

Objections to Christianity

Group 4

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Boston MA

(0:00:00.0-0:04:18.1) INTRODUCTIONS . . . PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELVES.

Alexis: The first thing about me is I'm not very good at going first. *(Laughs.)* But other than that, I'm twenty-two years old; I go to school at Tufts. I'm a grad student over there. I do a lot of program evaluation, data work. And I have two cats who are both pains in the butt, and I also like to cook a lot. I hope that's a good enough introduction.

Rebecca: Hi, everyone. I grew up in western Massachusetts, rural area. I just graduated from Suffolk University Law School yesterday. *(0:04:59.9 Applause.)* So I'll be studying for the bar this summer and looking for a job. I live in Brookline and I have a great, a lot of loving family and friends.

Andrea: Hi, I go by Annie. I'm forty-four. I'm a professor at Berkeley College. I teach music business, specialty in music licensing. I worked in the music industry for about fifteen years; still work in it. And I also have cats and also love to cook. Married, and a fairly new Bostonian, about seven years. I'm still getting my roots.

(0:05:38.0) WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Andrea: All over. I've been in Colorado, Miami, DC, California, so all over the place. Yes, it's a good start. You know, I feel good. I'm getting it down.

Stephanie: I'm Stephanie. I work at Walgreens. I'm a pharmacy technician. I have two boys, eight and he's going to be three tomorrow, the little one. That's it, nothing too exciting.

(0:06:07.3) I MAY END UP ASKING YOU TO SPEAK UP BECAUSE YOU SPEAK VERY QUIETLY.

Stephanie: Yes, I do. No, I know. I'm quiet. I'm just naturally quiet.

Tiffany: I'm forty-two. I have two cats. I love to cook. I'm going to up it with a wine club on top. I work in the finance industry. I'm married. I'm originally from Virginia. I spent ten years in Great Britain, so I have a weird hybrid accent. *(Laughter.)*

Christine: I'm a social worker. I work with a couple different populations, actually, right now—teens and kids with autism. I have a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter, and I have a good, nice partner.

Heather: Hi, I'm thirty-six and married. I'm pregnant right now and having a baby in August. *(0:07:19.2 Congratulations.)* I work as a nanny. I'm trying to think what else. Oh, and we're moving. We're moving this summer, too, so lots going on. I'm in Boston, moving to Needham. Thank you.

Amanda: Hi, I'm twenty-six. I go to Wellesley University for holistic expressive therapies. I also have a cat (*laughs*) and he's the man. And yes, just living life, working, same old thing everyone else does. Thank you.

Yunjin: My name is Yunjin. Based on my name, as you can see, I'm a foreigner. I'm from Korea. I came here in 2007 to pursue my PhD degree at Harvard, and am hoping to graduate by the end of this year in the chemistry department. And I have very different pets from the rest of you guys. I have two guinea pigs. (*Laughter.*)

(0:08:26.8) HOW BIG ARE THEY?

Yunjin: They're about this big. Yes, they're the size of little puppies and they behave like little puppies. And, what else? Pretty much it, yes.

(0:08:59.4) WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTIANS, THE CHURCH, AND JESUS. WHEN I SAY CHRISTIANITY, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF FIRST?

Female respondent: Jesus, the Cross.

Female respondent: I think of the Roman Catholic Church.

Female respondent: I think of the Bible Belt, like the South. I don't associate it with the North.

Female respondent: I think of it as an institution. Oppressive is too hard, but an overbearing institution.

Female respondent: I think of restrictive and restriction. That's the first thing that comes to my mind.

(0:10:18.2) HOW DID YOU COME TO FEEL THE WAY YOU DO TODAY ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?

Female respondent: I'll share my story. I was raised Catholic and I went to CCD and I went to church when I was younger, and I didn't feel like I fit in too much. I was also kind of raised in California, too, back and forth, and my aunt was Christian and my cousins were, so I went with them to just one of their worship services, and I had some questions for the preacher at the time. I went to lunch with him and . . . I'm fourteen and I just have random questions. I was like, "Well, what if I just don't believe in the whole story of Jesus? It was translated over and over and over again. What if I just don't believe all of it?" He pretty much told me that I was going to go to hell anyway, hell in a hand basket, pretty much. From then on I was just like this, "I don't even believe you. You're just a human being like me and you're telling me what's going to happen to me, and you have no right." From then on I was just like, "Nope, no thank you. No, thank you very much."

Christine: My story is very similar to that. I was raised Catholic, I went to CCD. And around the time that I was going to CCD you start asking questions. And we wouldn't get good answers. I distinctly remember my priest saying it was your Catholic obligation to learn Latin because everybody in heaven spoke Latin, and if you didn't know it, then you wouldn't know what was going on. And I know my Bible. I knew it; I don't know it so much now. And I was like, "Well, Jesus was from Arimathea; who the hell taught him

Latin?" He just got mad. He didn't have an answer. He didn't say, "Oh, that's a very good point. I don't know. Maybe he learned it somewhere." He just got mad and he told me not to ask questions. And if you tell me not to ask questions, I'm going to start asking a lot. It got to the point that I could raise my hand all class, and he would not call on me.

Yunjin: I can give a little bit of a different story. In Korea, the Christianity is growing very strong. And when I was little, my dad's side's family had a very difficult situation where the oldest one became a priest of a church. The second one was a very devoted Catholic, and my dad, who was the third one, who became a Buddhist. The fourth one didn't have any religion. So every big holiday there was a fight over the religion. It was just crazy. The oldest one, being a priest as his occupation, he was very, very forceful for the rest of the family to keep up all the traditional holiday things, and we should do certain things, and we should not worship other than Jesus Christ. Things were very ugly, and I ended up not talking to him over two decades by now. The entire family broke up just because of his one way, his way, or that's it. I was growing up watching all these things and it was very difficult to understand how one religion can turn everything upside down, and then break families apart, and never talk to each other, never talk to the relatives. Ever since then, I had a sort of negative notion about Christianity. It's just never going to change. No, no, it was the oldest who decided to walk away from the family. The rest of them, they were just like, "Okay, so we're just going to get along." Nothing ever happened after. Yes, we still don't talk.

Female respondent: That's really sad.

Yunjin: Yes, it is. It is kind of sad. So, that's my story.

Andrea: I'll go. I was raised Lutheran. I went through baptism and catechism and all of the things that Catholicism, we call it Catholic Lite. (*Laughs.*) We were raised to not talk about our religion, but it was just a very personal thing. And so we went through all of the prayers and did all of that. At the same time, about fourteen, when you go through confirmation, it's a three-year study period where you become an adult in the church. We had a youth pastor who basically was very young and hip and he sat down and the first thing he said to us was, "The Bible is a book of stories written by men, interpreted by men, and it's just to help us understand our faith." And so, of course, that got me to think, "Oh, this is just a book of stories. This isn't necessarily the Word of God." We all had this very inquisitive group. We also shared a church with a Jewish congregation, so we did Seder meals with them, and we learned each other's traditions. And so it was very open, learning about other faiths and being inquisitive about how our faiths are tied together, rather than what separates us. That's at fourteen, I started learning about that. My mom was nontraditional, into metaphysics, and so when I started having these questions, then I started asking her, "What are these other faiths?" and "What goes on?" She really was the one who helped me to understand metaphysics, universalism, Buddhism, all of these other things. I started investigating that at fourteen. Continued to be a Christian on and on, and even being a worship leader up until about eight years ago, and then just haven't really gone to church because I felt like I was not being true to myself, that I was really believing in these other things and not the hard-and-fast Christian doctrine. And so I didn't feel like I was being truthful. Yes.

Amanda: It's a little bit different, I guess. I was raised in kind of, I forget what it even was. I think it was either a Methodist or Protestant church. And I was doing Sunday school, going to a private Christian school, and my family was extremely devout, so that didn't really leave a lot of room for certain things. As time went on, my dad got more and more into the religion, and he started following this guy named Harold Camping. He was the guy who was prophesizing the end of the world—May 21, 2000—whatever, so that was his deal. He went off in that direction. And my mom and my dad got divorced over his cultish religious views, I guess. But when I would go to see him on visitation, it would be all of this Harold Camping stuff. He would play his Family Radio, which is where it's broadcast from. And it was just basically Bible verses and religion, paired with, "It's the end of the world. Prepare your children for the Second Coming," and I just remember being very afraid for a large part of my life because I didn't know what it was. I was just being told, "It's the end of the world. It's the end of the world," over and over again, even when it wasn't. That kind of put a sour taste in my mouth a little bit, but I didn't abandon my form of Christianity and my mom's form of Christianity, which was kind of more normal, I guess, what everybody else has been describing. Yes, and then when I finally, I think, shed Christianity for good was in high school. I was fourteen and I was going to a Methodist church, trying to find a new group of friends because I had just moved. And I didn't quite fit that youth group look. I was kind of at that point dressing in black, listening to hardcore metal music. (*Laughter.*) They pretty much just gave me dirty looks the whole time. I played guitar for them, but then, it just . . . I never could mesh with them. They'd kind of leave me out of things, and I felt very ostracized within a community that's supposed to be about God. I just realized that this whole thing has been about fear, being put down, being ostracized.

