“Religion & the Shaping of American Culture”

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MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Professor Grant Wacker is a historian and he is writing a new book, *Billy Graham and the Shaping of Modern America*. Dr. Wacker has been a professor of American Church History for many years at Duke University, Divinity School. Before that he taught at University of North Carolina, Department of Religion. His Ph.D. in American Religious History is from Harvard University. The best book on American Pentecostalism has been written by Grant Wacker called *Heaven Below*, also published by Harvard. Thank you, Dr. Wacker, for joining us.

DR. WACKER: I’m trying to think not about Graham himself. We have some wonderful biographies of Graham already out there, but I would like to stand back and ask about why he matters and what his career tells us about American life.

I can just offer a few statistics and give us some sense of his magnitude both on the religious landscape and on the cultural landscape. He has talked face to face to more than 200 million people and that probably is more than anyone in history with the possible exception of John Paul II. It’s hard to know with John Paul II, but certainly Graham has talked to more than anyone except him face to face. In 84 countries, on six continents, and electronically he has spoken to hundreds of millions more, some observers say even to billions more. These things are very hard to document but clearly one of the most visible faces of the last sixty years.

He’s established numerous attendance records and I’ll offer only one example. In 1972 he spoke to an outdoor meeting in Seoul, Korea, and we have pretty clear accounts of
how many were there because of photographs taken from helicopters and they can count the individuals. And it was something like 1,240,000. So 1.2 million people at one time and at that time, again, probably ranked as the largest gathering of humans at one time in one place in history. Again, it’s possible that John Paul II spoke to more later on, but at that time likely a world record.

Twenty-eight books translated into 50 languages. On the Gallup poll most admired man 55 times. Far more than any other person, the next closest to it is Ronald Reagan and I believe it was 32 times and John Paul II 27 times. He even ranked on a best-dressed list in 1970.

One of the ways I like to think about Graham is in terms of, what I may call, cultural snapshots. I think that gives us a better sense of his importance.

Harold Bloom, by no means a fellow evangelical, yet wrote about Graham in an article in Time about the 100 most prominent Americans and the article said, “in America you do not run for public office by deprecating Billy Graham.” That seemed wise enough. Or Woody Allen in the movie Sleeper has a scene in here in which he’s describing Graham to someone else and he said, “he knew God personally…they used to go out on double dates together.” Now, that is significant because Woody Allen, once again, clearly not in the evangelical camp with Graham yet knew his audience. He knew that the people seeing that movie would understand who he was talking about.

I read hundreds of the children’s letters that came in and they tell us a lot. Two I think are symptomatic. Usually by children’s letters we’re talking about first, second-graders. They usually start by saying, “Dear Billy.” They call him Billy and then signs off by saying, “Tell Jesus hi for me.” And it gives you, again, a sense of popular perception.

But what I like even more than children’s letters are the letters that were mailed and you can see a lot of them in the Graham archives or in the Graham Museum in Charlotte. Many of them are illegible except that you can just make out “Billy Graham” and they get there. They were sent mostly to the Minneapolis office and somehow they got there even when there was no other address except “Billy Graham.”
We could do this for a long time but you get the idea. He received voluminous criticism. Some of it was merited, some of it was vitriolic. But I think the criticism is important, too, simply as a mark of status. People don’t criticize someone publicly or take the time unless they think the person really is important and really needs the criticism.

After the very unfortunate event of Graham’s odious remarks about Jews in 1972 with Richard Nixon and became revealed in 2002, Christopher Hitchens described him as a “cheap liar” and an “avid bigot.”

George Will, who I would regard as in general conservative, was appalled when Graham attended a peace conference in the Soviet Union in 1982. He suggested that Graham’s unwarrantedly conciliatory comments in Moscow made him “America’s most embarrassing export.”

When Graham held his crusade in New York in 1957, landmark crusade, Reinhold Niebuhr did have some complimentary things to say, but he also said, “a miracle of regeneration is promised at a painless price by an obviously sincere evangelist. It is a bargain.”

Graham received even more criticism from the far right. Bob Jones of Bob Jones University said that Billy Graham was doing more damage to the cause of Jesus Christ than any human being alive. And, indeed, if you go on to just Google Graham today, the oceans of vitriol will just astound you. And the greater part of it comes from the right.

So two questions. How did Graham achieve and retain that Olympian status? His rise is improbable. He was a farm kid from North Carolina. Went to fundamentalist schools. He had no social connections to speak of. There were missteps, such as I mentioned his comments about Jews in 1972. Yet, as one historian has put it, he became America’s least colorful but most powerful preacher. So how did that happen? The rise was improbable. How did it happen that he achieved and retained that Olympian status?

And then the second question which falls from the first one is: what does his career tell us about America’s career? What does Billy Graham tell us about America? The argument that I would pursue is that Graham followed the same approach that all evangelicals or most evangelicals followed and that is, he discerned aspirations in the wider culture and then he drew on trends in the wider culture to meet those aspirations.
The difference between Graham and most evangelicals is that he did it with dramatically greater skill for six decades and with remarkably few missteps. So let me put the argument in slightly different terms. He did not create those trends but he discerned trends that were already there and then he appropriated them and shaped them and applied them for his own purposes.

The results were numerous initiated projects, sometimes he legitimated broad outlooks. Sometimes he shaped public discourse. The key point is that in a lot of ways he was both the product and the producer of the times, both a product of the culture and a shaper of the culture. He registered the times and he molded the times and that’s why I think he’s important.

I am working on a series of case studies that I hope will make this point and I’ll try to do this very briefly. But one case study will involve Graham as heartlander. And herein he appropriated and shaped and applied or deployed the values that we associate with heartland America.

His parents. He wrote autobiographically a lot and he wrote about his parents who were southern Presbyterians, conservative, mainstream and here the important point is they were not snake handlers. They were not dispensationalists, fundamentalists, at least initially, and they present this image of stable, solid southern evangelical mainliners.

