

**Jesuits, Mormons and American Religion in the World**

Podcast with **Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp**

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[**Daniel Gorman**](http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/persons/daniel-gorman-jr/)(**DG)**: Dr Maffly-Kipp, welcome to the Religious Studies Project

[**Laurie Maffly-Kipp**](http://rap.wustl.edu/bio/laurie-f-maffly-kipp/) (**LMK**): Thank you.

**DG:** *We’re here at the Morris Inn, at the University of Notre Dame. We just finished the Cushwa Centre's Biannual Seminar in American Religion, discussing* [*John McGreevy's book on Jesuits in the World*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0691171629/ref=rdr_ext_tmb)*. So, you have been writing about space, and geography, and understanding religion for more than* [*twenty years*](http://rap.wustl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Maffly-Kipp-cv-for-RAP-website.pdf) *now, beginning with your essay in Thomas Tweed's edited volume,* [*Retelling US Religious History*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0520205707/ref=rdr_ext_tmb)*. I'd be curious to know how your views have evolved, and what you believe is the importance of space and geography in studying American religions.*

**LMK**: That essay was my initial foray into the field and it was more of a thought piece, based on sort-of the hypothetical question of: what would you do if you didn't narrate American religious history from the perspective of European movements from East to West – particularly British American movements. In a sense, it was also inspired by the work, in the 1930s, of [Herbert Bolton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Eugene_Bolton) – who was a historian of empires in the New World – and his basic observation that the Spanish Empire had been a part of North America and South America, long before the British ever came along. So, what would it do to sort-of retell the story of the growth of the US nation and religion in that sort-of setting, but come at it from the perspective of all theses different movements into North America, at various points in time? So that was, I think, a framework that I laid out. And since then I've been, I guess, exploring different avenues into that. Most recently, I've been spending time doing work on Mormon history and looking at Mormonism. But I think that that focus on space has then led me to think about Mormonism differently: how do I think about Mormonism as having a particular kind of centre in the United States, but also has having other areas in other parts of the world that are significant for particular purposes?

**DG**: *So today, the book we've been talking about –* American Jesuits in the World*, by* [*John McGreevy*](https://history.nd.edu/faculty/directory/john-t-mcgreevy/) *– it's dealing with, well, somewhat missionary activity, but a little different from what you focus on. Because you’re often talking about American Mormons going outwards, whereas he's talking about, at first, Europeans coming to missionise America. Can you talk a little bit about the differences you see between Mormons and Jesuits operating on the world stage?*

**LMK**: Well, they're very different. I mean, certainly, they're different in terms of having a different focus on what they were doing with other people. So, for Jesuits: Jesuits are a particular Catholic order; their jobs revolve around educating peoples, administering the sacraments and keeping people in the faith. For Mormons, the goal tends to be to create habits of discipline and industry – much like those of the missionaries themselves. There's sort-of a distinct separation between the kinds of spiritual practices that a Jesuit missionary undertakes, and what he's trying to inculcate in other people. Whereas, for Mormon's, they were sort-of one and the same thing. So that's just one small difference. But, I think, on all kinds of different levels there are differences. But there are also similarities, because Mormons are also exiles – perhaps exiles in their own land. But they have a very – I guess, the best way to put it is – angular relationship to the US government in the 19th century, and often a very combative relationship. So, they aren't sold on the idea of the nation state as necessarily an all-encompassing good, just as the Catholics are disaffected from the US Government in various ways.

**DG**: *Well, certainly, one of the points that came up in the Q and A session, today, was that the Jesuits were roundly denounced as a secret society on the floor of Congress – one that should be banned. But there wasn't widespread Catholic persecution in the 19th century, the way we saw against the Mormons.*

**LMK**: I don't know, I think you could argue with that: the burning of convents, riots in the streets . . .

**DG**: *Well, that's true.*

**LMK**: . . . in Philadelphia and Boston. So, in some ways, I think that the tensions were manifest in more physical kinds of ways than they were for the Mormons. There were a few incidents with the Mormons. And the Mormons certainly fought back at various points. So I think, actually, a comparison of them is really helpful to see the ways that Protestant America was shaping the limits of its own toleration.