(0:19:29.6) WERE THEY JUST BEHAVING LIKE HIGH SCHOOLERS, OR WAS CHRISTIANITY DRIVING IT?

Female respondent: Yes, I think it was a mixture because they kind of prided themselves on being loving and tolerant because they were Christian. But it didn't really work out that way. Yes, except for me. I was weird. I was too weird to be Christian. (*Laughs.*)

(0:19:59.5) HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CHURCH, GOING TO CHURCH, OR THE VIEWS OF THE CHURCH?

Female respondent: When I think of church, and this actually relates to what Chris and Amanda said. I always had a lot of questions, so one time I asked the . . . We had confirmation leaders, and I asked them, "If you guys care about the needy or if you care about people that are in poverty, how come you guys just built this multimillion-dollar church?" Their answer was, "Well, we need a place for people to come and worship." And I said, "I don't understand, you could worship anywhere. You don't have to build a million-dollar church."

(0:20:56.2) DID THEY SAY THAT THEY BUILT IT TO THE GLORY OF GOD?

Female respondent: No, no, it was like, "We need somewhere for everyone to congregate in the community." And I said, "Well, couldn't you just congregate outside?" They did not like that answer. I said, "I'd rather be outside," because I remember hearing my uncle once saying, "I'd rather be on some

beautiful mountain somewhere worshipping God.” I remember I asked them about that, and they were confused that I would even bring that up in front of a class.

Female respondent: When you first mentioned the word “Christianity,” and I said the Roman Catholic church that’s, I think about . . . I know this is probably weird, but I’m thinking that they have so much money, *(laughs)* and they live this luxurious almost lifestyle, even though you’re not technically supposed to. When I think of the word church, I just think of almost a gang. Everyone has their role and everyone is supposed to do their duty. And it’s not necessarily to God, but for the higher-ups, and what they want to happen. I see a hierarchy of its own little . . . I’m trying to find the right word. The best word I can use is “gangs” because it’s just—

Female respondent: The Wall Street Old Boys club. They’re keeping the status quo.

Female respondent: Yes. It’s just as long as these people down here think they know what’s going on and we make this place for them to worship, so to speak. It’s just an institution, I think, that’s full of a lot of hypocrisy in many ways.

Heather: I don’t go to church much, aside from weddings, funerals. I’m Jewish, so, yes, that’s probably another reason.

(0:23:15.3) BUT YOU HAVE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?

Heather: Yes. My ex-boyfriend, let me see. I don’t know, he used to watch this program about, I forget. He was a religious preacher on TV. I’m having a brain cramp on this, with his name right now.

Female respondent: *(Whispers.)* Pregnancy brain.

Heather: What’s that?

Female respondent: *(Whispers.)* Pregnancy brain. *(Laughs.)*

Heather: Right, exactly.

Female respondent: You have permission.

Female respondent: Schuller, Robert Schuller?

Heather: No. Mm-mmm. *(Negative.)* He was young.

(0:23:43.7) IS IT RECENT, OR IS IT LONG AGO?

Heather: No, not that long ago. Maybe a couple of years ago. Three or four years ago maybe.

(0:23:51.5) JOEL OSTEEN?

Heather: Yes, yes. So, I don’t know, he would watch that a lot. I just think, to each his own, you know? Whatever you find inspirational or spiritual. I don’t know.

(0:24:07.2) WHEN I SAY “THE CHURCH,” WHAT IMAGES DOES THAT CONJURE?

Heather: It’s the majority, I feel like the majority of people go to church versus temple are the minority.

Female respondent: (*Whispers.*) I love temple.

Heather: What’s that?

Female respondent: I said I love temple. (*Chuckles.*) I do. It’s very calming.

Heather: What else?

Tiffany: I’ve been to a couple different kinds of churches. I’ve been to Spanish . . . not Spanish, but all the Spanish people just went there. They only spoke Spanish. I thought that was . . . I didn’t understand it, but I felt like they were just more into it. But then I went to . . . I don’t know what church it was. I went with my friend. I think they were boring to me, and I felt like they were just there to be there. They weren’t into it at all, they were just going just to say, “Oh, hey, I’m going.” So, I don’t know.

(0:25:15.9) LIKE A HABIT OR A RITUAL, BUT NOT REALLY ABSORBING?

Tiffany: Yes, they’re not . . . Yes. They just say, “Oh, I went,” so that means that they’re not going to go to hell. They’re, “I’m doing my duty.” That’s how I felt.

Rebecca: Yes. It’s kind of twofold. When you say “the church” I have some very negative connotations. I think of creepy old white men in their . . . What is the word? Cults, and the negative things that they have done, and how they brainwash people. But I also, at the same token, when you say “church,” I think of a lovely place where the community gets together, it’s sunny, and you see your friends on Sunday. That’s something I never really got to experience. Looking from the outside I thought, “Oh, that must be really nice, to have that community.” When you say “church,” I have more positive images that come up first, actually. But “the church,” negative.

(0:26:04.1) CREEPY OLD WHITE MEN?

Rebecca: Yes. Yes, I guess so.

Female respondent: One thing I just noticed is you said specifically, “Creepy old white men,” white men. That definitely, yes. I didn’t even think of it like that, but that’s the image I see in my head. It’s not a diversified image in my head, or culturally diversified at all.

Tiffany: Actually, I had a few more ideas about church. I think, is it at the Baptist church? Is it African-American mostly, at the Baptist churches, I think? I don’t know. I don’t go to church a lot.

Female respondent: Southern Baptist.

Tiffany: Southern Baptist? But I like the music. It's a lot of soul music, and they seem really into it. Yes, and then the other thought about church was just some of the abuse lately, too, in the churches. Not recently, but not that long ago.

Female respondent: What are you talking about, the priests, some of the priests?

(0:27:05.5) THE PEDOPHILIA PROBLEM?

Female respondent: It's not the first thing that comes to mind, but it comes to mind.

Female respondent: It gets there pretty quick.

Female respondent: I think of the Boston . . .

Female respondent: I think it gets there pretty quickly.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: Being from Boston, it gets there pretty quick.

Female respondent: Yes.

(0:27:29.6) TELL ME ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE THAT YOU HAD WITH PEOPLE YOU WOULD IDENTIFY AS CHRISTIANS.

Tiffany: All right. My son's grandmother, not my mother, his father's mother, she's Christian. She wanted me to take my son to church, bring him to church. I don't know. I think to baptize him. I was like, "I don't want to," she was like, "No, you have to. That's my grandson. I want him to be Christian. He's going to be Christian." I was like, "No, I'm his mother. I'm not baptized, none of my family got baptized. We just are not." It was a big problem for her because I didn't want to baptize him, and I was—

(0:28:30.8) ASIDE FROM HIM BEING HER GRANDSON, WHAT WERE HER REASONS?

Tiffany: That was pretty much it. She was just like, "I want him to be how I am," and I'm like, "If you want to bring him to church, I didn't say you couldn't bring him to church and expose him to that if you would like to, but I just don't feel like I need to baptize him." He's been to church a couple of times with her. "I never said you couldn't teach him about it, I just didn't want to baptize him." She had a big problem with that.

(0:29:01.3) DID YOU HAVE ANOTHER STORY?

Tiffany: No, just that one. Yes, that was it.

(0:29:07.0) DID YOU HAVE ONE, HEATHER?

Heather: I don't think so.

Female respondent: I do. No, I do. With my cousins and stuff, I saw them raised Christian. One of my cousins, she went and did mission work a lot. Her belief in God is very strong, and I admire that. I admire her ability to be so close to her God in that sense, and do work in that form and fashion. But at the same time, I notice too, that experience-wise of life, she has lacked as far as the understanding of others, the different types of people out there, the different ways people live in general. My aunt divorced her father when she was in high school, and she stopped becoming Christian, really. And still hid a lot of her lifestyle from her daughters, so she didn't see a lot of things. They were very, I feel, sheltered almost, from the reality of life. Not just hunger and all the things that we normally see, and we try to help other people with, but street smarts, I guess I could say, because she was so sheltered by her religion. Then there's other people that I've encountered that have tried to force the Word down my throat and tell me that I'm going to go to hell. That's my separate views of that.

(0:30:55.8) DO THEY TELL YOU YOU'RE GOING TO HELL, OR DO THEY TELL YOU YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HEAVEN?

Female respondent: Going to hell. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

(0:31:09.2) THEY JUST THROW IT RIGHT OUT THERE?

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: If you don't do it, you're going to hell.

Female respondent: Occasionally you hear the word of the Catholic purgatory.

Female respondent: Yes. Purgatory.

Female respondent: You do occasionally, but you're definitely not going to heaven. You're going to have to have a lot of prayers said for you. That's why you say prayers for other people in purgatory, so that somebody will basically do that for you when your soul needs it. Yes.