When Graham wrote about himself in his autobiography and in countless interviews, he wrote about his youth in terms of being a red-blooded American adolescent male, fast cars, sports, baseball, pretty girls. Presented himself as such a down-home guy, and appealed to those kinds of values. Unbuttoned, neighborly style comes through. Traditional ideas about gender, about manliness. And by “traditional” I mean not extreme to the left, not extreme to the right but just that: traditional views of gender and what it means to be a man. And he also maintained impeccable personal integrity throughout his life in terms of his marital fidelity, in terms of his financial affairs, in terms of truthfulness. And all of this played to Americans’ assumptions of their own heartland values. Bill Martin is the best biographer of Billy Graham and he said that what Americans saw in Billy Graham was their “best selves.” Whether or not they maintained marital fidelity and financial integrity and public truthfulness in their own lives, they esteemed someone who
did, who did it for them. Billy Graham’s America was Mayberry and in a lot of ways he was Andy Griffith and millions of Americans loved him for it. So that’s the first point: the heartlander.

Second, he was a southerner. He always was proud of his southern roots and he capitalized upon the political cache of those southern roots. This was the age of southern expansionism and there’s a great deal we could say about this, but I’ll throw out just one factoid. Except for the senior Bush, every elected president from Lyndon Johnson to Bush II—whether Democrat or Republican—was a southerner. This is an age of southern cultural expansionism if you think about who they were: southern or sun beltier, which for these purposes were the same: Nixon, Reagan, Carter, Clinton, Bush.

And think about who lost those elections: Humphrey, McGovern, Ford, Mondale, Dukakis, Kerry. Think about where they came from.

This was also an era in which the south had to some extent lived down its Jim Crow legacy but not yet come to be identified with the Christian right. There was a kind of window in which Graham arose. Well, how was he a southerner? He often talked about his love for the south, his love for southern food, his diction. You can certainly hear the difference between his diction and that of most evangelical preachers.

But more important than that is how he presented himself as neither a southern rural hick nor a southern aristocrat, but rather as a middle class genteel southerner whose origins or provenance we might associate with a booster south, the rise of Atlanta and Charlotte, his identification with a rising middle class. All right, so second, southerner.

Third, entrepreneur. Graham appropriated the climate of entrepreneurial agency following the Second World War: the entrepreneurial agency of the media age. And here I’ll speak very briefly of only two features but we can talk about more of his career. One, he was an orchestrator of the evangelical parallel culture. He didn’t start it. It had started long before he came along but he significantly amplified that parallel culture. Some people call it a subculture. I think it’s better called a parallel culture that was driven by parachurch agencies. Just a quick listing: Youth for Christ, Fuller Theological Seminary he didn’t found but he was instrumental, Gordon Conwell Seminary, Young Life, his own Billy Graham Evangelistic Association which in those days was a powerhouse organization;
magazines: Decision Magazine was next to the Jehovah’s Witness magazine Awake! as the most widely circulated religious magazine in the world; feature-length movies. And most important of all, I’d argue, was his founding of Christianity Today. He was very clear. Crusades come and go, but the printed word remains.

Architect of evangelical cooperation. He talked about harmony with Roman Catholics long before it was fashionable. He pioneered relationships with evangelicals and Christians on one side and with Jews on the other despite his serious mistake. The mistake was totally out of character, but on the whole his relationship with the Jewish community was a powerful one. He was friends with Jewish leaders, with rabbis, Golda Meier, Menachem Begin. He was not a Zionist, but he was always pro-Israel.

He was a pioneer of religious pluralism. The BGEA, his organization, probably does not agree with me about this, but I don’t think there was any question that he pioneered notions of religious pluralism. He adopted what I would call a principled agnosticism about the fate of the nonbeliever. Recurrently he would effectively say there is a wideness in God’s mercy and it’s simply not my call. And when journalists would ask him, as opposed to what actually got printed what he would think about, for example, the child in China who never heard, okay, his recurrent response effectively was “I leave that to God. I simply leave that to God. My job solely is to present the gospel.” So he was an entrepreneur pioneering the parallel culture and cooperative relations.

Fourth, he was a pilgrim who advanced the cause of a growing social consciousness about human suffering and discrimination and other forms of injustice.

The story of Graham and race is complicated. It seems to me that what we see between 1952—when his eyes just begin to open to the problem of racial injustice in America until 1982—in that 30-year span we see a continual process of expansion of his vision. It was zigzag. There were two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back, but on the whole we have to say it was a progressive move and compared to other southern white evangelicals it was really a very handsome moment.

By 1982 he spoke at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Moscow and he said he had gone through three conversions in my life: conversion to Christ, conversion to a racially just society, and
a conversion to the necessity of disarmament and world peace. What I think is significant here is how he articulated these three conversions. It was really very unlike most evangelicals. He placed them in order, in pattern, and where he did it, in Moscow.

In the latter years of his life in the ‘80s and the ‘90s he took a strong stand on nuclear disarmament. Mutual disarmament. He was never a pacifist. And we often think of Billy Graham as a strident, spread-eagle patriot of the 1950s. You know, most public figures were. But over the years he came gradually to distance himself from that spread-eagle patriotism and by 1982 he had made a determination to visit the Soviet Union and over a great deal of opposition including opposition from members of his own organization, he went to the Soviet Union as part of an effort to bring about an association of the Christian message with disarmament and the threat of nuclear annihilation. So I would say that on the whole I see Graham as opening to the increasing awareness of the threat of injustice and pain and suffering in this world.

My last example is Graham as counselor. I’ll say this very briefly. To me, in some ways the most important part of Graham’s whole story, what tells us the most about his relation to America, are the letters. The vast majority have been destroyed, but we know that millions came in to the office in Minneapolis. Only a few thousand have remained and it’s not exactly clear why these few thousand were not destroyed. They came in by the thousands during his crusades. Sometimes they came in at the rate of 10,000 per day.

What these letters are about is a litany of brokenness and addiction and despair. They are virtually never about politics. They are almost never about theology. They are almost always about broken lives. Graham became a public vehicle for private pain. People saw him, in some way by expressing their pain they found some relief.

I will close by saying that I have some negative comments about his legacy. It wasn’t all positive. Clearly, I think it was on the whole positive, but there are certainly things that I would criticize about Graham. He talked too much. He made careless comments. He made offhand comments about things he knew little about. There were grievous mistakes, such as his comments that he made to Richard Nixon about the way that liberal Jews controlled the American media. He was unself-critical about his legitimating power. He never caught on that simply showing up at some events legitimated it. And most seriously he was
always in the declarative mode until late in his life. I was struck this morning by I think it was Rich saying that too often evangelicals have told others what they believe rather than asking, “what do you believe?”

I could elaborate on my criticisms but my positive thoughts about his legacy go quickly like this as a bio. One, I’ve already intimated that he represented America’s best selves. Image of marital fidelity, financial accountability, quickness to forgive, humility, his humor.