**DG***: I suppose, what I was thinking of more was that there was not state legislation against the Catholic Church in the way that there was, for instance, when the Governor of Missouri declared war on the Mormon people, saying: "Leave my state or I'm going to kill all of you!" (****5:00****) That is a difference.*

**LMK**: Right! Yes. You're right. That's a difference. Although, I think one of the interesting things about John McGreevy’s book is the way he points out how assiduously Protestant Americans worked to create laws that would exclude Catholics in certain kinds of ways. So, from public education: there were certain rules put in place that made it obvious that the Catholics were not going to fall within the bounds of the law. I mean, their kind of education wouldn't be acceptable as a form of public education. So, it seems to me that the very creating and shaping of laws is another way to put boundaries around religious toleration.

**DG**: *Now, I'm curious also . . . You've obviously read the book – you've just delivered a short paper commenting on it. If you were writing a book about transnational religion in the 19th century – I mean, McGreevy is focussing on the ideas of nationhood and politics – what would be the factors that you'd want to pursue? What do you see as mattering the most?*

**LMK**: Well, in fact, I am writing that kind of book right now.

**DG**: *Well that's fortuitous!*

**LMK**: Yes. So, in fact, I am writing a book on transnational religion, in that I am writing a history of Mormonism that tries to take seriously Mormonism as a global religion and an international movement from the beginning, not simply since World War II. It's certainly the case that there are now more Mormons outside the US than in, but even in the 1850s there were more Mormon's in England than in the US.

**DG**: *Oh certainly, they were very active with sending missionaries – also to Scandinavia as well as England.*

**LMK**: Later, to Scandinavia. There were sort-of waves of migration, and missionisation and migration, starting with England and moving into Scandinavia by the 1860s and 1870s. And all of those – or many, many of those people – came over to the US, and really saved what had been a dying movement by the 1850s.

**DG**: *Yes. I believe you mentioned, during the Q and A period, that most Mormons at the end of the 19th Century in America were foreign-born.*

**LMK**: Either foreign-born or second generation at best. Because, yes, the bulk had been immigrants.

**DG**: *That's not a comment that the Church stresses very much any more!*

**LMK**: No, but it's also not a comment that other historians have noticed much.

**DG**: *Certainly not.*

**LMK**: I think the focus has been on Mormonism as a distinctly American religion, which is certainly true in terms of the influences on its founders. But it's not true in terms of who joined the movement in the first half-century.

**DG**: *Very interesting. I think the claims you’re making will certainly overhaul graduate reading lists round the country – including my own! So, the other thing . . . I'm thinking that at my University , the University of Rochester, the graduate . . .well, loosely defined, our graduate interests are supposed to be around “the world of goods, the world of nations and the world of ideas”. So, a nice way to integrate cultural and social history. Now, listening to the Q and A today, lo and behold! The comments wind up revolving around ideas, goods and nations. So the comments from, for instance,* [*Thomas Bender*](http://history.fas.nyu.edu/object/thomasbender) *– one of your co-panellists – saying that we should think of the Jesuits as a cosmopolitan religion; the discussion from Dr McGreevy that later Jesuits were embracing American nationalism, even though they weren't necessarily OK with separation of church and state; and your discussion of the culture Jesuits were bringing from around the world. Now, I just recapped – for the listeners – a lot of material and I certainly threw a lot at you, but I'd be curious . . . . These concepts of the physical things and the more intangible things: what do you see of those as their place in American religion?*

**LMK**: What do I see as the place of those in American religion?

**DG**: *So, I suppose, is there an aspect: nationhood, ideology, material culture? Do you see one factor as being more important than another?*

**LMK**: No. I think what I was trying to call for was not separating them – at least, disaggregating them in some way but not isolating any of them one from another. I think it's easy. . . . We often get a little too free with our definitions of globalism, internationalism, transnationalism. . .