Female respondent: Yes. That's what . . . So close to Tiffany's story. My grandmother, when we decided not to baptize, we didn't really decide, we just knew we weren't going to baptize my daughter because I'm not a Catholic anymore, and my partner has never been a religious person, religious man. So we didn't baptize, and my grandmother, who is in her nineties, told me that she's going to pray for my daughter every day because she's going to be left in purgatory when she dies. And I'm going to hell. *(Laughs.)*

Female respondent: I also heard something recently, too, that I didn't even know that you're supposed to be buried, and if you're not buried then you won't resurrect with God when he comes back.

Female respondent: Because it's supposed to be a bodily resurrection?

Female respondent: Yes, and I started laughing because I was like, "Oh, that's real zombie-ish. I'd come out just a skeleton and f*** around."

Female respondent: Love that one.

(0:32:27.3) WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

Female respondent: I love Jesus. I think he rocks, but I don't believe he's the Son of God. The biggest reason I don't believe he's the Son of God is because his father, in the Old Testament, is a gigantic jerk. And I just can't believe that this guy who's so loving and forgiving and accepting of the poor . . . he never said a bad thing about gay people, prostitutes, whoever . . . has anything to do with that God. It's like they just grabbed this thing and meshed it together, and said, "Yes, they're related." No, they're not. They can't be, seriously.

(0:33:06.0) IF HE'S NOT THE SON OF GOD, WHO IS HE?

Female respondent: Just a fantastic human being. Really amazing, like Muhammad or somebody. A really fantastic human being.

Female respondent: Or like Ghandi.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: Yes, that's how I view him, too. Just a great person who did a lot and said, "You know what? Just because you people are going to be mean to others doesn't mean I have to be."

(0:33:29.3) WHAT DO THE REST OF YOU THINK ABOUT JESUS?

Female respondent: That we're the same. That we are children of God, just as he was a child of God. That we are all imbued with those same abilities to heal with our words, with our actions, as Jesus was. Yes. I don't believe the story of the miracles of turning water to wine. I don't believe those things, but I believe that he was somebody who was outstanding, just as we have outstanding people. Yes. Or that we each have that potential within us. That we are all a part of God, we are part of that universal consciousness that was created by who knows what.

Female respondent: On that point, I have read there are some theories that Jesus, during the time that he was lost for thirty years or whatever . . . that he was in India studying under the mystics because he said, "All the miracles I have done, you can do yourself," and that he was almost a mystic, in a way.

Female respondent: The Gnostic Gospels, and . . .

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: Yes. Absolutely, that we all have that potential within us.

Female respondent: Yes. He just tapped into it.

Female respondent: Absolutely.

Yunjin: Yes, I was just going to say, maybe I'm going to be going to hell by saying this.

(0:34:50.8) NOT BY US.

Female respondent: We'll pray for you. *(Laughter.)*

Female respondent: No way. You will not hear that from me.

Yunjin: I don't see Jesus as just a real person who existed about two thousand years ago. When I hear "Jesus," I think of him as more like an image combined from multiple stories or multiple personalities that existed in around the same period, where he did wonderful things for many different people and communities. But as the Bible is established, I think the main character is just a combination of multiple people around that era. They became known as Jesus. So in that way Jesus is more like a creation of a next generation trying to have some sort of an idol in Christianity to follow, not necessarily having just a real person who was named Jesus and acting as the Son of God. That's my take.

Female respondent: I see it almost just like that, but it's a fairy tale.

Female respondent: Right.

Female respondent: And the Bible, with its cursive script, is like a Brother's Grimm book of compilations. It's a book of stories, and Jesus was just an image in that story. So when I think of Jesus, I think of 2D pictures of, "Great, there's Jesus. How wonderful." But he didn't exist, he's not real. The stories are inconceivably wrong, and it's just a pile of lies. Oh, God. *(Laughter.)*

Female respondent: Where's the lightning bolt? *(Laughter.)*

Female respondent: It isn't raining outside. *(Laughter.)*

(0:36:53.9) AS FAR AS WHAT JESUS DID OR DID NOT DO, WHAT DOES OR DOES NOT FIT INTO YOUR BELIEF SYSTEM?

Female respondent: I don't believe he was born of a virgin. I don't believe that he was born December 25th. I believe that the whole Christmas thing was linked back to the pagan holidays and they just piggybacked on it. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Female respondent: I don't believe he rose three days later. That's also another very common mythology that happens over and over again. I think they borrowed a lot from what was already out there. They wanted people to believe in Christianity and they said, "See, this story is really a lot like your story. We just changed the names." Then Mary was never even a very big figure until they started going to cultures where the female was important in their deity system. Then all the sudden, "Well, we've got Mary. Look at Mary. She's really important to us too." I think you're right. They made up what they wanted to make up, and they put together pieces. The rest of his stories . . . I don't even know if it matters if he did it or not. Whether he changed water to wine or anything, because they're just good lessons about love.

(0:38:47.5) DOES ANYONE HAVE A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THAT?

Female respondent: No.

Female respondent: I think he could have healed the sick. I think from the things . . . My mom is an energy healer. She does energy work, where she moves energy in people's bodies, and I've seen it happen; I've had it happen with me. So for me, that part could be true. I can believe that we can heal each other with words. If you look at Emoto's work, words spoken into water changes the . . .

Female respondent: Structure. I've seen that. That was really interesting.

Female respondent: Structure, the crystalline structure of water, and of sand also. When you sound into sand . . . I also work in music, so we do a lot of music therapy. For me, that's the one story that I can be kosher with. That's the one thing that I think. People saw these things happening and didn't know how to explain them. For me that's one area of truth. I believe that he did perform things that could have been considered supernatural. I've seen those things in my own life. So . . .

(0:40:08.5) WHAT ELSE DID HE DO THAT YOU COULD POSSIBLY BELIEVE?

Christine: Well, I think being a social worker, I would hope that people would do things that he has supposedly done. I personally just don't. I think of them as all just stories. I think the Bible is a great story. There's a great multitude of stories, but I do think, coming from the social work perspective, it would be really nice if a lot of different people healed the sick. And if people . . . I'm trying to think of some other stories, stood up for people who are vulnerable. I'm thinking Mary Magdalene and different things like that. I think that it would be really nice if more people did that. I hope that someone that is supposedly this guy Jesus did do that at one point, because that would give me a lot of hope with humanity.

(0:41:24.5-0:41:44.6) MODERATOR ENCOURAGES RESPONDENTS TO FEEL FREE TO EXPAND ON THEIR THOUGHTS.

Female respondent: You know, you should include wine in this. And then the (0:41:48.7 unclear/laughter).

Female respondent: Oh, I'm seeing *Fire and Ice* after this. (Laughter.)

(0:41:59.1) LET'S TALK ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU FIND UNACCEPTABLE OR OBJECTIONABLE.

Female respondent: I think it's an exclusive club. That's what I always think of. They're very specific with who can . . . At least, I'm thinking from the Catholic Church. So if you are the standard pro-choice, or if you're gay, if you're . . . I'm trying to think of something else. If you're basically any other religion, you're not really invited to be a part and worship with everyone else. Either you should change your ways or definitely leave, not kind of.

(0:42:57.9) THAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: I would take it one step further and say not only is it exclusive, it's also exclusive to women, making it a male-dominated religion.

Female respondent: Yes. Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: The way that women are talked to and degraded under the guise of Christianity is unacceptable.

Female respondent: Yes, definitely.

Female respondent: Unacceptable to be exclusionary on any type of person regardless. Regardless of sexual orientation is my biggest problem. If you truly are . . . And I think that's probably why I left the Christian church, was because I don't . . . Jesus was this loving individual, he didn't exclude people because they're different. He embraced people because they were different. So the fact that the Christian church won't embrace gay marriage or being gay is a deal-breaker for me.

Female respondent: It wasn't that long ago that divorcees were shunned.

Female respondent: Right, absolutely. If it's not one thing, it's another.

Female respondent: My whole thing is too, that it's so involved in the government system and politics. It should be, state and church are separate, but it's not. It's always involved.

Female respondent: We prayed in school when I was at an elementary school that was not church affiliated at all. That was twenty years ago, but . . .

Female respondent: You sure you weren't in Texas?

Female respondent: No, it was in Colorado, and Colorado was a blue state.

(0:44:24.3) THAT'S TRUE.

Female respondent: Yes, it was a blue state back then.

Female respondent: The other thing I find unacceptable about them is going back to . . . I can't remember if I made a point about how much money they have. When Jesus said, "It'd be easier for a rich man to go through the eye of a needle than to get into the kingdom of heaven." But you would never think that they ever read that sentence in their life.

Female respondent: Isn't the Roman Catholic Church, the archdiocese, its own separate state? So any money that goes into that . . . This whole world could fall apart and they would be the richest people on earth, because that money does not leave that system.

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*) I think they already are.

Female respondent: Yes, it's like their own separate country almost, and anything that goes through there, stays there.

(0:45:13.0) WHERE ELSE DOES THE CHRISTIAN FAITH DIFFER FROM YOUR VIEWS?

Female respondent: The pope is infallible. Nobody's infallible.