The second is his handling of mistakes and we go to the episode about Jews as symptomatic. What I find in the career was a willingness to apologize, to face the mistakes and apologize for them straight out. So in this instance, as soon as they ascertained that these were his words he issued a written apology. It was published in many newspapers. And then he got on an airplane and he flew to Cincinnati and he spoke to the rabbis and he faced them and he said, “The things I said that day were unforgivable. I ask you to forgive me.” And as I read the journalist response it seems to me that the great majority of Americans including Jews did. They accepted a straightforward apology.

His remorse about his partisanship after Nixon repeatedly he apologized, repented for what he had done, how he had gotten tangled in power and his personal regrets. So I think his handling of mistakes have been symptomatic of what Americans are looking for.

Third, on the whole I see a record of increasing progressiveness in his views of social suffering. Doesn’t mean that in all cases he aligned his views with the Democratic party but it means that on the whole he sought to bring about alleviation.

Fourth, he represented the evangelical movement at its best: expansive, entrepreneurial. Ironically in many ways he created the public space that made possible the rise of the Christian right, but he himself was very careful to distance himself from the Christian right, but nonetheless evangelical at its best.

And lastly, I would say that what took place after 9/11—actually, it was on 9/14—was in many ways Billy Graham’s national moment when he spoke at the National Cathedral with a rabbi, with a priest, and with an imam. And what is significant for me is that of all the scores of millions of Protestants who could have been chosen, of course, they chose
Graham. But more than that, he stood shoulder to shoulder with people of multiple faiths in that moment of national suffering and I think it says something about both him and Americans since, in times of extraordinary suffering, they were shoulder to shoulder.

MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Thank you, Grant. Our next speaker is the youngest regular op-ed writer in the history of The New York Times. Ross’s new book is Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics. He was even on Bill Maher two weeks ago and comported himself well.

MR. ROSS DOUTHAT: I thought I’d begin by talking about why there are no Billy Grahams today. [Billy Graham] emerged in a period that was a period in between culture wars in American life, you might say. It was a period after the culture wars of the 1920s and ‘30s, which on the one hand could pit Protestants against Catholics (you saw expressions of nativism and you had a brief return of the Ku Klux Klan to prominence) and on the other hand pitted Protestants against Protestants, in the famous modernist fundamentalist wars.

So it was this period in between those wars on the one hand, and then obviously the culture wars that started in the 1960s that we’re still living with. Obviously religious and cultural conflict didn’t disappear in the 1940s and 1950s, but a couple of things did happen in that era that made it distinctive.

One thing was that the experience of the Great Depression and the Second World War and the lived reality of totalitarianism both on the right and the left, both fascist and communist, created a moment of almost intellectual reassessment that made people and intellectuals especially—but westerners in general—more interested in traditional religious faith and particularly traditional Christian faith than they had been 20 or 30 years earlier. I think there had been a sense, particularly in the early 1930s, that secular ideologies were the coming thing and that more traditional forms of communal life, religious belief and so on, would be less relevant in the brave new world being built in Moscow or in 1930s Berlin, depending on your ideological perspective.

But the experience of what then happened in the late ‘30s and 1940s and the level of worldwide horror that those secular ideologies created a moment that, when we think
about it in the case of Niebuhr, we think about it in terms of a new highbrow interest in Christian realism. A return to older intellectual ideas about human sinfulness and so on.

But it also created a space for a popular expression of that same impulse as well, one that had both Protestant and Catholic forms but found a very powerful expression in the ministry of a figure like Graham.

At the same time, I think you had this moment of Christian convergence in the United States. And, again, I want to emphasize that I don’t think this Christian convergence meant that all Protestant and Catholic differences disappeared. Obviously in the 1950s there were still famous anti-Catholic polemics being written by Protestants, there was still incredible tension between evangelical and mainline Protestants and so on. All the tensions of the 1920s and ‘30s were still there in some form.

But at the same time, you had this convergence where it was possible for Graham, the leading evangelical sort of popular figure at that point to go to a Catholic city like Boston and organize a crusade and have the Catholic cardinal of Boston write an op-ed basically saying, “Bully for you, Billy Graham.” This is not something you would have expected to happen in 1927.

I could go on with examples like that but if you look in the book I take four figures—Graham, Niebuhr, Fulton Sheen, the famous Catholic bishop and broadcaster at that point, and Martin Luther King. And I argue that in spite of all their obviously enormous differences there was a greater sort of theological and then to some extent as well political commonality than you’ve seen from any group of prominent figures in that vein in the decades since.

I think in Graham in particular you have a figure who is on the one hand confidently and unabashedly Christian and Christian in a very traditional Protestant evangelical sense. For all the development that Professor Wacker talks about in his views, Graham does not emerge on the American scene as someone making obvious compromises with liberal modernity. He’s someone who’s preaching a very stark Christian message. He’s making an altar call. He’s boiling down religious questions to a yes-or-no for Jesus Christ.
Yet unlike so many Christian figures today, he is not a focus for intense polarization. The idea that “no politician got elected by criticizing Billy Graham,” – well, it’s hard to imagine anyone saying that about a similar sort of preacher-like figure today. Maybe a figure like Rick Warren sort of has some Graham-like qualities, but I don’t think he has anything like the kind of bipartisan credibility that Graham enjoyed really throughout his career—and that he enjoyed in spite of moments like his too close identification with the Nixon White House, and in spite of moments like his more left-wing, you could say, interventions in the disarmament debates of the 1980s.

So he’s a resolutely Christian figure who doesn’t become a focus for polarization. Then he’s also a figure who is identified, in spite of his real theological conservatism, with personal conversion rather than with culture war. He’s more identified with people sending him letters and having life-changing experiences that are personal experiences of Jesus Christ than he is with the kind of battles that subsequent figures on the Christian right are associated with.

I just want to run through what has changed that has made it harder for figures, whether they’re an evangelical preacher or a Catholic bishop who wanted to do a nightly broadcast or a Protestant theologian, to be identified, I suppose you could say, as a Christian first and as a combatant in our political and cultural dispute second—which I think is what was distinctive about Graham and what’s rarer today.

Four big things changed starting in the 1960s. The first was a phenomenon that all political journalists write about all the time and so it’s well known to everyone in this room: the influence of political polarization and the ideological sorting of the two major parties that really gets underway after Goldwater’s race in 1964 and has continued pretty steadily down to the present day.

