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Route 66 Evangelicals

Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010. 520 pp., $35.00.

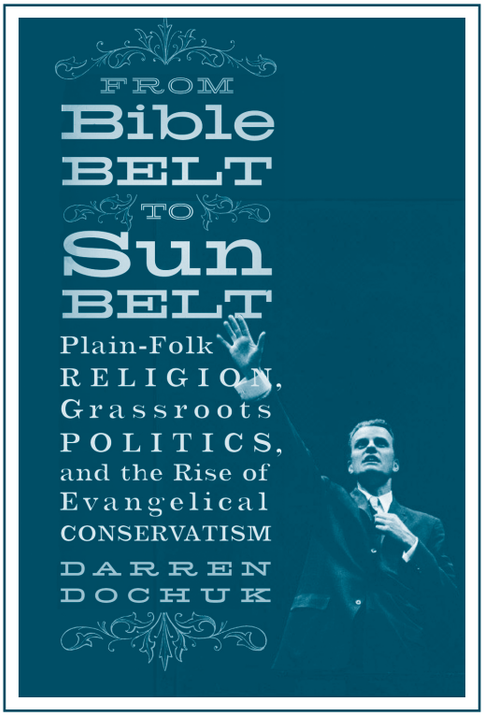
In July of 1950, my mother listened to the preaching of a North Carolina evangelist. Just twelve years old, she spent her days swimming in a nearby lake and her evenings under a canvas tent.

The place was the Youth for Christ camp in Mound, Minnesota. The speaker was Billy Graham. Fresh from the 1949 Christ for Greater Los Angeles Campaign, he was the next big thing in American religion. My grandmother knew it and made sure her children were there. Joining Graham on the platform were two celebrity converts from California, reformed gangster Jim Vaus and singing cowboy Stuart Hamblen. The prodigal son of a Methodist preacher, Hamblen sang his composition, "It is No Secret (What God Can Do)." Unbeknownst to my family, a young Tim LaHaye parked cars.[1]

As the young president of William Bell Riley's Northwestern Schools, Graham had a special connection to the Twin Cities. For years he urged listeners to "write to me, Billy Graham, Minneapolis, Minnesota. That's all the address you need." Dramatizing the connection between Minneapolis and the Los Angeles campaign, a 1950 promotional film opened with panoramic footage of the California landscape. While viewers watched a sleek locomotive speeding toward the Pacific Coast, the narrator announced, "From Minneapolis comes the young evangelist Billy Graham and song leader Cliff Barrows, his wife Billie Barrows, and Beverly Shea the gospel singer."[2]

Darren Dochuk begins his account of California evangelicals on the twentieth anniversary of the 1949 campaign. Instead of a train trip from Minneapolis, he focuses on a different journey: the migration of millions of Southern Protestants to Southern California. A sign of the South's continuing relationship with the West, Graham's popularity symbolized the growing influence of evangelicals on the culture of Los Angeles.

To be sure, Dochuk is not the first to tell this tale. From John Steinbeck's Joads to Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother," their journey has been documented by novelists and photographers. While Gerald Haslam's *Workin' Man Blues* chronicles the rise of the "California sound" in country music, Dan Morgan follows a Pentecostal family from Oklahoma in *Rising in the West*. Covering similar territory, Mark



Shibley's *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States* maps the "southernization of American religion."

Missing from previous treatments is a systematic effort to link California's religious development to the wider story of American culture and politics. While paying cursory attention to the West Coast, studies of the Religious Right spend most of their time in Lynchburg and Virginia Beach. Focusing on the fusion of libertarianism and moral traditionalism, the burgeoning historiography on American conservatism gives short shrift to evangelicalism. Though works on California history provide episodic coverage of both the Old Christian Right and its post-sixties counterpart, they fail to connect the dots.

Dochuk does all this and more in *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, a book that will transform the way scholars see the political and religious geography of the United States.

Redrawing the Evangelical Map

In the past, American religious history has imagined a geographical starting point in the Northeast. "From this centre," notes Canadian religion scholar Ronald Grimes, "destiny rolls westward like a great ball." This westward spatial movement coincides "with a temporal movement running from the time of the Puritan colonies to that of New Age or new religious movements in California."[3]

In Dochuk's version of this story, however, destiny follows a southerly route along Route 66. Moving west and then back east, he describes how a population of Southern migrants and their descendants transformed Washington from the California suburbs.