Female respondent: That's the Catholic people that say that.

Female respondent: Sorry.

Female respondent: Protestants don't care. It's the Catholics. But I'll put the pope. I am going to put the pope, just because you said it.

Female respondent: Although I do like the new one a bit better.

Female respondent: Do you?

Female respondent: He's just still too old.

Female respondent: They're always too old.

Female respondent: They're always too old. (*Laughter.*)

Female respondent: We could have had a lawsuit.

Female respondent: That's another thing too—

Female respondent: They're younger. He's not toeing the party line, they're going to kill him anyway.

Female respondent: They're always super old, stuck in their ways. There's no bending somebody who's so old-school and so structured.

(0:45:54.6) YOU MEAN THE POPES?

Female respondent: Yes, popes, priests. They're all, they're not willing to look at themselves and see their own flaws in themselves, and then try to help people. Their ideas of themselves of, "We're right, and no one else can tell me otherwise," it's just this stubborn thick-headedness that is completely saturated through all of them. There's no . . . Like with my grandma. My grandma is never going to change, and I know that because she's been like that for seventy-five years. I know that that's going to happen to that guy, too; he's just never going to change. You can't teach old dogs new tricks.

Female respondent: I don't mean to keep saying things, but I don't believe that I need them to have a relationship with God. I feel like they feel like they're my broker and I won't be able to talk to Him (*laughs*) without him.

Female respondent: That's a good point.

Female respondent: I would agree with that.

(0:46:52.8) IS THIS THE GOD THAT YOU SAY WAS A MEAN GOD?

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: Yes, the mean one. Even if I was looking for a broker to Jesus, then I'm not allowed to speak to them unless I go through them. And I think that's wrong. I think I should be able to have my own personal relationship, whether I'm inside church boundaries or not.

(0:47:09.9) I WAS ACTUALLY THINKING ABOUT ABORTION.

Female respondent: I was just thinking that, pro-life and . . . Yes. Pro-life and they don't believe really in birth control pills. Yes, I was thinking on that.

Female respondent: I'll call it pro-life.

Female respondent: There's a lot of pro-life.

Female respondent: Yes, but pro-life is different, though, from . . .

Female respondent: Pro-choice.

Female respondent: Using . . .

Female respondent: Contraception?

Female respondent: Contraception.

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: I think those are definitely two different issues.

Female respondent: I don't think within the eyes of the Catholic Church it is, though, because they don't like any of it.

Female respondent: You can't stand in the way of what God's going to do at all, literally.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: There's a barrier there.

Female respondent: No, that's why you can only do accidents, because then you just shot at the wrong time. You know? (*Laughs.*)

Female respondent: Yes.

(0:48:00.1) DOES THE CHRISTIAN FAITH SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE MORES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Female respondent: They're too closely related for me. The Catholic views came before the Christian views, but they're all the same views. They're all the same views.

Female respondent: One dictates the other.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: I also think of confession. If you don't have that, you have that at the church. You can just speak to someone about that.

(0:48:44.8) YOU HAVE CONFESSION IN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Female respondent: Yes. You do.

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: That's only—

Female respondent: We have confession, too, in the Lutheran Church.

Female respondent: That's the whole brokerage thing. I have to tell you and then do eighty-five Hail Marys just to walk out there and feel better? No.

Female respondent: I feel like the Methodist Church that I went to was very much like, "Oh, we're not like the Catholic Church. We're much more open and appreciative of everyone." Blah, blah, blah. That was their mantra, but this is where that . . . Not only the group of kids came from, but all of these other views were still pretty much there. It was still patriarch bull, it was still exclusive, they were still pro-life. It was in Central Florida, so they were—

(0:49:21.1) THEY WERE POSITIONING THEMSELVES AS A BETTER CHOICE THAN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Female respondent: Right, to be like, "Hey, look, we're different." But they're not.

(0:49:30.0) WHAT OTHER OBJECTIONS DO YOU HAVE TO CHRISTIANITY?

Female respondent: The whole hell thing. The whole thing of . . . Yes. The whole idea of, "My way or the highway."

(0:49:51.3) HELL IS ONE THING; MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY IS SOMETHING ELSE.

Amanda: I also have this issue with the institutional aspect of it. I don't know. I'm kind of a hippie. I wear this Celtic cross, but it explains my religion more. More of my past and present, because I was raised

Catholic but I do not believe in their institution. I'm Irish; I believe more about my heritage. I'm also Native American, so I have a lot more of a spirituality view on things. I just see it as they come in and they just tear walls down. They tear whatever they want down. They build it up.

(0:50:41.7) WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ABOUT THE INSTITUTION PART OF IT?

Amanda: The institution part is . . . I feel like they go out and try to conquer specific places in order to put their footing down. They ruin a lot of peoples' cultural identities by doing that. And then they tear down whatever those people believe in, their structure of their lives, and build massive churches in place of that. I feel like they suck the life out of many cultures that were fine just the way they were. These savages, so to speak.

(0:51:25.5) DO THEY SUPPLANT THE CULTURAL STRUCTURE OR FABRIC OF THE COMMUNITY WITH THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

Amanda: Yes, that's how this came about.

Female respondent: Yes.

Yunjin: It goes with the same line. I feel like the church is very separate from religion. The church became almost this separate entity of being an institution, saying it's supposedly a place to believe in something. But it became a place where they put their own rules and restrictions, and exclusions and inclusions. They make their own rules regardless what religion they believe in. That creates a lot of adverse effects on me, seeing that it's an institution run by people. People who make their own rules, and they follow their rules, and then change their rules. It's evolving in a way, but it's not really open for other peoples' opinions outside of the institution. It's more and more being away from its own identity, being a place to worship. It's not like that anymore. It's just a group of people trying to build their own little society, which is isolated from the rest of people.

Female respondent: I think more now so it's become more exclusive, but back when they started venturing out and trying to conquer these lands with Christianity and Catholicism, they did go out and try to pull people in regardless of what they believed in because they needed that in order to conquer.

Female respondent: And they still do that through missions work. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Female respondent: And that just bothers me.

Female respondent: Feed somebody, but in helping them they have to be converted to Christianity.

Female respondent: Yes, it's not just, "I'm just going to help you just from the love of my heart." No. "I'm going to help you, but you have to help me help you."

Female respondent: Yes, it's like the Crusades. They went in there to liberate the Holy Land and it's like no, they wanted all the gold and everything that they had in there. It was crazy.

Female respondent: The oil, or the diamonds. Or . . .

Christine: In Africa, or they do it in the prison system in this country now, too. They offer Christian groups and Catholic groups, and it gets you out of doing other things. And if you do well in certain . . . this is in certain states. Massachusetts is not one of them. But if you do well in the groups and you act how you're supposed to in the groups, you actually get shorter sentences.

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: Wow.

Christine: That's one more thing.

(0:54:16.5) WHEN WE TALK ABOUT MONEY, NOT RELIGION, IS THAT THE INSTITUTIONAL SIDE OR IS THAT SOMETHING MORE?

Female respondent: More.

Rebecca: I'm going to say the money, not religion. No. Although one thing I would, I don't know. No, it wasn't that. One thing I was going to add was just anti-science, the anti-evolution, the anti (*0:54:44.2 unclear*). I think that's not logical . . . I tend to associate it, anti-science, anti-logical a little bit.

(0:54:50.8) IF THEY WEREN'T ANTI-SCIENCE, HOW WOULD THEY CHANGE? WHY IS ANTI-SCIENCE NOT GOOD?

Rebecca: I think it's naive to ignore nature or science. I believe in science. I think to just ignore it and say . . . What is it that they say? Evolution didn't happen. Is that correct? Then I feel like they try to preach that in schools.

(0:55:31.7) THEY SAY THAT EVOLUTION DID NOT HAPPEN?

Female respondent: Yes. That's . . .

Female respondent: Right. In some schools—

Female respondent: That's Creationism. That it's only five thousand years old.

Female respondent: Yes, God made dinosaurs.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: They're against the Big Bang Theory.

Female respondent: Yes, yes. All that stuff. I just associate it with anti-science. Not having tons of facts to back it up, or evidence. That's just what comes to mind. I believe that probably a lot of people don't believe in global warming. Perhaps maybe, coming from their faith. That's anti-science.

Female respondent: When it comes to my aunt . . .

(0:56:06.6) TELL ME ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING AND CREATION?

Female respondent: They are associated. They're all in the same basket with me, in my mind.

(0:56:14.7) DO THEY SUPPORT GLOBAL WARMING?

Female respondent: They believe it doesn't exist.

Female respondent: Which is strange, because they want to help people. They want to help the earth, yet they don't want to take care of the earth—

Female respondent: We have dominion over the earth.

Female respondent: Or believe that even if man could be capable of global warming. It doesn't matter if we're responsible or not.

(0:56:40.3) IT'S GOD'S WILL THAT WE HAVE ALL THESE THINGS?

Female respondent: Yes. That's the thing, the dichotomy. Take care of the people who are poor, but not really because we still want the money in the church. Take care of the earth, but not really, because we don't believe in global warming. It will be fine.

