recent history.

Matthias: Yeah, yeah. You used that term wedge-issue, which so many of these issues are. Could you talk more about the function of wedge-issues in politics? How have those functioned?

Dr. Griffith: Yes. This is where I think it's very fair for us all to be cynical, because I think that there are opportunistic politicians who realized that these issues were great ways of galvanizing voters. It's as simple as that. And so they collaborated with

religious leaders who came to be on their side and really were able to massive movements. Let me give you a concrete example of that.

In 1972, the year before Roe V Wade was decided by the Supreme Court, the vast majority of Southern Baptists in America, White Southern Baptists, were in favor of legalized abortion. They wanted abortion to be more accessible to people. They described it as an issue between a woman and her conscience. I think 90% of Texas Baptists, Texas Baptists, were in favor of legal abortion. So in 1973, when Roe V Wade came down the only people really strongly on the pro-life side for the most part were Catholics. Protestants across the political spectrum were very much in favor of having at least some degree of legal abortion.

Well we know what happened after that. By 1979 Jerry Falwell has the moral majority and the anti-abortion movement is huge and helps to elect Ronald Reagan in 1980, and has been part of the Republican voting block ever since. That's a great example I think of how some political leaders saw abortion as something that they could turn conservative Christians around on and really pull them into their coalition. We know that today all kinds of very conservative Christians, abortion is sort of their single most important voting issue. So it's been very successfully utilized as a wedge-issue that's been politically incredibly successful.

Matthias:

Yeah. I think maybe to end, you end the book with the Women's March of last year, and I mean one just happened this year. I wouldn't say that you end the book on a hopeful tone, but you do write, "Finding a way to live together despite our deep differences demands participation in a larger project of reckoning, engaging and willfully empathizing with others in our common humanity." You say maybe we'll get there one day, but we have to understand precisely how and why our divisions got so deep. But I'm curious about, and you kind of say this, but what do you see as a way forward, is there a way forward, in trying to bring this gap back together? That's a big question.

Dr. Griffith:

It's a huge question. At that time that I wrote that it was right after Donald Trump's inauguration to the presidency, just been through the 2016 campaign. I personally was feeling somewhat hopeless, but also as the Women's March showed, and that attracted of course not only women but people across a wide range of identities, and who were marching for a whole range of progressive causes not only women's issues.

It seemed like there was this mass movement and that the numbers were on that side of kind of being able to move forward in some way. And I guess I still had some hope, having come out of the evangelical world myself and really loving the people, many of the people I grew up with in church. Even if I don't agree with them theologically I see them as good people many of them. So I've always wanted there to be the bridge you're describing and the way forward. The thing that has discouraged me most has been the continuing conservative evangelical support for Trump no matter what. No matter how racist, how

sexist, how horrible he is in his marriage to Melania even, you know, with porn stars and paying them off, and just criminal seeming behavior.

The continued refusal to second guess their support for him is discouraging to me, because I think based on those grounds that is in part about patriarchy and seeing him as this great patriarchal male leader. That discourages me because that seems to me like something that will prevent us from moving forward together. But I tell you, in your generation things are different. I'm very hopeful about younger people, and you all who I see as really even very conservative folks being much less attached to some of those gender structure. I really think that might be true. So looking farther into the future, a couple of decades, that does give me hope.

Matthias: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned Trump, it's so interesting to be living in this era. I know I said we were wrapping up, but you brought this up and this is so interesting, because your whole book you talk about this sex being such a core issue and this quest for morality. And I think it's so interesting, in the last two years it seems like that has almost completely flipped in a way that reeks of hypocrisy. You mentioned patriarchy, would you say that those two things are tied?

Dr. Griffith: Absolutely. I think what we're seeing is that the deeper strain by far is patriarchy. That folks who have counseled sexual morality forever are now willing to pretty much put that aside. They put it aside for Roy Moore, the Alabama Senate candidate. They completely put it aside for Trump, in favor of something else. What is that something else? It looks very much to me like patriarchy. Now they say it's more about, "Well, God chose him. We don't like that behavior either. God chose him." I believe they don't like that behavior, but they're willing to tolerate it and celebrate him in an almost worshipful way at times. I think it's partly because of what he represents as patriarchy over and against these other forces that are trying to dismantle that.

Matthias: Dr. Griffith thank you so very much.

Dr. Griffith: Really great to talk to you. Great questions Matthias.

Matthias: It's been such a pleasure.

Dr. Griffith: For me too.

Matthias: Be sure to pick up a copy of Dr. Griffith's new book, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*. She's on Twitter, @RMarieGriffith. Queerology is on Twitter and Instagram @queerologypod, or you can tweet me directly @matthiasroberts.

Queerology is produced with support from Natalie England, Sean McDorman, Tim Schrader and other Patreon supporters. To find out how you can help

support Queerology head over to matthiasroberts.com/support. One really easy way to help support Queerology is by leaving a review. Do that right in your podcast app or head over to matthiasroberts.com/review and it will take you right there.

As always I'd love to hear from you. If you have ideas about what you want to hear on the podcast or just want to say hi, reach out, I'll get back to you. Until next week you all, bye.