What that polarization has done – I think it happened first on the religious left in the 1960s and ‘70s and then happened on the religious right in the 1990s and especially in the Bush presidency – is create an intense identification of Christian faith with one or the other partisan cause. This in turn creates a sense that happened first for liberal mainline Protestants in the late 1960s and 1970s—that they were just the Democratic party at prayer. Then I think something similar happened with Christian conservatives over the
last 20 years or so. You actually see Americans who had previously identified as Methodists or Presbyterians or Catholics or something distancing themselves from organized Christianity as a kind of political statement against the religious right, which is a phenomenon that we’ve seen over the last 15 years that we hadn’t seen before.

To understand the impact of that polarization, I like to contrast the public ministries of Graham and Martin Luther King with two figures who were in a sense plausible successor figures in the 1980s: Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson. Both Graham and King – and at various moments especially King later in his career – were clearly political figures. No one would hesitate to describe Martin Luther King but a political figure. But imagine how the history of mid-century America would have been different if Billy Graham had decided that the best way to witness to Christian faith in American life was to run for the Republican nomination for president. But imagine the difference. Imagine the difference if Martin Luther King had been a Jesse Jackson figure who ran two unsuccessful campaigns for the Democratic nomination in the 1960s. I think in that shift in how both the religious left and the religious right related to political coalitions, you can see a shift that had momentous consequences for American Christianity as a whole and made it, again, for subsequent figures harder and harder to have an identity where you weren’t defining yourself as a conservative Christian first and then a Christian second—or a liberal Christian first and then a Christian second.

So you have polarization. You have the sexual revolution which is the shift that everybody is aware of, and is working itself out down to the present day in our debates over gay marriage. But it obviously starts with issues having to do with heterosexuality and straight life and the divorce revolution of the 1960s and ‘70s and everything that followed from the development of the birth control pill in the early ‘60s.

I think, again, it’s telling Graham comes of age before those debates are front and center. In general, Billy Graham has held fairly traditional Christian views on issues related to sex, abortion and so forth. But because he came of age before those issues were such huge flashpoints in American life, his public persona was not defined by them the way, again, the public persona of figures involved in religious and political debates since the ‘60s and ‘70s have been. Overall, the sexual revolution created a challenge for Christian sexual ethics that no church, Protestant or Catholic, has found a completely successful way to
address. There have been both liberal and conservative responses to all of these issues, but none of them have at least to this date come to a kind of resolution that has made those issues be anything less than a sort of persistent flashpoint, a persistent reason for people to leave Christian churches, a persistent source of cultural polarization and so on.

I think you also have to look at the influence of wealth and money on the United States over the last 40 or 50 years. If you look at the original New Testament message there is a fairly strong emphasis on personal chastity that obviously becomes somewhat difficult to make in the post-sexual revolution era. But there’s also obviously a very strong emphasis on a suspicion of great wealth, a suspicion of money and its corrupting influence that resonates less, I would argue, among Americans who came of age in what was by historical standards the kind of abundance of the post-World War II landscape, as opposed to Americans who had come of age in the great depression and who had a very different experience of their material circumstances, their relationship to money and so forth. I think this has had a general impact. It explains the shift from Billy Graham as a central figure in religious life in the United States to someone like Joel Osteen as a sort of Graham-esque figure whose message is accommodated to a landscape of greater wealth than the more hard-scrabble landscape in which Graham came of age.

The other narrower but very important example I like to cite is the impact of America’s wealth on the kind of people and the number of people who choose to become ministers, pastors, Catholic priests and so on. You don’t have to ascribe bad faith or bad motives to my parents’ generation and my own to see that the kind of money available to people from professions like the law and medicine and investment banking and so on made the ministry less appealing. The difference between the money available in non-clerical professions and clerical professions was always large. But the gap—you know, you can compare a minister’s salary to a lawyer’s salary in 1950 and a minister’s salary to a lawyer’s salary today and it explains a lot about why, for instance, fewer people who made Phi Beta Kappa would even consider going to divinity school in 2005 than considered going to divinity school in 1945. And this, I think, in turn has a huge impact on personnel, human capital, the manpower available to America’s churches and their ability to sort of make the Christian message seem appealing and relevant in the contemporary landscape.
Then the final trend that I talk about in the book that I think changed things is the impact of globalization and decolonization and the extent to which those forces were suddenly beamed into Americans’ living rooms by the television revolution in the ‘60s and ‘70s and obviously by cable TV and the internet and everything since. I’m thinking, in particular, of the extent to which they made the idea that one religious tradition had an exclusive truth claim seem much less credible than it had seemed before. This was already happening in the ‘50s and you can see it in Graham’s career and his own adaptations that Professor Wacker was discussing—where he speaks differently about the possibility of salvation than an earlier generation of evangelical preachers had often done. He says he has a different answer, let’s say, to the question about the baby in China perhaps than a Graham figure in 1922 would have had.

But even those adaptations were insufficient to the magnitude of globalization, and the fact that it overlapped with decolonization, which meant that because Christianity is a Western religion, it was perceived as tainted by the sins of European empires and so on. And I think that combination of factors goes a long way to explaining why theological relativism seems more plausible in 1985 than it did in 1955.

So that’s sort of the sketch that I offer in the book of the trends that have just made it harder and harder (1) for institutional Christian churches to thrive in the current landscape; (2) for a traditional Christian message more broadly defined to reach a wide audience; and (3) for figures like Graham to play a role in our society that transcends political divisions. And, again, the closest I think we’ve come to a Graham-style figure of the temporary emergence of Rick Warren in the last election cycle as, someone who President Obama kind of paid court to and invited to give the blessing at his inauguration and so on. But I think even Warren is seen frequently through a sort of culture war lens as a spokesman for you know, the nice conservative evangelical, as opposed to the obnoxious conservative evangelicals. I don’t think he has the kind of credibility Graham had and I don’t think he will have the kind of non-partisan staying power that Graham enjoyed over so many decades.