Female respondent: It's just extremely, extremely hypocritical.

Female respondent: Absolutely. That's a great way to put it. Hypocritical. Say one thing, do the other.

Female respondent: Yes. Or only a little.

Female respondent: Yes.

(0:57:15.6) NOT PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH?

Female respondent: Yes. *(Laughs.)*

Female respondent: Oh, can I add something else, too, that really gets me? With this tornado and stuff, and the Boston bombings. I hate it when people sit there and . . . You'll have some people in the church saying that it was deserved because of our sins. And then you'll hear other just normal people go, "Thank God. God spared my family." I think that's so offensive. You're saying, "God didn't care about that family. God cared about my family, though." How can you say that God would look at that little boy and go, "Eh, not sparing you."

Female respondent: If you're Calvinist, I have a really good friend who's Calvinist, and that's one thing she says. She prays for me because I'm not Calvinist. She says, "Well, you're not going to heaven because you weren't chosen." Or, "That child is not going to heaven because they weren't chosen. Only those of us who are Calvinists are God's chosen people."

Female respondent: Well, the Catholics say . . .

Female respondent: If we're not Calvinist, we're all going.

Female respondent: Yes. The Catholics think that we're the only ones going.

Female respondent: I'm sorry, I thought the Jews were God's only people. *(Laughter.)* Did I miss something?

Female respondent: Yes. Exactly. Exactly.

(0:58:18.8) WHY ISN'T THE ELEMENT OF POLITICS IN CHRISTIANITY ACCEPTABLE TO YOU?

Female respondent: It's supposed to be church and state, separate. It's supposed to be the ideals of what's better for all people, not just them. They always have to put their two cents in. "My Christian blah says this . . . My religion says this, so I'm not going to vote yes on marijuana." It's just . . .

(0:59:06.0) ARE THERE NON-CHRISTIAN GROUPS THAT DO THAT KIND OF THING ALSO?

Female respondent: Oh, yes! All the time. It's annoying. Why do you have to bring . . . It's the betterment of all people. That's why we are a democratic society. It's for the betterment of all people. We have specific people in Congress, Senate, all that stuff, with specific religions because they just have their specific religions, but we choose these people. Not all of us choose them to be the people who decide what's better for our country. Then you have the money of the churches getting involved in helping pay for these campaigns.

(0:59:53.4) YOU'RE SAYING THAT CHURCHES HAVE POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE MONEY THAT GOES TO THE CAMPAIGNS?

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)* Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)*

(0:59:59.7) DOESN'T GLAD HAVE POLITICAL ACTION MONEY THAT GOES TO CAMPAIGNS?

Female respondent: I don't agree with that, either.

Female respondent: Every group has it, autistic people.

Female respondent: It shouldn't be like that at all.

Female respondent: There should be no lobbying involved.

Female respondent: Yes, exactly. That's how religion gets put into it.

Female respondent: Whoever has the most money wins.

Female respondent: But it's not just limited to that. The other thing it does . . . It's a two-edged sword, because it also gives a group of people, who maybe don't want to know and learn about the issues . . .

They will have their preacher preach to them on Sunday and go, “This is what you think.” Or, they’ll read their Bible and they’ll go, “Well, the Bible says that gay people are bad, so I’m not going to vote for equal marriage.” They’ll just stop right there at that book instead of going out and meeting these people and talking to them and learning about them. I have an aunt who has never met a gay couple before in her life beside what she’s made up in her head and she’s seen on TV. She’s finally met my parent’s neighbors. She thinks they’re lovely. She thinks it’s a real shame that they’re still going to hell, but this is the first time that she’s actually even interacted with them and it’s been positive. If she had allowed herself to have that fifty years ago, she might be a different woman, but the church told her what she needed to believe and she just took that and ran. They stop people from thinking.

Female respondent: I might be unpopular in saying this, but I think that . . .

Female respondent: No, we’d love you, too.

Female respondent: Well, I’m not trying to be sarcastic here, but honestly, if the churches in general paid taxes, I would feel more comfortable with their roles in politics. To me, it’s this really unfair disadvantage, that they do have pull in politics and they’re doing charity work, supposedly. But from being a social worker and working in different agencies that some have had affiliations with churches, and some have not, they pick and choose who they want to come through their doors and who they want to serve. To me, at least if they paid taxes there would be at least some equal playing field. I really do think that paying taxes is something that in my mind, growing up Catholic, is something that makes sense. It’s supposed to be making everyone equal, and making everything fair and just. I think that would make it fair and just.

Female respondent: And they all want you to pay taxes to them; they just call it tithing.

Female respondent: Exactly. (*Laughter.*)

(1:02:36.0) WHAT DO YOU THINK? PICK ONE OF THESE AND TELL ME “THE REASON I’M UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THIS AS AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IS BECAUSE . . .”

Stephanie: The exclusiveness. I’m not baptized or anything, but my mother was and her father was Greek Orthodox. Because of him, when I was younger I just wanted to follow all my friends. And I was like, “I want to go to CCD now.” My mom was like, “Well, okay. I’ll try to sign you up.” Then, when she tried to sign me up, they said, “No” because her father was Greek Orthodox. And I said, “I’m not baptized or anything like that. I never learned about it.” They said, “No. You can’t.” She had to fight with them.

(1:03:29.2) WHICH CHURCH WAS THAT?

Stephanie: I don’t know. I just wanted to go to CCD, but they wouldn’t let me go. They didn’t want to let me go. I was like, “But I never learned about the Greek Orthodox religion,” so I don’t know why they wouldn’t let me go. I didn’t understand. I was too young.

(1:03:47.6) IT DIDN'T LET YOU LEARN WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE LEARNED IN CCD, DID IT?

Stephanie: I didn't know what was going on. She just said, "Well, they won't let you go." I asked "Why?" and she said, "Because our family is a Greek Orthodox family." I said, "Okay." I don't know.

(1:04:07.8) HOW ABOUT YOU?

Heather: I don't really like the whole anti-science, pro-life. To each his own I feel like, but for certain things, I feel like . . . I don't necessarily believe in abortion, but if you have a sick baby or something like that, or an unhealthy baby, then I think that . . . Or, if you were raped or something like that, then I feel like you should have the right. I feel like that that should be a choice. Pro-life. But I don't even think that they believe in that. I think they believe that if you undergo tests and something is wrong with the baby, like Down syndrome or something, that you should still have the baby and love the baby because it's a child of God. Life's hard enough. I don't think you necessarily have to bring in a sick child to the world if you choose not to. I feel like that's the woman's right.

(1:05:13.9) IS THIS SOMETHING THAT SEEMS TO BE UNIQUE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, OR IS THIS HAPPENING IN OTHER RELIGIONS?

Heather: I don't know about other religions, but I think in Christianity, Catholicism, and probably Buddhism wouldn't agree with it. (*Laughter.*)

Female respondent: I heard one guy say, and he was Christian, and he said, "Oh, if a woman is raped, her body would know and reject the child."

Female respondent: That was that senator or representative.

Female respondent: That just bothers me that they have these . . . Even if the child, even if a woman would die giving birth to that child, they still want that child to be born.

Female respondent: But they don't want to take care of it after it's born.

Female respondent: Right. No way.

Female respondent: No welfare. No entitlements.

Female respondent: Even if the woman would die giving birth to that child, they still think, "Well, fine, you're going to go to heaven, though. You're giving birth to that child. Die, then."

(1:06:11.5) GIVE ME A SHORT EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIANITY BEING HYPOCRITICAL. SOMETHING THAT REALLY TURNS YOU OFF.

Yunjin: They say "Love your neighbor," but if your neighbor is homosexual or something that is not like you, then you should not love them. It's a very obvious irony. Love your neighbor, but if they are different, you should not love them.

(1:06:54.4) HOW DO THEY DETERMINE WHAT DIFFERENCES TO TAKE ON?

Yunjin: That's one of the things that I wanted to talk about. They read the Bible literally. They don't understand the meaning behind, or they don't understand the sentences in the context of the entire story, or the theory behind it. They form restrictions or rules, or what is not like you, not like us, that kind of thing. They all build around the misconception that is coming from reading the Bible literally. In a literal fashion. What bothers me most is that not only do they misread the Bible, but they actually reinforce the idea by teaching the others, or asking the church members to follow or understand in exactly the same way as they read. Not only that, but going to the political side, they use that kind of technique to form the political agenda, such as the pro-life. What else is there? Gay marriage, or things like that. If they approached the Bible in a more religious fashion, or even in an academic fashion where they try to understand the meaning behind, they try to understand more deeply and not just reading the surface. I think it would be much better teaching, but I don't see that happening in the church.

(1:08:44.7) THOUGHTS?

Female respondent: Yes. There are sometimes when they do read it literally and then completely disregard it, which has that hypocrisy. Like, "Thou shalt not eat shellfish, ever, or else you're going to die." There are plenty of Christians who eat . . . Yes, it's in Leviticus. There are plenty of Christians who eat lobster in Boston. It's just a whole bunch of things like that, especially within that part.