**DG**: *Sure*

**LMK**: . . . and I think, part of what my colleague was calling for was the use of the term cosmopolitan as sort-of an orientation towards the rest of the world. (**10:00**) What it seems to me, though, that using that term can do is to draw attention *away* from the way power flows in the movements: the power of states is one kind of power, economic power is another kind of power. I think that's how I would break things down. Material goods are interesting to focus on, but there's also, appending to that, the question of “Who's paying for what?”

**DG**: *Oh, sure.*

**LMK**: Right? And that determines the flow of those goods.

**DG**: *So, if you were to say, simply, that "Oh, the Jesuits were cosmopolitan", that may be obscuring who's leading their operations.*

**LMK**: Right. So, if you just notice that they're bringing chalices over from Italy and putting them into chapels in North Dakota, it doesn't necessarily tell you anything about the circumstances behind those movements. And so, you just don't want to separate those two things out. I suppose that's the simple point I'm trying to make.

**DG**: *So, a lot of the conversation today dealt with the fact that the Jesuits do eventually, wind up launching outward from their bases in America to the Pacific Empire. And that really intersects with several of your* [*book*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/d/Books/Proclamation-People-Century-Mormonism-Frontier/0874809185/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1495470355&sr=8-1&keywords=Proclamation+to+the+People%3A+Nineteenth-Century+Mormonism+and+the+Pacific+Basin+Frontier)*s dealing with Pacific missionaries. Could you expand a bit on missionaries in the Pacific?*

**LMK**: Yes. I think the 19th Century was the Pacific Century in that regard. If one could say that the 17th and 18th centuries sort-of focussed on Atlantic movements – with the slave trade, with European migrations to the new World – the Pacific Century is very much caught up, at least in terms of the relationship of the US to other nations, with: movements from various countries in Asia, eastward; the US becoming an imperial power, moving to places like Hawaii and later down to Central and South America. And those sorts of exchanges and contexts become focal points for interesting religious phenomena.

**DG**: *Sure. And then the other thing, I'm thinking about, though, was – coming towards the end of the conversation – was that McGreevy’s book is mostly focussing on putting Jesuits into the international story, not so much on their interior life. I mean, he touches on that in the discussion with Father Bapst but it's not the main point of the book. And we're sitting here at the Cushwa Centre which has. . . the nature of spirituality and history has been a recurring topic for them. Do you think the book could have done more to consider the interior life of these priests?*

**LMK**: By interior life, do you mean . . . ? I mean, he does consider things like the devotionalism, the increasing devotionalism in the 19th century – which is tied to interiority, I guess.

**DG***: I suppose I was thinking of the one gentleman’s comments which were about: “the book doesn't really deal with the sort of spiritual exercises that Jesuits do".*

**LMK**: Yes. It 's certainly more focussed on the Jesuits as missionaries. And it struck me, as that conversation was going on, that Jesuits are not necessarily trying to inculcate the same disciplines in the people they are leading to the faith as they do in themselves. And, in a sense, those are almost two different tasks of a missionary. One question is: how do you inculcate discipline, education, bodily exercises or whatever into your subjects? But, as members of a Jesuit order, how do you try to maintain your own spiritual discipline, which might be a very different thing?

**DG**: *Oh, certainly*.

**LMK**: That's certainly not where McGreevy's interest lays.

**DG**: *Well, it also brings up an interesting contrast with your work, for instance, studying Mormons – who take the Protestant idea of "every man his own priest" to an extreme, compared to the Catholic priest, saying: "There are certain things that are just for us and not for you."*

**LMK**: Exactly. Exactly, yes. So Mormons: they're trying to replicate themselves and say, "This is how you live a Christian life – do as I do." It's a lay order, there isn't a trained ministry, in that sense. So, I think , the tasks are really different. And what the Jesuits are trying to preserve for themselves in their own spiritual lives, can be – and in some situations is – very different from what they're trying to get others to do.