I think the second half of this story is not a story of the collapse of religion in America and it’s not even a story of the disappearance of some kind of Christianity in America. It’s just the story of the weakening of the kind of Christian center that Graham represented, and
that the world we’re living in now, the nation we’re living in now is not becoming a more secular country except in the loosest possible definition of the term “secular.” It’s a nation where people are still deeply influenced by Christianity, still deeply religious, but are more likely to express their Christianity through the kind of authors who appear on the Oprah Winfrey show, the Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love*, Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle and so on—or through a figure like a Joel Osteen who has in some ways a Christian message but it’s clearly directed towards a more affluent, more relativistic society—or through explicitly political figures. This is the phenomenon that political journalists are used to writing about: The influence of partisanship, the fact that we are still this deeply religious nation, we have all this religious energy, but because we’re more partisan than ever before and our religious institutions are weaker than ever before, it’s easier than ever before to pour those religious energies into Sarah Palin’s “Fundamental Restoration of America” or Barack Obama’s “Hope and change; yes, we can,” celebrities keening on YouTube videos campaign of 2008.

**KIRSTEN POWERS, Fox News:** For the professor, when you were talking about how Bob Jones had said that Billy Graham would cause more damage to Jesus than anybody else. I don’t know that much about Billy Graham so I was interested to know why he would say that and why the right was so critical of him. And for Ross, is the bottom line that there’s just sort of no hope? Is that what your book is saying? I mean, how will anyone ever rise above this? Will there ever be another Niebuhr?

**GRANT WACKER:** The immediate context for Bob Jones’s comment was Graham’s crusade in New York in 1957 in which he made a point to cooperate with everyone who would cooperate with him. I think he said something about Unitarians. He drew some lines but within very broad limits he would cooperate with anyone who would cooperate with him as long as they did not ask him to change his message.

And then as the inquirers came forward he never called them “converts” but as inquirers came forward and then they were counseled, they were counseled to go back to the churches they had come from or if they didn’t have a church they were counseled to churches, but they honored whatever tradition they came from. I’m working on this but there are indications that when people who self-identified as Jewish they were counseled
to go back to their synagogues, and certainly Roman Catholics. And so this is what inspired Bob Jones. I mean, he would have said this is bad religion. This is really bad religion because we’ve let down our standards.

ROSS DOUTHAT: Well, the trends that I’m talking about are bigger than religion, too. The 1950s, ‘40s were a period of American confidence and stronger institutions more generally and a period of political consensus of a sort more generally and it was a period of consensus and cohesion and so on. So in certain ways it’s unfair to compare our era to that one, because some aspects of what’s changed is a return to American norm and the mid-century period is the sort of slightly unusual period.

The trends that I’m describing are trends that continue to unfold and that are manifest not only in our religious life but in the Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* phenomenon that everyone is familiar with. They’re obvious in sort of general attitudes of disillusionment towards institutions of all kinds. So that’s the case for pessimism, in a sense that we do seem to be becoming a more atomized society more generally, a more polarized society more generally and so it’s not obvious that it will be easier to be a Billy Graham in 2020 than it was in 2005.

That being said, the reason that I begin the book in the mid-century era is also because the world of Graham and Niebuhr and so on was not an inherited world; it was a world that was built. And I do think that people have agency, agency that is affected by deep tectonic forces but is real nonetheless and I do think it should be possible for religious people in American life to self-present in ways that do more honor to Christianity than Republican or Democratic partisanship or to gospels of self-help and self-love.

I don’t have a five-point plan, but I do cite examples like Timothy Keller as examples of people who are making the case for Christianity in ways that are not just sort of easily slotted into the, “Oh, here’s another Republican preacher” kind of mode. I think it is possible, too, that the experience of the great recession and an age potentially of diminishing expectations and so on, while it may increase polarization and may accelerate some of the trends I’m writing about, there are opportunities for broader cultural reassessment that I think would be good for, again, American culture as a whole and not just American religious culture.
SALLY QUINN, *The Washington Post*: Grant, I wanted to know what you thought about Franklin Graham who is actively a bigot and clearly is not following in his father’s footsteps. And I don’t know whether you know how his father feels about him.

And, Ross, I want to know what you think actually is bad religion and why. You mentioned Elizabeth Gilbert and Deepak Chopra and Oprah and Eckhart Tolle, but it seems to me that the institutions are failing people and that people are going off to find what everybody is looking for in life which is meaning and that people are finding meaning from these people.

ROSS DOUTHAT: One of the strengths of traditional Christian doctrine—and I’m using “traditional” in a very broad way to encompass both Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox as well—has been its comfort with paradox, the idea that it’s important for religious tradition to be able to say “both/and” rather than “either/or.”

Take something like Alcoholics Anonymous. Alcoholics Anonymous is, in a sense, a Christian ministry that’s all about letting go and letting God and recognizing the necessity of grace, the necessity of recognizing a higher power, a higher authority and so on in order to deal with your addiction. Which I think is a sort of useful stand-in for the broader Christian attitude towards sin, something that is inside you that you cannot escape from and need to recognize a higher authority in order to confront.

At the same time, Alcoholics Anonymous is an institution that succeeds by asking real effort of people. It’s not something that says, well, you let go, you let God, and then we don’t care if you come to meetings. No, they care if you come to meetings. And you have a sponsor and you are morally accountable. So I think in that microcosm you can see how that both/and can fit together and also how it can fit together in ways that can have very positive practical moral consequences for people’s lives. I don’t think Alcoholics Anonymous would be as successful as it had been if it didn’t combine both of those elements, a strong emphasis on grace and a strong emphasis on works.

So what I define as bad religion is approaches to religion that want to pursue one idea to its logical conclusion to the exclusion of others.
GRANT WACKER: I think that Franklin Graham is a culture warrior and Billy is not. His words after 9/11 and Billy’s words are highly symptomatic. After 9/11 we all know what Franklin said about Islam, it’s a terrible religion. And then again Laurie Goodstein interviewed the senior Graham and said, “What do you think of your son’s words?” and Billy said, “Franklin has his opinion and I have my opinion. On some issues we disagree.” And I think he disagrees substantively but it was also a question of a style of working with people rather than bludgeoning them.

Having said that, I have to give Franklin credit on his work with Samaritan’s Purse which seems to me to be one of the major philanthropic endeavors around the world and this is part of the complexity of Franklin Graham is the work that Samaritan’s Purse does without regard to whether they’re a Muslim country or Christian country.

DAVID BROOKS: You mentioned, Grant, that Graham was a public vehicle for private pain and I wanted to ask you what his message was, what the sort of the moral tenor of his message was in response to those cries of pain. I was hoping you could frame it along the continuum of moral realists over here, the Niebuhrs and such, and then maybe the positive thinking people over here, Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller, maybe Joel Osteen. Where was Graham on this continuum and do you think there’s been a shift in American Christianity along this continuum over the last 30 years.