Female respondent: They had a dispensation. In the 1900s they sat down and they said, "Oh, these bits of Leviticus. You can't eat shellfish, you can't have cloth of a woven material." There's a few others, really ridiculous ones. A group of men sat around a table and said, "You know what, these are silly. We're going to write these out of here. But this one about the gay men? No, we're leaving that one. That one he meant. These other ones, God didn't mean. He meant that one." A bunch of men sat around and just arbitrarily decided which was okay and which wasn't, gave all the Catholics a pardon for shellfish, and still continued to persecute gay people. That infuriates me.

Female respondent: I'm going to need a nice margarita after this. (*Laughter.*)

Female respondent: I'm going to come with you.

Christine: I think, just really quickly, I think from working in soup kitchens and homeless shelters, there is a part in the Bible that says, "Teach a man to fish and he'll be fed for life" or, "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, and teach a man to fish and he'll be fed for forever." A lot of those soup kitchens that I've worked in that were run through Catholic churches had no interest in helping people get out of the soup kitchen mentality, get out of the homeless shelter mentality. They just gave them the fish and didn't teach them anything. That, to me, is hypocritical.

(1:10:33.7) WHAT DID THEY DO WITH THEM?

Christine: They just shuffled them between the homeless shelter that they had set up and the soup kitchen. There was no support for employment counseling. There was no support with getting back into

school. It was really frustrating. They wanted the other agencies to do it, but in areas where that didn't exist.

(1:10:59.0) YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE YOU WORK WITH THE YOUTH.

Christine: Yes. I've worked with a lot of different populations as a social worker, and I think that . . .

Female respondent: In prisons.

Christine: Yes. I had mentioned prisons. It's a very different perspective.

(1:11:13.7) I WANT TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE CORE BELIEFS OF CHRISTIANITY. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT CONVERSION, WHAT IMAGES DOES THAT BRING UP FOR YOU?

Stephanie: Someone is turning into a monster.

Female respondent: I see the guy in the corner handing out the pamphlets of me going to hell, and the microphone.

Christine: I think of AA a lot. Again, that's probably because of the social worker side. Just because I've seen a lot of people go through recovery, and how they change when they start going to NA or AA, Alcoholics Anonymous.

Female respondent: I go to Codependency Anonymous, and I do the twelve steps. It's a higher power that's stated in the twelve steps, so it's not specifically Christianity, Catholicism, or anything like that. It's a god that we understood. It's anybody's God.

Female respondent: That's a change, though, isn't it? Wasn't it traditionally more of a Christian thing in AA? My husband has gone through AA.

Female respondent: When Bill, Will, Will something, I can't remember his last name. When he started the twelve steps, he turned to Jesus, but then it never said "Jesus." It always said "higher power."

(1:13:36.5) WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ON THIS CONCEPT OF CONVERSION, AS IN BEING "BORN AGAIN"?

Female respondent: I think it's converting to the religion, and once you accept Jesus then you are a "born-again" Christian.

(1:13:56.6) BUT YOU ALSO THINK IT MEANS CONVERTING FROM ONE RELIGION TO THE OTHER?

Female respondent: Maybe, or accepting the religion. Maybe accepting it. Going from not believing in it to believing in it.

(1:14:06.8) SOMEBODY SAID "A MONSTER." TELL ME ABOUT THAT.

Female respondent: I don't know. This is a culmination from a lot of media, of a video game that I recently played, where this character goes in. And there is this Christian prophet who is standing there saying, "The only way into this city is to be cleansed and 'born-again.'" So he takes the character, he almost drowns the guy in water, and then picks him up. And then he becomes a monster. I think of that, also, in the media as a whole bunch of people in white robes heading toward the water to dunk peoples' heads under. It's a very creepy image.

(1:14:49.5) REBECCA, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN PRESENTED WITH THIS CONVERSION BELIEF?

Rebecca: I frankly don't know a lot about it. I'm seeing this really for the first time. I'm trying to put it together, with my, maybe, past stereotypes. I don't know. I think the word "born-again" is thrown out a lot in liberal Massachusetts as negative. But, quite frankly, I really don't know exactly what it means. I'm still putting it together.

(1:15:33.0) WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT "BORN-AGAIN" BEFORE I ACTUALLY PROVIDED A DEFINITION?

Rebecca: Yes. I don't know. I guess I thought of it as someone super Christian. Born again. Again, I don't know. Someone just super Christian, super. That's all. Really into it. Am I wrong? I don't know.

(1:15:52.4) LET'S DEFINE THE "SUPER CHRISTIAN." WHAT DOES THE SUPER CHRISTIAN SAY AND DO?

Rebecca: Someone who really tries to preach it and push it on others. All about it. It's their whole life. It's not just their Sunday ritual. It's their whole life. You can't leave this out. That's all.

Female respondent: For me, the people that I've . . . I've actually had an adult baptism for myself at one time when I felt like I needed that. And that was against everything that I had been raised. As Lutheran you only get baptized as a baby. You don't do it again. My husband was Protestant and actually had been "born-again" and done the whole dunking and everything. Before that and after that, to me, that is just again, part of the rote and the course of being a good Christian. It's somebody, to me, who has not questioned their faith, but who has just been handed their faith. So, for somebody who is being converted, it is for me somebody who is not educated. It's somebody who has just been, like you said, the Bible has been given to them literally. They've been told this is what they should do. The people who I have encountered, they don't have a deep understanding of . . . Most of the people that I've encountered don't have any education. They've gone to high school. They haven't done any college, so conversion for me is very negative. It means uneducated. It means somebody who is not a deep thinker and just goes with the . . . Just a sheep.

(1:17:38.1) ACTION: THE EXPRESSION OF DEMONSTRATION OF FAITH THROUGH WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS. AGAIN, THIS IS ONE OF THE FOUR BELIEFS FOR EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS.

Female respondent: Again, the guy with the microphone handing out the pamphlets. Fire rains upon you.

Female respondent: I think this one makes me, probably, the angriest because of the term “social justice.” I feel like most Christians, especially the super Christians, I don’t think they have any idea of systems of oppression, marginalization, and subordination that are put upon people as they navigate through the world. That changes who you are, your outlook, your perceptions about pretty much everything. And that their view of social justice is basically give this person soup, give this person bread, give this person a bed. Then it will be all better and they can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. But life doesn’t work that way.

(1:18:31.3) WHAT SHOULD BE “SOCIAL JUSTICE”? WHAT WOULD YOU HOPE TO SEE?

Female respondent: I would love to see social justice, but I don’t want it to be the hypocritical social justice, that I am 99 percent sure will happen.

(1:18:51.2) WHAT WOULD BE THE SOCIAL JUSTICE THAT’S NOT HYPOCRITICAL? HOW WOULD WE KNOW IT’S FOR REAL AND NOT FOR SHOW?

Female respondent: I think if there could be a genuine acknowledgement that the white men that are probably leading this movement are in a position of incredible privilege. They need to be able to acknowledge that, and see that within themselves, how they got to where they are has a lot more to do with their inner strength. It has a lot to do with who pulled the strings for them to be where they are. And why certain other people might not have had those same strings pulled for them along their lives that forced them into a funnel that lands in a completely different place. I feel like they don’t consider, systematically, what’s going on in the world. They just see my success is this, and you should have the same success, but you don’t because of failings within yourself, typically. If they could show acknowledgment, that that’s not the way it works, I would feel much better about the use of that term.

(1:19:45.8) ABOUT THEM FEEDING SOMEBODY AND PUTTING A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS?

Female respondent: Right.

(1:19:53.0) SOMEBODY ELSE ON “ACTION”?

Yunjin: I don’t know. Correct me if I’m wrong. I think the Evangelical Church was the first church recognized by the archbishop? They have very similar names of hierarchies as a Catholic Church. I think it was the first church to accept a homosexual preacher. They gave out the official archbishop title to a person who is married to his partner. I think he was the one who gave a blessing to the first inauguration of President Obama. That’s what I think. I was just trying to understand why Evangelical Christianity tried to come up with social justice. I think this might be one of their movements inside. Trying to vocalize a little more about their openness. They care about social issues that not all the other churches, maybe, think of. Maybe, I think, that’s the reason why they decided to be more proactive about social justice. In that sense, if they keep moving forward to that direction, I think I would be okay reading their “action” category.

Female respondent: I guess I don't really like the term "social justice" either. It sits badly with me. I had to make a real effort to say, I don't really know what the Evangelical social justice action plan is. I'm putting the Christian one that we've already rallied against into their action plan. I think it is similar. It still is going to be pro-life. I can't see it being more inclusive than the other things. I see it as a very white. Evangelicals seem very white, and so I see racial issues. But I honestly don't know what their platform is.

Alexis: One more thing. The primary tenets of social justice is to meet someone where they're at. If you're going to have a conversation, you meet them where they are, and then you roll with the resistance that they give you in talking. But you're supposed to take cues from them to gauge if they are ready to change their views and mindsets on things. You pretty much erase that by saying, "And telling others about Jesus." (*Laughter.*) You don't give the person a chance to voice their ideas about what social justice is. It's just like, "Here's your soup," and then, "Here's your Jesus." (*Laughter.*) It just erases itself.