I am typing these words in Springfield, Missouri, Queen City of the Ozarks, birthplace of Highway 66 and headquarters of the Assemblies of God. Home to the Baptist Bible Fellowship, it is where Jerry Falwell went to school. Attorney General John Ashcroft grew up here. So did historian Grant Wacker. My house is twelve miles away in Christian County, a community picked by the Patchwork Nation Project to represent the nation's 468 Evangelical Epicenters.[4]

Though Dochuk did not set out to write a history of southern Missouri and northern Arkansas, his book could well be a supplemental reading in my Ozarks Religion course. Many of the movers and shakers in California evangelicalism have ties to this part of the world. Take, for example, Arkansas evangelist John Elward Brown, founder of John Brown University and a regular visitor to Los Angeles pulpits. So connected was Brown's college to West Coast benefactors that its second major building was christened California Hall. Home to the Cathedral of the Ozarks, its "head, heart, and hand" philosophy became the template for a host of California evangelical institutions.[5]

The same goes for George Benson's Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas. An itinerant evangelist for free market capitalism and the Churches of Christ, Benson delivered over 200 speeches per year. Bankrolled by philanthropist J. Howard Pew, Benson directed a

national program of economic education, creating the Disney-animated *Adventures in Economics*.

Harding was the model for Pepperdine University, another school of the Churches of Christ. Founded by Parsons, Kansas native George Pepperdine, it became an outpost of Christian libertarianism. Following Benson, Pepperdine's leaders courted the Los Angeles business community by inviting conservative speakers to campus, including Milton Friedman, William F. Buckley, and the superintendent of Springfield, Missouri's public schools.

Singer Pat Boone is yet another link between Springfield and California evangelicalism. Married to the daughter of *Ozark Jubilee* host Red Foley, Boone was a key figure in the rise of the religious right and a confidante of Ronald Reagan. Raised in the Churches of Christ, he later found a spiritual home in the California charismatic movement.

A Dark Chapter in California History

As these biographies make clear, more than just a road connected the Bible Belt and the Sun Belt. Shaped by their Southern roots and their California neighbors, Dochuk's evangelicals underwent several transformations on their way to the Reagan Revolution.

Suspicious of big business *and* big government, they arrived with a populist streak that did not find a home in either party. To be sure, California's Southern migrants cast their votes for Franklin Roosevelt. A few even supported socialist politician Upton Sinclair.

Yet in the end, small government Jeffersonians proved a poor match for California's Social Democrats. While liberal writers warned of the "southernizing of California" (77), Southern clergy criticized the secularism of the Democratic left. Celebrating the autonomy of local neighborhoods, white evangelicals resisted integration. Such divisions cracked the New Deal coalition wide open.

Exacerbating these tensions, some evangelicals harbored deep prejudices against American Jews. Shedding light on a dark chapter in California history, Dochuk notes that "the region was a hotbed for anti-Semitism, ranging in intensity from the staid British Israelism, a trans-Atlantic philosophy of Anglo-Saxon superiority that colored the sermons in some Protestant churches, to the confrontational Silver Shirts," a paramilitary group with metaphysical roots (85).

Southern California was not unique. In 1946 journalist Carey McWilliams called Minneapolis "the capital of anti-Semitism in the United States." A native Californian who appears often in Dochuk's text, McWilliams warned of similar prejudices in his home state.[6]

As a Minneapolis native, I am ashamed that my grandmother attended the River-Lake Gospel Tabernacle during the thirties and forties. Led by one of the "weird prophets" discussed by McWilliams, it was a bastion of British Israelism. There evangelist Luke Rader lashed out at the "Jew Deal."[7]

The younger brother of radio pioneer Paul Rader, he made frequent visits to Los Angeles, substituting for Aimee Semple McPherson in 1936. "Clad in a black chiffon velvet hooded robe and suffering from a severe cold," Sister Aimee watched from the platform of the Angelus Temple. Two years later, Luke eulogized his brother at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church.[8]

By the mid-1940s, Rader's visits were confined to California's British Israelite churches, centers for what McWilliams called "curious cults and weird movements" (96). An October 1946 advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* said it all. Promoting Rader's engagement at Kingdom Temple, it was located directly above an ad for the Amazing Criswell, psychic to the stars. Sharing space with Charles Fuller's "Old Fashioned Revival Hour," an announcement for the Rosicrucians asked, "Is your body surrounded by a

subtle magnetic field which profoundly affects your social relationships?" Catherine Albanese calls the metaphysical tradition the "missing third" of American religion. In Los Angeles it was more like the missing half.[9]

Dochuk's book features several *dramatis personae* with anti-Semitic views, including the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith and Pentecostal Jonathan Perkins. In 1945 Smith and Perkins became the spokespersons for a Huey Long-style pension scheme called "Ham and Eggs". A protégé of Long, Smith spoke to a crowd of 2,000 in Los Angeles. Accompanying him on the platform were Assemblies of God District Superintendent C.W. Woodworth and "Fighting Bob" Shuler of the Trinity Methodist Church. In 1946 the movement's final sermon was given by Texan J.A. Lovell, another British Israelite. Embarrassed by such characters, the backers of Ham and Eggs distanced themselves from their clergy allies.