GRANT WACKER: Every letter that came in received a response and obviously not a personal response. People had to know that if letters were coming in at the rate of 10,000 a day he’s not going to be able to read and respond to them. But the responses that went out were often just evangelical boilerplate, that the Bible teaches this and here’s what you need to do. A remarkable number of the responses—and my sense is that probably a majority of them were just strikingly common sense. And one of the phrases that often appears in the responses was “You cannot unscramble eggs” and this would come when people who talked about marriages that had gotten messed up and what do we do. I see this as so American, I mean, it’s just so American to take the reality where it is and now we’re going to deal with it. And dealing with it involved conversion, faith, affiliation with a congregation, devotion, prayer and so forth. But, again, just take the reality as it is. And then there are just a lot of practical solutions: talk to your children; talk to your teenagers; straighten out your own life.
I haven’t seen the Oprah responses so I don’t know, but I have read Bob Orsi on the letters that were written to Saint Jude. And not as great a number but still a tremendous number and it does strike me that there is more of a traditionalist theological component along with that common sense component and does not get into the kind of therapeutic culture that we see later on.

ROSS DOUTHAT: My sense of what has changed over the last 50 years is less that we have more therapeutic voices and more that we have fewer nontherapeutic voices. I think if you go back to mid-century religion, you have plenty of people making the kind of arguments in different forms that an Osteen might make today, that a Deepak Chopra might make today and so on. The current in American religion Sydney Alstrom, the historian of American religion calls it the “harmonial element in American faith”—where the idea is that the most important thing is to just sort of harmonize yourself with the universe and then issues of whether it’s theological detail on the one hand or sort of specific moral guidelines on the other are less important than your orientation towards God and the universe—that has always been a huge part of American religion.

What I think is striking over the last few decades is the extent to which counterweights to that have weakened as institutions that help provide those counterweights have declined. I don’t want to make the case that it would be a great thing to live in a world where there were only institutional expressions of religion. I think the genius of American religion has always been this creative tension between these different forces: institutional faith on the one hand, religious freelancers on the other hand; the kingdom of the cults versus the Protestant mainline, you might say, and so on. When I’m talking critically about our current religious moment the argument isn’t that all we need is religious orthodoxy. It’s that just as orthodoxy without room for heresy is dangerous, so too heresy that doesn’t have orthodoxy to push off against and be tested by and so on is dangerous as well.

PAUL EDWARDS, Deseret News: I was interested in your description of Graham as an orchestrator of this parallel evangelical culture. And you mentioned a number of the different cultural organs that he puts together so there is campus ministries, and there’s filmmaking, and there’s journalism. I’m just wondering, are there any strategic lessons to be learned from that?
GRANT WACKER: He thought that his founding of *Christianity Today* was very important. And he talked about his crusades and also “millions come to the crusades and hear me,” but he said, “words are evanescent. Words are forgotten unless they are printed,” and so they put a lot of money into both *Decision Magazine*, which he saw as a devotional version of *Christianity Today* and to other publications. But that one publication flourishes now and is one of the major voices of modern American Christianity.

The second is that he was attentive and listened to businesspeople. His board was stocked with people who had been extremely successful in the business world and he took them seriously. That’s part of the untold story of the Billy Graham ministry is the role of businessmen. He reached out to and incorporated Mormons along with Catholics and to a lesser extent with Jews, but he took very seriously the wisdom that came from the businessmen and he listened to his board with the businessmen there and their savvy.

And then he was just on the cutting edge, with satellite technology, land relays, everything that came along in the realm of electronic communications, they were on the cutting edge.

ROSS DOUTHAT: One of the interesting things about the current moment is that American evangelicalism learned the lessons of Billy Graham’s career a little too well. Everything Graham did, the emphasis on para-church ministries rather than specific denominations, the quest to found institutions like *Christianity Today*, like Fuller Theological Seminary and so on helped to provide a kind of a new beginning for American evangelicals after this endless sectarian feuding of the fundamentalist wilderness years. All of that was hugely important to the success of evangelicalism mid-century and afterward – and to the extent to which the evangelical churches were the only part of American Christianity that didn’t experience this huge crisis in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s.

The problem is that on all of those fronts, what was necessary in 1950 might be problematic in 2000 or 2010. And when I look around the evangelical landscape today, I see a community that is in need of churches more than para-churches, and of stronger confessional groups that are clearer on what they believe. I think you can see this in the mega church phenomenon, which for a long time has been a sign of the robust health of
American evangelicalism. But it’s also problematic because it makes your religion dependent on super-star pastors, on particular charisms and ministries and so on that can burn out very quickly once the pastor himself burns out.

So what Graham supplied to evangelicals was what evangelicals desperately needed in 1947 and 1957. But today in terms of figuring out, how do we take American evangelicalism and equip it for more enduring survival? I have a line in the book, I say, Campus Crusade for Christ is incredibly successful. It’s an evangelical group that’s been ministering on campuses that I believe started in the same period as these other groups. But you can’t raise a family as members of Campus Crusade for Christ.

So I think the big challenge faced by evangelicalism today is it’s had 40 years of nondenominational success but maybe what it needs now is a little more denominationalism and a little more confessionalism than what Graham supplied to it.

RICHARD MOUW, Fuller Theological Seminary: I think one thing that gets lost in that, Ross, is the whole business of how people get credentialed for the magisterium and evangelicalism. I mean, you get Chuck Colson. You get Phil Yancey. You get the editors of Christianity Today. No one knows what churches they belong to. You know, we’re seeing a little shift in that with Rick Warren and with Willow Creek but even those don’t have denominations. And I’m just wondering if you look at what’s happened to denominational leadership why would you wish that on us, you know?

ROSS DOUTHAT: This may be my Catholic biases showing through, but when I look at the landscape, two things show up. One is that I think a lot of conservative evangelicals have good reason to be skeptical of the theological directions that some of the younger, self-credentialed evangelical mega-church pastors are taking. I think there is a danger that if you don’t have some sort of confessional grounding – and with the Graham generation, yes, people didn’t know necessarily what denomination they belonged to and that was very helpful to their ministry, but they did come of age in a more denominational context so you had more of a confessional grounding than the generation that comes of age after them and the generation after that.
I think one of the reasons that mainline denominational Christianity collapsed was not because it was too denominational and confessional; quite the reverse. It was because in the ‘60s and ‘70s those churches decided that denominational identity was a barrier to Christian unity. But that ended up being disastrous for the mainline. And I think you can imagine something similar happening in the evangelical world absent at least some purchase in something other than sort of purely personality-based form of ministry.

