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BILLY GRAHAM AND HIS RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON US POLITICS

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Abstract: The role of religious leaders in the United States is analyzed in the article. Features of Billy Graham's influence on the social, social-political life of the country. Impact and cooperation with US presidents. Features of Billy Graham's activities.

Key words: Billy Graham, politics, religion, US, church, society

JEL: F50, F59

Introduction

The influence of Billy Graham and religion in general on state church relations has been explored by many foreign scholars. One of the most prominent researchers of Billy Graham's work is Grant Wacker, who has published several works including "America's Pastor" and "One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham"¹ in which he has collected personal interviews, previously unpublished photographs, and other material, not only the positive aspects of Billy Graham's work but also some of the contradictions of his work.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the work of Billy Graham and its impact on politics and state - church relations in the United States.

1 Billy Graham and politics

Billy Franklin Graham is a special phenomenon in American political and religious life, who has combined the pastor of a Baptist church, a television and radio presenter, a member of the largest Baptist community of the Southern Baptist Convention, and what is quite controversial, paying attention to the United States Constitution (Where the founding parents had drawn a clear demarcation line and created a model of separation of state and church) was the spiritual mentor of the US presidents (Lyndon Johnson, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, met Barack Obama).

2 The role of a religious factor in the United States

The media called him the "pastor" of America. That is important in a country where a large percentage of citizens are deeply religious and more than half are Protestants and the southern states are called the "biblical belt" of the country (Table 1).

¹ GRANT WACKER. One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham (Library of Religious Biography. Eerdmans (September 10, 2019). 256 p.

Table 1: Religious affiliation in the United States of America.²

Christian	70.6%
Evangelical Protestant	25.4%
Mainline Protestant	14.7%
Historically Black Protestant	6.5%
Catholic	20.8%
Mormon	1.6%
Orthodox Christian	0.5%
Jehovah's Witness	0.8%
Other Christian	0.4%
Non-Christian Faiths	5.9%
Other Faiths	1.5%
Unaffiliated (religious "nones")	22.8%
Atheist	3.1%
Agnostic	4.0%
Nothing in particular	15.8%
Don't know	0.6%

From Table 1, we can analyze that Americans are a deeply religious nation. Religious sermons have a significant influence on it. Uta Andrea Balbier also noted this in his research. Uta Andrea Balbier in his study «Billy Graham's Crusades in the 1950s. Neo-Evangelicalism between Civil Religion, Media, and Consumerism» pay attention to certain features of the period when Billy Graham's influence gained momentum.

First, it was the period after World War II and the start of the Cold War, the nation was seeking a new identity, relations between national communities and religious communities were rethinking, and evangelical Christians were developing a new understanding of themselves as a Christian community.

Secondly, during that period the media was on the rise, opening new channels of advertising. According to the author, Graham understood this and used it as a mechanism to spread his sermon.

Third, Graham focused his actions on what he understood to be a "consumer" in the 1950s. He became the "leader" of the religious awakening of the 1950s.³

3 Impact on US Presidents

During the presidential election, he refused to support J. Kennedy, who appealed to Billy Graham to support him, and convinced U.S. citizens that Catholic affiliation would not be a postulate and dogma for him if he held the office of president of the United States, and religion would not have influence on his political decisions. But Billy Graham refused, and as a result, support his opponent.

The "warm relationship" of Billy Graham and the American presidents is an acknowledgment of his influence, as they wanted to establish "friendly relations" with him. Including:

- Lyndon Jones;

² RELIGIONS. [Electronic resource] / Access mode: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

³ UTA ANDREA BALBIER. Billy Graham's Crusades in the 1950s: Neo-Evangelicalism between civil religion, media, and consumerism. [Electronic resource] / Access mode: https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GHI_Washington/Publications/Bulletin44/bu44_071.pdf

- Ronald Reagan;
- George W. Bush, who invited him to spend the day at the White House and the next day US forces began bombing Iraq. J. Bush also noted that after Billy Graham visited his home in Maine, he thought about his faith and began to take it seriously;
- Bill Clinton, before the inauguration in 1993, asked him to say a prayer on it;
- J. Carter stated that he treated Billy Graham as his advisor and that he "made a huge impact on my life";
- Following the death of Billy Graham, US President Donald Trump noted that "Great Bill Graham has died."⁴

These examples are just some of the cases that prove the weight of Billy Graham's figure in the American political space. But what was most important was his influence not on the political elite of the country, but on the Americans themselves.

4 The role of a religious factor in the United States

He is one of the first religious preachers to use television and radio broadcasting as a marketing ploy that has made good dividends, as result millions of followers not only in the United States but around the world. How could a simple "California farmer's son" be catapulted to the top of America's social hierarchy as a religious leader. He began his journey with the fact that he headed an educational institution. Another important element in its formation was radio - the weekly preacher air, called "The Hour of Solution", began with a 60-year cycle in 1950, delivering Billy Graham's sermons to every American's home.

It is worth noting that the turning point came in 1957 when Graham began a 16-week "crusade" in Madison Square Garden, prompting television services to broadcast it. Subsequently, his television performances garnered an audience of about 215 million people. According to professor of Christian history Grand Wecker in the work "Billy Grahem's America" his charisma shrouded people.⁵

Although it received considerable influence and dividends from its activities, the books fees alone amounted to about \$ 33 million. He led a rather modest life, for which he was repeatedly praised.

Conclusions

By ignoring theological terminology and including the "simple guy" without formal theological education, he succeeded in attracting more masses to his theological rhetoric. He was also an ardent opponent of racism, which affirmed his affection for African Americans, and he often showed through his widely publicized ways his friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr.

Billy Graham's purposefulness and neutrality combined with the development of television in the United States - the "new American obsession." He performed on the top channels of the time. Billy Graham's tactics went beyond the simple preaching of the Gospel, which gave the Americans a deeper understanding of "America's first pastor."

⁴ BILLY GRAHAM, 99, Dies; Pastor Filled Stadiums and Counseled Presidents. [Electronic resource] / Access mode: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/21/obituaries/billy-graham-dead.html>

⁵ GRANT WACKER. Billy Grahem's America. Church History. Vol. 78, No. 3 (Sep., 2009), pp. 489-511.

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