After a run for president in 1956, Smith faded from public view. Moving to Arkansas in 1964, he is buried beneath the Christ of the Ozarks statue. Billed by H.L. Mencken as "the gutsiest and goriest, loudest and lustiest, the deadliest and damndest orator ever heard on this or any other earth," he belongs to a different era.[10]

Reinventing the Right

Given such unsavory associations, it is remarkable that California evangelicals rejected the rhetoric of extremism. Much of the credit should go to Billy Graham. In Minneapolis Graham inherited the fundamentalist empire of W.B. Riley, the man who popularized the *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the Upper Midwest. In Los Angeles Graham drew support from clergy who shared the stage with Smith.

Reflecting the irenic stance of the new evangelicalism, Graham's 1949 Los Angeles campaign was free of such inflammatory rhetoric. Building an ecumenical coalition, he struck a more inclusive tone. Gone were the denunciations of Jews and Catholics. In their place, Graham articulated a fierce critique of atheistic Communism.

Southern Californian evangelicals were moving in the same direction. After an emotional encounter with an editor from the Anti-Defamation League, Jonathan Perkins repudiated anti-Semitism. Countless others recoiled at the deeds of Adolph Hitler, affirming their support for the new state of Israel and its role in biblical prophecy.

Embracing a more cerebral brand of politics, college-educated evangelicals enjoyed reading "classic treatises by Friedrich von Hayek and Russell Kirk, or recent hits like Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged"* (187). The same was true of the Reverend James Fifield, who made the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles a center for free market thought.

Ironically, the prosperity of California's small government conservatives was dependent on billions of dollars in government military expenditures. According to Dochuk, nearly 40 percent of the region's manufacturing jobs were tied to the defense sector (170). In Southern California, anti-Communism was good for business.

Taking advantage of the post-war ideological climate, the John Birch Society thrived in the region, paving the way for the presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater. Several conservative Protestant leaders had close ties to the organization, including Tim LaHaye, Billy James Hargis, and Major Edgar C. Bundy.

Distancing themselves from the Birchers, a new breed of evangelicals embraced the mellower conservatism of Richard Nixon. Saved under the preaching of Paul Rader in the 1920s, Nixon knew how to talk the talk. Drawing on his friendship with Graham, he appeared at a Tennessee crusade in 1970. Such events helped

cement Nixon's relationship with the evangelical subculture. While Pepperdine's Bill Banowksy served the Committee to Re-Elect the President, students from John Brown University enjoyed a White House visit.

More so than the pre-Watergate Nixon, Ronald Reagan became an evangelical hero. This was not a foregone conclusion. Presiding over the liberalization of California's abortion laws (and opposing a ballot initiative banning homosexual teachers), he was not always a social conservative. Yet in the end, Reagan's religious rhetoric helped ensure electoral success. More than any major candidate, he identified with Christian conservatives, telling the National Religious Broadcasters, "I endorse you" (362).

The Gipper's emergence as a national politician coincided with the growth of California's evangelical subculture. According to Dochuk, Los Angeles joined Lynchburg and Dallas as an incubator of the new Christian right. From Focus on the Family to Campus Crusade, Southern California spawned a plethora of parachurch groups. American Christianity would never be the same.

Heading South by Southwest

Beginning with Charles Fuller's radio program, Sun Belt evangelicals transformed my Minnesota family. Like Fuller, most of my grandmother's favorite preachers hailed from warmer latitudes. So did the speakers at the summer Bible conferences at Northwestern College (where we paused to admire a portrait of Billy Graham). Through radio and television, we familiarized ourselves with J. Vernon McGee and Robert Schuller (no relation to "Fighting Bob"), E.V. Hill and James Dobson.

Eventually, my family experienced its own Sun Belt migration. In the eighties, my aunt moved to California after falling in love with a man she met on a Heaven and Home Hour tour of Israel. An activist in the pro-life movement, she became a member of Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America. In 2005 my aunt and uncle relocated to Tennessee where they are active in a Southern Baptist church.