The other thing is it’s exhausting as a Christian body to have to recreate yourself completely in every generation. I think the story of the last 2,000 years suggest that institutional churches play a very important role is making Christianity something other than just a temporary enthusiasm.

The Methodist church, for instance, begins in enthusiasm but it endures—and maybe it won’t endure forever, but it endures as an institution and I think that there are lessons in that story for evangelicals today.

DR. WILLIAM GALSTON, The Brookings Institution: Ross has offered a narrative of decline and he’s given his particular story as to why that happened. My question to you would be to what extent you agree with that narrative and where you might disagree.

The four things that [Ross] listed were polarization and the sexual revolution and the growth of wealth and therefore temptation not to adopt a religious vocation and finally globalization, decolonization, white man’s guilt. If I’d been telling the story I certainly would have included those items but if what is to be explained is bad religion, I would have put some other things on the table, too.

I really think it’s not that the therapeutic has remained stable but there’s a lot more therapeutically-infused religion than there was 50 years ago and that cannot be good for religion.

Secondly, I think there’s a broad cultural phenomenon that you underplay and that is the fracturing of culture into high and low, the disappearance of the middle ground of culture. And if you want to conduct a very interesting experiment pick an issue of Time magazine at random from 1955 and compare it to the Time magazine of today and see what you
see. In other words, there’s been a real collapse of middle and high cult has immigrated into the academy and low cult has taken over the popular organs and the middle is conspicuous by its absence and that middle is where a lot of not-so-bad religion dwelled.

Third point, the growth of individualism necessarily comes at the expense of institutions and the hyper-individualization of American society all by itself could have done a lot to undermine these institutions.

And then finally, four and five, there has been a huge growth of the spirit of non-judgmentalism in American society. About the worst thing you can say about anybody or any institution is that it’s judgmental.

Well, religion that doesn’t make judgments is not much of a religion. And I’ve seen this up close in my own synagogue when the rabbi even very delicately tries to apply some classic Jewish principles to the conduct of the community, he’s basically told to get lost and if he persists in his error perhaps to get lost for good. And there is no appetite or tolerance left for moral leadership in religion defined as criticism of the religious community.

And finally I think I’ve been around long enough to say this. I have never seen on all points of the political spectrum such hostility to elites and anyone who claims a position of any kind of authority including intellectual or moral authority. Well, how the hell can you have a viable religious institution if it is dominated by contempt for anything that could be represented as elitism? So it seems to me that in addition to these four tectonic changes that you listed that there are all those huge changes in American culture.

ROSS DOUTHAT: [A lot of what you just said] is in [my book] and I agree with probably 97 percent of it. I will say one thing I tried to do in the book to avoid what I think is a temptation for people of my general religio-political orientation is to avoid blaming the trends that I’m decrying on specific noxious individuals who were the snakes in the garden of mid-century religion.

What I try and do in the book is use those four factors—and I agree with you that there are many more—to explain why therapeutic religion became more powerful, more
influential. So I completely agree with you but I think that I tried to separate really structural forces from the theological trends that arose from the forces. So similarly something like nonjudgementalism—when I talk about globalization, decolonization, the sense of theological relativism that comes out of those experiences I’m trying to explain where today’s spirit of nonjudgmentalism comes from in a way. And I think that that experience of the loss of Western credibility, the way Christianity was deservedly associated with those experiences does go some distance towards explaining why people are so nervous about being too judgmental today.

GRANT WACKER: As I look at the whole story of religion in the last half of the 20th Century it strikes me that three of the most influential figures are Billy Graham, Martin Luther King, and John Paul II and they’re the ones that endure generation after generation. In all sorts of discussions. And what has puzzled me is how it happens that in this both secular age and therapeutic age that we still keep going back to these three people as pole stars.

ROSS DOUTHAT: For people who are interested in the future of a more theologically serious or at least just morally serious approach to religious faith in general and Christianity in particular, that may be reason for hope, right—that even in an era of institutional weakness and therapeutic religious culture and so on, the examples of something different, something at least somewhat better still have the power to command attention and respect.

The only thing I’d say that probably roots my pessimism is the particular experience of my own Catholic Church. I became a Catholic when I was 17 so I’m in the unusual position of being neither a cradle Catholic nor a true adult convert, but I came into the Catholic church at sort of the high point of John Paul II’s luster. It was the period after the fall of Communism but a period when there was I think increasing attention being played to the role that he had played in that story. It was sort of a period when at least for conservative Catholics—and I was in obviously a circle of pretty conservative Catholics—there was a sense that the pope’s talk about sort of a new springtime for Catholicism and for Christianity and so on in the 21st Century was really going to bear real fruit.
And then came the sex abuse crisis. And I do think the sex abuse crisis dimmed John Paul’s luster and in fact, I think it may not have dimmed it as much as it should have. This is a place where I and George Weigel, who’s been at these events before, somewhat differ. But I think that that experience and some of the underlying weaknesses—I side with John Paul II broadly in the big sort of intra-Catholic debates of the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s, but I think it’s also clear that whatever Roman Catholicism in the United States needs over the next 100 years, what John Paul II accomplished was insufficient to achieve that future. And I’m not sure what will achieve that future but that is—I agree with you, in the case of the last pope in particular I think the experience of the last ten years, sex abuse and the broader sense of institutional disillusion in the post-John Paul American church has made me a little more pessimistic than I would have been as a college-age conservative Catholic.

TOM KRATTENMAKER, USA Today: I want to ask about the Q conference. If I’m correct, you shared the stage there just a couple of weeks ago. I would like to hear your impressions of Q but then a comment on the larger movement that it represents. Would you term it something meaningful or maybe temporary enthusiasm?

ROSS DOUTHAT: So the Q conference for those of you who don’t know, I don’t know if it explicitly bills itself as the evangelical answer to the TED conference, but it is the evangelical answer to the TED conference. It’s people, mostly evangelicals, presenting their particular ideas. It’s a lot of short talks. People talking about different ministries and so on. It does seem like one of the fullest expressions that I’ve seen of a sort of post-Robertson, Falwell, younger generation evangelical approach to Christianity that someone like Mike Gerson has spent a lot of time writing about over the last decade or so, but very focused on issues related to the third world, to poverty, to sustainability, the environment and so on.