**DG**: *Another topic that comes up, involving America in the World in Dr McGreevy’s book, is the fact that Jesuits were becoming more politically liberal as the 20th century approached, but they had an interesting relationship to America as empire. For instance, they're perfectly happy to sail on American ships to go into the Pacific. But on the other hand, they oppose, for instance, the war in the Philippines, in the early 1900s, because it's a war against a Catholic nation. So, in the Mormon Church, did you find similar ambivalence about the imperial message?*

**LMK**: Earlier on there was a lot of ambivalence about it. (**15:00**) When Mormons send off missionaries to the South Pacific in the mid-19th century, and later to places like New Zealand, the message is, "We're also being oppressed by our government, just as you are being oppressed." In other words, they're an anti-colonialist movement spreading a message of joining common cause with the oppressed people's in Utah. "And we will", you know, "have more strength together". So, yes, it's sort-of an interesting thing. And, of course, by the 20th century they are certainly in line with American liberal values in a very different way. But there are other traditions that have a much more – I would say – a much more conflicted relationship to the US Government throughout. So, African American Christians, for example, also have some debates about how much to support the American imperial project, in various places: be it Haiti, where there's a long tradition of African American missionaries in Haiti; or in Africa, because they have their own loyalties as they see it to people in Africa. So I think the whole issue of loyalties to religion and nation – aside from the Protestant mainstream one – have always been much more conflicted, and often more complicated, than we've realised.

**DG**: *So we've spent a long time talking about comparative aspects of your work and Dr McGreevy’s work. But, I'm curious now. The role of the Catholic Church today in the United States is . . . . So, just to narrow in on Catholicism: the Catholic Church today is a large supporter of the United States Government, although it's basically at odds with – sometimes at odds over – social issues. Do you think that trend is going to continue, of the Catholic Church having a liberal voice in American society? Because there certainly was a resurgence of conservatism under John Paul II and Pope Benedict.*

**LMK**: Yes . . . . Historians, typically, aren't very good prophets.

**DG**: *Yes, so I caveat all of this with, “This may go wrong!”*

**LMK**: Right! You know, I think there are potentially lots of counter-cultural elements in Catholicism . Even the social teachings of Catholicism – there is an anti-militarism which goes way back, that is combined, in ways different for Catholics, with their pro-life policies. So even though they might agree with evangelical Christians or other Protestants about questions of abortion, they'd part ways over the role of the American military and its work abroad. So it's a complicated picture, I think. And as we've seen – and as a historian I suppose my take is – it’ll probably come around again. We will see more episodes of liberal . . . . I'm not a whiggish historian, so I don't believe that we are in some inevitable march towards progress of all sorts, or enlightenment. And therefore it's hard to predict what the next step would look like.

**DG**: *Absolutely. The thing that's been weighing on my mind – less so than recent political developments – is population shifts and demographics in the Catholic Church. I mean, certainly, with the rise of birth control – despite what bishops might want to know – the families are smaller now than they were in, say, the 1800s. And certainly, with the rise of secularity, I am curious to see the role of Catholicism in American public life. Dr McGreevy's book deals with them taking on a larger role and now, I wonder, as the population shrinks, what's going to happen?*

**LMK**: That's a great question. We have certainly seen revivals before in this country.

**DG**: *Oh, sure*.

**LMK**: So it's hard to predict. The demographic shifts are obviously significant, but exactly how they'll play out, I think, is not easy to prognosticate. Just because there are people in the Southern Hemisphere who are becoming the voice of Christianity, it's not clear to me what political pay-off that has, or what path that portends. In fact, if you look at something that I know a little more about, in Protestant missionary work, the kinds of Protestantism that are making in-roads in places like Africa and South America are some of the more conservative kinds of Protestantism: Pentecostalism . . .