That same year my parents joined us in Missouri's fastest-growing county. Looking around our neighborhood, it is easy to accept Carey McWilliams' description of evangelical suburbia. Noting the prevalence of "jerry-built suburban homes in large, raw subdivisions," he wrote that "there is something about the theological style of the evangelical sects that seems to have had a strong appeal to the new middle-class elements."[11] Grant Wacker called it "Eden with a satellite dish." We call it home.

Whatever the proper label, it is a powerful confluence of geography and faith. From the Queen City of the Ozarks to the City of Angels, evangelicals have played a central role in American politics. By mapping the impact of Sun Belt evangelicalism on the entire nation, Darren Dochuk has provided an invaluable service. ■

—John Schmalzbauer, Missouri State University

[1] Doris Greig mentions *LaHaye in Billy Graham: A Tribute from Friends, ed. Vernon McLellan* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 80.
[2] *The Canvas Cathedral with Billy Graham and Cliff Barrows*, Los Angeles: Grace Films, Inc., 1950. Available at http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/exhibits/LA49/07film.html
[3] Ronald L. Grimes, "Sacred Space and the Southwest: Mapping Histories of American Religion," *Environments* 22(2)1994: 23-24.
[4] See www.patchworknation.org for more details on the project.
[5] Richard Ostrander, *Head, Heart, and Hand: John Brown University and Modern Evangelical Higher Education* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2003).
[6] Carey McWilliams, "Minneapolis: The Curious Twin," *Common Ground*, August 1943, 61-66.
[7] Maura Lerner, "Razing Old Lake Street Tabernacle Stirs Up Memories of a Darker Era," *StarTribune*, 15 September 2002, B11.
[8] "Lawyer in Temple Role," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1936, A2.
[9] *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1946, A3.
[10] Glen Jeansonne and Michael Gauger, "Gerald Lyman Kenneth Smith," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture,* 27 March 2009, available online at http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1767.
[11] Carey McWilliams, "The New Fundamentalists," *The Nation*, 5 June 1976, 686–687.

NOTICES

Christian History Magazine Resumes Publication

After a hiatus of nearly three years in print form, and nearly a year since its online subscription version closed down, *Christian History* magazine has resumed publication with its 100th issue which examines the history and influence of the King James Version of the Bible. *Christian History* was founded by Ken Curtis, founder of Vision Video in 1982 as part of his Christian History Institute (CHI). In 1989 it was handed over to Christianity Today International (CTI) who expanded its circulation base over the following two decades. In 2010, the challenges facing the publishing industry necessitated CTI's passing the publication back to CHI, which decided to take up the challenge and re-start the magazine. Dr. Chris Armstrong of Bethel Seminary (MN), a past editor, has agreed to serve as the magazine's managing editor. For further information about the re-vivified *Christian History* magazine go to www.christianhistorymagazine.org. While we are saddened to learn that Ken Curtis went to be with the Lord in early January of this year, we are grateful as we think of the role he played—through his films and *Christian History*—in stimulating the evangelical community to learn more about both itself, and the wider, collective history of the Church.

ISAE—Produced Short Documentary *Saving the World?*

NOW AVAILABLE FROM VISION VIDEO

Part of the ISAE's recent project highlighting changes in American Protestant missions, *Saving the World?* chronicles the assumptions and expectations that Protestants carried into the 20th century and highlights some of the major—and unexpected—developments in the hundred years since the famous 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh: new global forces and realities including the growth of the non-Western Church, East-West and North-South partnership, the growing contribution of women, and the rise of the short-term missions phenomenon. Commissioned by the ISAE, produced and directed by award-winning videographer Tim Frakes, and utilizing the insights of leading historians, theologians, and mission executives, *Saving the World?* provides Sunday School classes, home study groups and college and seminary classes a solid introduction to the development-and future-of the world missionary effort. *Saving the World?* is available online now from Vision Video (www.visionvideo.com) at a special price of $11.99.

Deadlines for American Society of Church History Prizes Coming

Submission dates for two of the American Society for Church History's (ASCH) annual prizes are nearly upon us. The deadline for the Sidney E. Mead Prize (for the author of the best unpublished essay in any field of church history written by a doctoral candidate or recent graduate whose manuscript stems directly from his or her doctoral research) is **July 1st**. The award consists of $300 plus publication in the ASCH's journal *Church History* (contingent upon incorporating revisions stipulated by the review committee). The Jane Dempsey Douglass Prize is an annual award in the amount of $250 for the author of the best essay published during the previous calendar year on any aspect of the role of women in the history of Christianity. Nominations or submissions, accompanied by a copy of the article, **must be received by August 1**. Authors must have their work nominated

in order to be eligible for any of the prizes listed above. To make a nomination, please send a letter or an e-mail to the Executive Secretary (keith.francis@churchhistory.org). For further information go to the ASCH website at www.churchhistory.org/grants-prizes/.