Female respondent: Intrusive.

Alexis: Yes.

Female respondent: Try out Jesus. (*Laughter.*)

Female respondent: Social justice is such a bigger concept the way I think of it than what I . . . I'm the same as Chris. I don't really know what their definition of social justice is, but I can't imagine it being the same definition as I have. Again, because of what Alexis was saying. With the "and telling others about Jesus," that doesn't really fit with my personal view on social justice. It doesn't even make sense, even on a smaller level because to me, social justice is a huge movement. Not with just a few people.

(1:23:34.6) THE CROSS? THERE IS A STRONG EMPHASIS ON THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE REDEMPTION OF HUMANITY.

Female respondent: "Redemption." I don't like that word. It's the "you're going to hell" word. That "if you don't turn to Jesus, you will go to hell" word. That's what I instantly hear.

Female respondent: It's like something's wrong. When I grew up, it was all about sin. That we were all sinful, and that you couldn't wash that away even with baptism. You still were going to be a sinner and you were still . . . Unless you followed the church all the time, and you read the Bible all the time and that was a part of your life every day. That word of "redemption" is very negative, because it gives the connotation that we are always dirty and bad, and awful people.

Female respondent: And we were born that way.

Female respondent: They are born that way.

Female respondent: So even if the baby was born, the moment after it came into this earth it never committed a single bad thing, if it's not baptized, I was taught under Catholicism that it's going to purgatory. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Female respondent: That's one of the people we have to pray for. Or, if you have somebody who just happened to be living on the other side of the world and didn't know anything about Jesus and never was told anything about Jesus and lived a beautiful life, it didn't matter. You were still going to at least purgatory, if not hell.

(1:25:02.5) THE CROSS REPRESENTS THIS?

Female respondent: Not the cross.

Female respondent: When you're doing the story of this. This isn't . . . I see her necklace and I think "growl." This is focusing on the story of the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us.

(1:25:19.0) IS IT THE ELEMENT OF REDEMPTION AND WHO THAT SINGLES OUT THAT REALLY BOTHERS YOU?

Female respondent: That, and I didn't ask him to die for my sins. God created us. He didn't create us perfect. Then he got mad at us and decided to take his son and let him die for . . . It's just not a good story. I don't buy his story.

Female respondent: Most importantly is if somebody on the other side of the world never had the option to hear about Jesus, they're still going to hell. That's the part I can't hang with. I can't even wear a cross. I dug out a cross yesterday out of my jewelry box. It was one that my parents gave me for confirmation, and I put it back. I haven't worn it for twenty years because it literally, physically hurts to wear it. It makes me think about everything that is negative embodied in the cross. That we are evil. We are sinful. And that without that, you can't ever be right.

(1:26:14.5) WHAT ABOUT THE HIGH REGARD FOR, AND OBEDIENCE TO, THE BIBLE AS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY?

Female respondent: An ultimate authority. Ultimate?

Female respondent: The Bible. The book of stories is the ultimate authority.

Female respondent: If you actually behaved in the way that the Bible describes about slavery, beating your wife, killing your children, you'd go to jail a lot. *(Laughter.)*

Female respondent: Absolutely. And the fact that it's written by men, that it was not the Word of God. It can't be the ultimate authority.

Female respondent: And changed over and over again.

Female respondent: And changed over and over. It's been . . .

Female respondent: Just for a second, I wanted to say something about the cross. I wear this cross, but for me, it has a completely different meaning. It's almost where I was. It reminds me every day of the fact that there are people out there that were raised Catholic and that have this strong belief of this religion, this institution. But they forgot how much they've crossed the cultures and the various . . . It just reminds me daily of everybody is different, and we're all equal, and we're all children of God, and that we all make mistakes. Mistakes have already been made with this cross. When I see that, and I think of redemption, it just p***** me off.

(1:27:50.5) HAVING DISCUSSED CORE BELIEFS, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS?

Female respondent: Since reading this?

(1:28:47.6) BASED ON WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED OVER YOUR LIFETIME, WEIGHED AGAINST WHAT THEY SAY.

Female respondent: What I feel about the whole thing? I don't know. I feel like they do all these things, like the conversion, and then they say, "Oh, well, now I'm going to follow this religion and do everything. I'm going to follow the Bible." It's their rule book that they're going by, and if they don't, then they're not accepted into heaven.

(1:29:51.6) SO HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THEM KNOWING THAT'S WHAT THEY DO?

Female respondent: I think it's fake because they're just like, "Okay, now I'm 'born-again' so I'm going to do everything the Bible tells me. I know I'm going to be okay to go to heaven regardless of what I did."

(1:30:07.5) WHAT'S THE REASON THAT'S PROBABLY NOT THE GREATEST THING TO DO?

Female respondent: I'm talking about if they wanted to . . . Other people, too, if they came from a different religion and went there. They think that just because they've done all this, they are going to be saved now.

(1:30:30.3) WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT THAT?

Female respondent: I think they're buying into a lie, almost. It's not that it's bad, per se. I just think it's fake.

(1:30:50.5) IS IT BAD TO BUY INTO A LIE?

Female respondent: I don't know. I think so.

(1:31:13.0) HOW ABOUT YOU, REBECCA?

Rebecca: This isn't the same with what I would conceive as Evangelical Christians.

(1:31:22.1) WHAT DO YOU CONCEIVE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AS?

Female respondent: These four tenets. Their platform.

(1:31:29.3) IT AGREES WITH IT, BUT WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THEM? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THEM?

Rebecca: I guess, 180 degree difference with me and my beliefs. That's okay. It's unfortunate I think they try to push a lot on other people, but it is what it is. Everyone has to believe in their own thing. If it makes them happy in this life to be all about the afterlife, then to each their own. I disagree with it. I think it's sad that they're consuming their whole entire life, all about trying to do this unknown afterlife. Just enjoy the life you have now. So, I feel bad for them?

(1:32:19.5) IF THEY'RE PURSUING THE AFTERLIFE, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN THEY'RE NOT DOING THAT THEY SHOULD BE DOING?

Rebecca: Enjoying the life that we have now and the people around us, and the nature and things around us that we have. We can see, we can touch, we can smell, the now. They're removing themselves, their entire lives from the now, just obsessing about an unknown. It is or isn't. Just enjoy the now. I feel like they're missing out.

(1:32:59.8) WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT ENJOYING THE NOW?

Rebecca: I feel bad for them because we have the now. We have each other. We have the sense. We have the smell. I think you're gambling. You're gambling if you're putting it all onto something that is unknown.

Heather: The core beliefs. The conversion, and you mentioned Bible, cross. It's all very systematic, religious. I feel like what Rebecca said, about trying to do all these things for your afterlife to go to heaven not hell. I think you should be in the here and now too, and be a good person and good things will happen. As good a person as you can. I think everyone makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect.

(1:34:21.1) IF YOU LIVE IN THE "NOW" AND FOCUS ON YOUR WORLD AND BEING A GOOD PERSON, WHAT KIND OF GOOD THINGS DO YOU HOPE WILL HAPPEN?

Heather: I think life is what you make of it. You do bad things, you're going to end up in bad places. You steal, you lie, you cheat, things are going to happen. There are consequences to those things. You live a good life, you treat people right, and basically do the right thing. Then I think that, yes, you're going to a good place.

(1:35:04.3) WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU TREAT PEOPLE RIGHT AND DO THE RIGHT THING?

Heather: Treat those as you want to be treated and good things are going to happen. Stuff like that.

Female respondent: It just came to me real quick that Evangelical Christians, what I think of, are people who have done horrible, horrible things and are trying to save face. I see pedophiles, rapists, murderers turning to this because it's open to them so that they can save face. I don't think it really has anything to do with if they're going to make it to heaven or not. I think it's a last resort type of thing, if it is to make it to heaven. It's like, "Oh well, I'm going to die soon, so I might as well try to get to heaven now." I see it as something fake. I see it as something that is like a last resort. The end is coming near, I'm going to die. I've got to wrap it up quick, become an EC or whatever so I can go to heaven. It's all based on where you're going to go when you die. I just see more people who've done a lot of awful things becoming these "born-again."

Female respondent: There might have been a recent story which might help illustrate what your point is. It was that one Republican senator, representative that had a full-on affair with a girl down in South America. And then there was the Democratic one that basically just put a picture of himself in his underwear on Chatroulette or whatever it was. The Republican had the full-blown affair, has been forgiven, and reelected because the Christians love a good redemption story. They love somebody to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, and now I've found God and I'm really sorry, but God's going to help me." The Democratic party people, who aren't that Evangelical, were like, "That's not a good excuse. What were you doing?" You were supposed to be an adult.

Female respondent: Anthony Weiner? Is that who you're talking about?

Female respondent: Yes, Weiner.

Female respondent: Yes, so there's a difference. They love that redemption story. You can be a bad person and then throw yourself at the feet of Jesus, and then suddenly you're accepted again.