So this is an evangelicalism that is sort of clearly theologically conservative in some ways and socially conservative in some ways but is much more apolitical than the previous generation, undoubtedly if you polled people there on gay marriage, for instance, you would undoubtedly find a more moderate to left wing [composition]. At least part of the attendees would have those views.
The story of liberal Christianity in the ‘60s and ‘70s is in part a story of high hopes for a Christianity focused on transforming the world that could move beyond faded institutions and have a lot of house churches and sort of reconnect with the original enthusiasm of the gospels. Liberal Christianity starts with those hopes and it ends up with a lot of disappointment, I think because in the process of trying to adapt itself to this new landscape it adapted itself too far away from core Christian claims. And I think the trends that you see at work among younger evangelicals at a place like Q are in a tremendously hopeful for the future of an evangelical witness that can do what Grant was describing and marry an inclusive and nonpartisan vision to an authentically religious message. But the question is, when does adaptation shade into adapting yourself out of existence. So when I look at that movement that’s what I wonder about.

**DAN HARRIS, ABC News:** I was interested in hearing you guys riff on Joel Osteen.

**SALLY QUINN:** I specifically asked [Osteen] last week about the prosperity gospel and it was the one time I’ve ever seen him get upset. And he said, “I’m not out there saying if you believe in Jesus Christ you’re going to get rich. That is so not what we’re talking about here.” He’s [saying] you’ll be spiritually rich. There are others out there who preach what they call prosperity gospel, which is if you believe in Jesus Christ, you’ll get rich. I don’t think that is part of his message.

**CULLEN MURPHY, *Vanity Fair***: You were talking about the responses from Billy Graham to all the letters and I think you said, I see this as so American when you were describing the kind of advice that was given. And there’s a tendency of all religions to become imbedded, because they are imbedded in the cultures that they inhabit and to take on some of those characteristics.

When I look at American religion today and also at the country that it’s imbedded in, it doesn’t surprise me, for instance, that Catholicism and many evangelical denominations don’t seem all that humble because the country that they’re in has a tendency towards a kind of can-do optimistic, not very humble attitude. I wonder if there’s a way out of this box in a sense, or perhaps it’s not a problem, but I’d be interested in knowing what you think.
GRANT WACKER: This is a religion of a second chance and so deeply imbedded in all these letters is a kind of desperate cry for a second chance. And this is what comes back in the responses is that there’s another chance. And I said it’s so American because this is what William Jennings Bryan was about. There’s a second chance in the political realm.

And so there’s a possibility of rebuilding one’s life. And so in one sense we get this entrepreneurial thrust as you’re suggesting, which is expansive and it’s broad-shouldered and muscular and all this gender language we could use but at the same time there is a humility that has to be built in or that is built in that we’ve run amok. Our lives have run against the shoals. They’re on the rocks and things have to be rebuilt and part of that rebuilding is the humility of asking and acknowledging who we are and what’s happened in our lives in order to rebuild.

That’s all one cluster of issues, but at a more personal level with Graham I think it’s just overwhelming when you look at his personal comments and reports of journalists that go to visit him is they come back with reports of a humility. Now, why I think that’s important in a broader sense is the press reports on it then whatever the personal characteristic is, it’s amplified and so it seems to me that that’s a feeling that the broader population also understands and esteems as important.

REIHAN SALAM, The Daily: Rod Dreher a few years ago contrasted Alistair McIntyre’s Benedict option against what he called the Benedict temptation, the Benedict option being the idea that one should retreat from a kind of debased culture to form more robust Christian communities on the fringe of that debased culture. And the idea of the Benedict temptation is, that idea is very dangerous. We should be in dialogue with a broader culture, et cetera.

But given a lot of the pessimism that you’ve encountered today and some that lives inside your own brain, I wonder if you’ve thought about some institutions that have actually been living the Benedict option, some projects that you feel have really been successful in your view? Have you seen manifestations of a Christian culture that really does reject the mainstream and is trying to build some kind of alternative that you find promising that makes you doubt the idea that actually it’s more temptation than real option?
ROSS DOUTHAT: One of the fascinating things about the Mormon Church is that for all of certainly my own vast theological differences with LDS doctrine and practice, the Mormons have been the only major religious body in the United States to maintain a robust influential, successful parallel culture that has seemed to resist some of the trends that I’ve described.

But the downside of that is the one that my colleague Professor Brooks brought up this morning which is the extent to which to many outsiders to Mormon culture, it does seem like Mormons are stuck in the ‘50s. That the reason they’ve been so resilient is that they’ve just sort of walled themselves off from these trends and that Mormonism’s resilience is only resilient because it’s still a relatively small body, and so it hasn’t been large enough to go through the kind of convulsions that Catholicism went through in the ‘70s and ‘80s. That’s why I’m interested in some of the issues I raised about archeology and history and Mormonism’s ability to confront the secular academy over the next 100 years because I think those will actually be crucial to its future.

But I don’t know if there is a more Catholic or Protestant version of the Mormon approach that is completely possible. Mormons obviously have a very distinctive history and a very distinctive geographical position and so on. I don’t believe in a model of withdrawal.

I don’t think of America as a genuinely post-Christian culture. I certainly don’t think it is a secular or a pagan culture. And as long as that’s the case I think, with people who have my own beliefs, you can’t withdraw from a culture with which you still have so much in common. And so that is I think the case for whether you’re a conservative Christian or a liberal Christian. For all the trends that Bill was talking about towards atomization, we have a lot in common as Americans and we can still have these arguments and they’re worth having. And that’s a reason for saying let’s have them and let’s not just move to North Dakota, home school our kids, and grow organic vegetables.

GRANT WACKER: Half of my life is teaching in a divinity school and so I stay in touch a lot with my divinity students who have come back after five years, ten years. And I am recurrently impressed by the strength of the rural church and the stories that they come back with about the rural church. And I think that part of our focus and certainly mine is, stuff I’m working on has mostly been about, urban situations, the cosmopolitan situation,
the kinds of stories that big city dailies would write about. And the life of the rural church or the parish and, there’ll be far fewer rural synagogues, but still, I mean, often flies under the radar screen of those of us who are professionally involved looking at it. So I don’t know what the larger implications are but there certainly is great resilience in certain segments of the population. And if we could isolate the components of that resilience and how to extend it into the rest of the population, we’d be better off.

MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Ladies and gentlemen, join me in thanking our speakers.