New Collections Opened at Billy Graham Center Archives

The Billy Graham Center (BGC) Archives at Wheaton College (www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives) is a unique and strategic resource for the study of evangelical history. The collecting policy of the Archives centers on North American Evangelical nondenominational Christian organizations, personages, and topics. Besides being a major repository of records and materials for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and evangelist Billy Graham, the Archives possess collections dealing with organizations like Youth for Christ, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the papers of notable evangelical figures ranging from Christian industrialist Herbert John Taylor to inspirational speaker and author Corrie ten Boom. The BGC Archives is particularly well-known for the strength of its holdings dealing with North American non-denominational missionary organizations. Among the new collections that have been processed and opened within the last year are:

Collection 74, Ephemera of Billy Graham: new material has been added to this existing collection. In 2010, the staff of the BGC Archives sent brief questionnaires to the approximately 480 Wheaton College alumnae from the classes of 1940 through 1946 whose attendance at the college overlapped with Billy Graham's years at the college. They were asked 1) if they had documents from the period related to Graham and, 2) if they were willing to be interviewed about their memories of Graham. The net result of the project was several dozen questionnaires with handwritten comments, several typed and written brief memoirs and a few other documents, (including one

Members of a video crew tape historical materials for PBS' documentary series, *God in America*, broadcast in October 2010 (courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives).

1944 letter over Graham's signature), and 26 oral history interviews totaling a little more than 20 hours.

Collection 307, Christian Films and Videos: new material has been added to this collection, including the inventory of a Christian film rental business. . The 300+ films added were made by small Christian companies in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. These movies were intended to be rented out mainly to churches and reflect Protestant evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity of the mid-20th century. Subjects include dramatizations (some for children and some for adults) of stories from the Bible or about living the Christian life, and a wide range of presentations on then-contemporary social and political issues, such as World War II refugees, the threat of communism, race relations, the Christian and politics, attitudes toward rock and roll, and the origins of the Jesus People movement. Many of the films are aimed at teenagers.

Collection 546, records of the American Messianic Fellowship. 1887-1987. This new collection includes annual reports, audio tape, correspondence, legal

documents, log books, minute books, newsletters, photograph, and prayer books documenting the AMF (formerly the Chicago Hebrew Mission), one of the leading Jewish evangelism ministries in the United States.

Collection 563, Papers of Robert E. Coleman. 1936–2010. This collection contains correspondence, manuscripts, oral history interviews, class lecture notes, meeting files and other materials relating to Robert E. Coleman's ministry as an evangelist, scholar and church leader. Besides Coleman's own life and ministry, the collection contains voluminous material on the theology of evangelism and Christian discipleship, American 20th century Evangelicalism; the growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in regard to the training of clergy; Billy Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; Asbury Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Trinity Evangelical University), and American Methodism.

Collection 654, Ephemera of Byang Kato. 1962–1996. This new collection brings together photocopies of essays, theses, articles, tributes, tracts and sermons written by or about Rev. Kato, a Nigerian theologian and the first General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). These materials were gathered by Dr. Christina Breman as resources for her dissertation.

To learn more about the BGC Archives, its holdings, or to view its 2009/2010 annual reports online, go to: www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/ar/2009-2010/cover.html

RECENT DISSERTATIONS

Alafaci, Francesco. "The Extreme Right in Australia with Particular Reference to Protestant Christianity, 1945 to 2001." University of New South Wales, 2011.

Baines-Walsh, Laura Kathryn. "Adopting to Dixie: The Southernization of Nineteenth-Century Lutherans in the North Carolina Piedmont." Boston College, 2011.

A young Billy Graham (l.) with two unidentified friends on the campus of Wheaton college, ca. 1940 (courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives).

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Carter, Heath W. "Scab Ministers, Striking Saints: Christianity and Class Conflict in 1894 Chicago." *American Nineteenth Century History* 11:3 (September 2010), pp. 321–349.

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A sign advertizing an evangelistic campaign featuring NFL lineman Bill Glass, Greenville, MS, 1969 (courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives).

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A Sunday School in Holcombe, WI gathers for a group portrait, 1909 (courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Archives).

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