**DG**: *Which is a counter-narrative to the modern, growing secularism in America.*

**LMK**: And now they’re sending missionaries back to the United States.

**DG**: *Really?*

**LMK**: Yes. There are reverse migratory flows of missionaries. One of the biggest churches in Western Europe right now is a church – and this may be out of date because it's a few years ago someone told me this: that there's a huge evangelical church that was founded by a Nigerian pastor that has grown by leaps and bounds in Europe. (**20:00**) Now who that's growing among, in Europe, is an interesting question. But, of course, the make-up of Western Europe and the United States is changing, as well. So the demography may just follow back to the Northern Hemisphere.

**DG**: *Sure. Well, this discussion of transnational Catholicism and which particular voice will win out, makes me think of the original intention for why we're sitting here in Notre Dame. So, for our listeners, this conference was originally meant to be part of a much larger conference on the work of* [*Mark Noll*](http://news.nd.edu/for-the-media/nd-experts/faculty/mark-noll/)*, the historian of American Christianity. Due to unfortunate circumstances, the conference had to be, mostly, scrapped. But I'm curious what you would think of this, to bring in Mr Noll as an evangelical historian and historian of evangelicalism. His recent work has been abandoning America Studies, to some extent, to talk about the world. His book,* [Clouds of Witnesses](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Clouds-Witnesses-Christian-Voices-Africa/dp/0830838341/ref=sr_1_13?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1495471725&sr=1-13&keywords=Clouds+of+Witnesses) *is about Africa and Asia. So, the work of Mark Noll: how, if at all, does that influence your research? Do you see his views about pluralism . . . do you think those are going to carry more weight, going forwards, in the academy?*

**LMK**: In certain sections of the academy, absolutely. I mean, Mark has been a pioneer in that sort of field, looking at global Christianity, for a long time. And thinking about, well – he's a historian with an eye to the future, and where the church is going. And that's certainly a big piece of the puzzle that I think has trickled back into the academy, in all kinds of ways. So I don't see that stopping, by any means. But the question of what globalism or increasing globalisation of any of these religious traditions actually means for piety, for spirituality, for institutional life is, I think, the next big question. We know what it means in terms of bodies moving from one place to another, but how that actually, then, plays out – in terms of building institutions and building structures – is anybody's guess.

**DG**: *Well, and you've also mentioned – on sort-of a final note – that you and the other panellists talk about how the Catholics have become, you know, comfortable with their place in American society. Whereas Mark Noll, in his works, is talking about how some evangelicals want to make the country an explicitly evangelical nation – and he rejects that, as an evangelical man. So do you see these fights in the academy at all, over how to define religion? Should there be an exclusively Protestant historical mould, or should we find news ways of thinking and defining religion – ways that aren't just tied to Christianity?*

**LMK**: So, are you thinking . . . ? Yes – I think the horse is out of barn on that one! I don't see going back to any kind of narrow focus on either churches, or institutional life or Protestantism. But I think, in some ways, the study of religion in all of its dimensions can only enrich the future study of Protestantism, along with other traditions.

**DG**: *Yes, I think pluralism is here to stay. Or, at least, that's what we're supporting, right?*

**LMK**: Yes.

**DG**: *And then, a genuinely final note, I’ll ask: some scholars consider Mormonism a Christian faith; others say it is a Christian inspired faith.Where do you stand on those issues?*

**LMK**: It's certainly inspired by Protestantism and that's where, if you look at the first sort of members of the movement, they came by way of other Christian traditions. I don't . . . . The theological question – of whether it is a Christian tradition – I don't feel, as a scholar, is mine to answer. I guess, on one level, I take seriously the self-identification of Mormons who see themselves as Christians. I think it's an interesting question to look at. I think there are other Mormons who don't see themselves as Christian, so that's also an interesting question: where are the fault lines, and when and where do these questions matter? As a cultural historian, I think those are the more interesting questions for me. But I am not a theologian and I am not a historian of a particular kind of church tradition, so I'll leave that to the experts.

**DG**: *Laurie Maffly-Kipp discussing bodies in space: what they think, what they say and what they do. Thank you very much.*

**LMK**: You're welcome. Thank you.

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