Female respondent: You're the coolest guy in the world.

Female respondent: Yes. The other thing about the EC's that we haven't mentioned is, I always feel like their preachers are the dodgiest people on the face of the earth. They always seem to be the people who . . . They're making all this money through their church, but then when they do any sort of exposé on it, the money is staying with them and not going anywhere else. They're asking for millions of dollars from their followers, but they're just normal people who happen to rent out a large hall and get people to send more and more money in until they have millions.

(1:38:24.0) ARE THERE PARTICULAR PREACHERS, CHURCHES, OR MEDIA STATIONS THAT SEEM TO BE BIG ON THAT?

Female respondent: I wouldn't be able to tell you what they were, but I think . . .

Female respondent: Yes, I've seen stuff like that.

Female respondent: The megachurches?

Female respondent: Yes, the megachurches. That's what they are. I put them with Evangelical.

Female respondent: Yes.

Female respondent: I put them in the same basket.

Female respondent: I've seen them on TV. They'll talk (*makes loud, excited sound*) like that (*laughs*). "Come on to Jesus!" Then the put the hand on the head. "You're born-again now!" There's all this money passed, and then behind the guy you can see him like, "My wallet is getting really big back here!" Like Scrooge McDuck swimming in it later on in the day.

(1:39:09.2) IS THAT FROM MOVIES?

Female respondent: Scrooge McDuck? Donald Duck?

Female respondent: You can Google him later.

(1:39:18.4) HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE OR DESCRIBE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS?

Connie: I taught at Free Methodist Church, which is an EC church in Illinois, for six years. There, most of the students who were coming to college had been homeschooled in these kind of protected societies, their communities, where all of these were a part of that. It did a lot of damage to their self-esteem. There was a lot of kids who ended up, because they weren't educated in birth control, ended up having babies while they were in college, or having sexual . . . There was rape on campus and all kinds of things. Also, people getting married their freshman or sophomore year of college in order to be able to be sexually active. For me, again, it goes back to that not being educated. Or being a society that is so protective that they're not allowing their children to interact socially with other people or other ideas, because that might contaminate or change their core beliefs, or cause them to think differently. It was difficult as a teacher to have all these kids come at you and you be . . . I was very open-minded and willing to talk to them about that. It was a very difficult situation to be there six years and have students asking, "What is birth control? I want to have sex with my partner. I love this person, but I'm twenty years old and I've been told that's not all right." Or, "I've always been homeschooled and we're not . . ." And especially on campus, the entire town was dry. No alcohol in the town because of the campus. There was no dancing on campus. All of these things were part of this protective society.

(1:41:36.4) OF EVANGELICAL HOMESCHOOLED YOUTH?

Connie: Homeschooled youth, where they just weren't ready to be fruitful members of society. They didn't know how to do anything. They'd never had jobs. They'd always just been cared for by their parents. They had never had their own money. They had never interacted with anyone who was gay. Never interacted with somebody who was a different faith. For me, it was just, again, about being uneducated. I saw a lot of damage happen to the kids. They just weren't prepared for working in the real world. They didn't know how to operate. They were literally deer in the headlights.

(1:42:30.4) SOMEBODY ELSE. WHO HASN'T SPOKEN?

Female respondent: I am all about everyone having their own choices, and I think that's something that . . . I try not to be judgmental. I think that it's totally appropriate that people have faith in Jesus Christ, and this EC religion. The only issue that I have with it is the preaching to everyone else and the missionary standpoint. That we have to recruit and get people to come into our team, or however they might be thinking about it. That is where I have issues with it. But I believe that people should make their own decisions. It just gets really messy when people are persuaded and coerced, especially if they are not educated, if they don't really have any other . . . If they're in a rural area, in the middle of nowhere, this might be their only option. It might be the only thing that they've been taught.

(1:43:46.1) LIKE CONNIE WAS TALKING ABOUT?

Female respondent: Yes. Definitely. There's nothing . . .

Connie: Yes. Like I grew up in Illinois. It was southern Illinois.

Female respondent: Yes, and I grew up in Chicago and I've traveled around . . .

Connie: Not even close. It's more Kentucky than it is . . .

Female respondent: Yes. I traveled all over Illinois, so I totally know . . .

Connie: Greenville, Illinois.

Female respondent: Yes. I've been there.

Connie: Right off I-70.

Female respondent: It's definitely . . . I've seen a lot of communities like that.

(1:44:10.5) SO YOUR OPINION OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IS THAT IT DOES NOT OFFER CHOICE?

Female respondent: I don't know. I don't really know enough to say that. I just think choice is important in everyone's life, and it feels like there isn't a lot of choice.

Yunjin: I've never been a part of church or any sort of organized religion before. My personal feeling is that Christianity or Catholicism has been with modern society ever since human beings were modernized, I guess for two thousand years. It's a tradition. It has been sort of a double-edged sword tradition. But it's sad that all of these good parts that could have been a really great role in a society; being a charitable organization, being the leader of youth, and educators, and inspirers, and a spiritual source and whatever . . . It could have been like that, but it's just very sad to see that it's not the path that they are taking, and it is totally opposite. Their tradition . . . the good tradition has been overshadowed by all the sad things that are happening, all this political debate, all this noise that they are making. I don't know if Evangelical Christianity is trying to change their image, trying to present themselves in a different way. I don't know. I think it is a little bit too late to change what is happening.

It just is sad. Most of the religions, it's just kind of taking the toll. Not doing what it is supposed to be. It is just very sad.

Female respondent: I guess the reason I didn't speak is just that I feel like I might be too biased (*laughs*) to offer something . . . Well, no one is ever objective, but I felt a little bit too biased. I guess I'll go ahead anyway. This sounds a lot like the Family Radio that I was raised with, in that telling other people about Jesus was the main thing. I still remember when I was a kid being handed packets this big that said, "The end is near. Do you know who you are?" or something like that, and my dad telling me to crawl over and put them in people's windshields and stuff. This just conjures up that memory for me, thinking about redemption and the ultimate authority, and telling others about Jesus. It just sounds like whackjob Christianity, and that just makes me angry, I guess. I'd say that EC's have no credibility in my world. But at the same time, they're free to do what they are going to do. I'm not trying to convert them to atheism. I'm going to let you do your thing, I just wish for the same respect for me to let me do my thing without trying to change my views. Just as much as you believe in your God, I believe in my no God. Let's meet each other there and just part ways. That type of thing.

(1:47:46.5) WHACK JOB RELIGION?

Female respondent: Maybe.

Female respondent: With creepy old people.

(1:47:52.8) WITH CREEPY OLD WHITE MEN. DID YOU WANT TO SAY SOMETHING?

Female respondent: Yes. The other thing that I'd like to point out. When I hear Evangelical Christianity, I see this as a particularly American problem. They might go to South America or other places, but I feel like it originates here. I did live in England for ten years. They're a secular nation, but they actually behave much more Christian than we do. They actually give Christian holidays and churches more respect and time than we do in a lot of ways, and they don't ever, ever talk about it. You don't talk about religion, you don't get into arguments about religion. They're just so much more polite about it. This is rude America to me.

(1:48:56.9) WE'RE AT THE END OF OUR TIME. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SHARE OR YOU WERE HOPING I WOULD ASK?

Female respondent: You could maybe add over there, the other issue is the Ten Commandments. "Do not kill," yet the NRA is one of the largest funded Christian organizations. The NRA is not a Christian organization but is funded by Christians in packs. That would go on my list.

Female respondent: I think if you actually tallied up all of the people that God has supposedly killed—

(1:49:32.9) IN ONE OR TWO WORDS, WHAT DID YOU CALL THAT?

Female respondent: In the Bible, it's several hundred thousand, and the devil killed ten. (*Laughter.*)

Female respondent: Ten Commandments. “Do not kill,” versus the NRA.

(1:49:56.8) OTHER THOUGHTS?

Female respondent: There’s . . . it’s completely anecdotal, but after I was Catholic, I actually spent a long time being Wiccan, and now I consider myself to be a non-practicing pagan. I have a group of friends who are still very, very pagan, and they have almost become Evangelical types.

Female respondent: Interesting.

Female respondent: It’s almost like it’s a certain type of personality. When they talk, it’s all, “Goddess this and thank Goddess that, and praise . . .” It’s just, “Oh. So mote it be.” It’s very in your face Wiccanism, which I find just equally as offensive. Because I just don’t think . . .

Female respondent: I don’t think it benefits it.

Female respondent: Even though I definitely agree with them in a lot of ways more than I do Christianity, I don’t like it in my face.

(1:50:50.0) DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING? DID YOU FIND THIS OKAY TO PARTICIPATE IN?

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

Female respondent: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*)

(1:50:59.8) I LEARNED A LOT. (LAUGHTER.)

Female respondent: Good for you.

Female respondent: (1:51:00.9-1:51:06.5 *Inaudible/crosstalk.*)

Female respondent: You should have done this on a Friday night so we could all go to the pub afterwards. (*Laughter.*)

(1:51:14.6) THANK YOU . . .