

Religion and American Culture Conference slated for 2009 in Indianapolis

In celebration of its upcoming twentieth anniversary, the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture announced in September that it will host the first “Religion and American Culture Conference” June 4-6 in Indianapolis.

After consulting with leaders in the field of American religious studies for several years, the officers of the Center and *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* have determined to sponsor biennial conferences to gather scholars from various disciplines to share their work and discuss the major issues in the field.

“We’ve talked about doing this for perhaps six years now but waited to see whether the traditional societies would address the big issues facing scholars who study religion in North America from humanities and social sciences perspectives,” said Philip Goff, director of the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture.

Meetings of most academic societies are bound by paper and panel proposals that focus on recent research, leaving very little room for discussion of the pressing issues within the field. “What we plan to offer is a conference that deals with research and analysis, to be sure, but focused tightly on the big questions that often unite or divide us,” explained Goff. “Never has a better understanding of religion’s role in society been more important, yet we rarely get to that place where we can converse about the underlying issues for more than a ninety minute session.”

The conference will be planned around a series of crucial topics that define aspects of the study of religion in America, such as cultural vs. structural explanations, and historical vs. ethnographic approaches. A variety of forms will be utilized—panels, debates, plenary talks, and a few traditional paper presentations will constitute the

sessions. In a number of cases the papers will be circulated prior to the meeting in order to move more quickly to discussion. All sessions will be formed by invitation, as Center officers work with scholars across the country.

“The purpose of these meetings will be to deepen our understanding of each other’s work within the larger context of comprehending the relationships between religion and American society. My hope is that this will strengthen our teaching and improve our research. By allowing for an extended discussion about such weighty matters, I hope the quality of the annual meetings of traditional societies will be increased,” said Goff, who has spent the past two years as co-chair of the North American Religions Section of the American Academy of Religion. “The last thing I want to do is replace the important work of our societies. Biennial meetings of this sort should supplement and deepen those meetings.”

Some of those who have been around since the early days of the Center found this development somehow familiar. The Center began after hosting a series of meetings through the mid-1980s that gathered scholars of American religion in Indianapolis to discuss the large issues then governing the field. “Several people have shared with me their excitement about these meetings reigniting the engines that propelled the field forward twenty years ago,” said Goff.

The meetings seem then a fitting tribute to both the generation of scholars who developed new models and approaches to studying American religion two decades ago and those new scholars who are carrying the field forward today. Further details of the Religion and American Culture Conference will be made available in January on the Center’s web site.



Downtown Indianapolis



Running Deer sculpture at Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, downtown Indianapolis



Lucas Oil Stadium, new home of the Indianapolis Colts, located downtown Indianapolis

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Religion & American Culture:
a Journal of Interpretation

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Young Scholars in American Religion

The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at IUPUI announces a program for early career scholars in American Religion. Beginning in April 2009, a series of seminars devoted to the enhancement of teaching and research for younger scholars in American Religion will be offered in Indianapolis. The aims of all sessions of the program are to develop ideas and methods of instruction in a supportive workshop environment, stimulate scholarly research and writing, and create a community of scholars that will continue into the future.

Dates: Session I: April 2-5, 2009
 Session II: October 15-18, 2009
 Session III: April 15-18, 2010
 Session IV: October 14-17, 2010
 Session V: April 28-May 1, 2011

Seminar Leaders:

W. Clark Gilpin is the Margaret E. Burton Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Christianity and Theology in the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is a historian of Christianity who studies the cultural history of theology in England and America since the seventeenth century. Among his works is an intellectual biography of Roger Williams, the seventeenth-century advocate of religious liberty. A more recent book, *A Preface to Theology*, examines the history of American theological scholarship in terms of the theologian's responsibilities to a three-fold public in the churches, the academic community, and civil society.

Tracy Fessenden is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Arizona State University, specializing in western religious traditions, religion and literature, and American religious and cultural history. Her recent work focuses on religion, race, gender, and sexuality in American cultural history, on the relationship between religion and the secular in American public life, and on questions of religion and violence. She is author, most recently, of *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*.

Eligibility: Scholars eligible to apply are those who have launched their careers within the last seven years and who are working in a subfield of the area of religion in North America, broadly understood. Ten scholars will be selected, with the understanding that they will commit to the program for all dates. Each participant will be expected to produce a course syllabus, with justification of teaching approach, and a publishable research article. All costs for transportation, lodging, and meals for the seminars will be covered, and there is no application fee.

To Apply: Applicants must submit a curriculum vitae with three letters of reference directly supporting their application to the program (do not send portfolios with generic reference letters) as well as a 500-word essay indicating 1) why they are interested in participating, and 2) their current and projected research and teaching interests. The deadline for applications is 15 October 2008. Essays, CVs, and letters of reference should be sent to:

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 Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, IUPUI
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Center Hosts Symposium on Evangelicals—Then and Now

Dr. Grant Wacker, professor of Christian history at Duke University and president of the American Society of Church History, spoke at the Center on September 12th as part of a day-long symposium dedicated to understanding evangelicalism from its resurrection in the mid-twentieth century to today's complicated picture.

Wacker's public talk, entitled "Exporting the Soul of Dixie: Billy Graham and the Expansion of Southern Culture" discussed the reasons behind the great evangelist's rise to global prominence and his enduring role as American icon. From his youthful good-looks to his insights as elder statesman, Graham grew along with American culture and in doing so both shaped it and was shaped by it.

That afternoon, twenty-five of the Center's Research Fellows met to continue the conversation. Candy Gunther Brown and Arthur E.

Farnsley II offered initial comments to start the roundtable discussion devoted to modern evangelicalism. Dr. Brown is an associate professor of religious studies at Indiana University-Bloomington. Growing out of her earlier writings on sanctification, she has turned her attention to divine healing practices. Currently at work on two monographs based on archival and ethnographic research, Dr. Brown argued that, among other things, we must view modern evangelicalism through the lens of globalization and healing. American conservative religion is markedly more influenced than in the past by immigrant Christians who were evangelized in the twentieth century with Pentecostal and charismatic ideas of sanctification and physical healing. Any picture of modern evangelicalism in America that fails to understand this will be missing an integral part of the picture.

Arthur Farnsley, Director of Public Teaching at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture and adjunct faculty in Religious Studies at IUPUI, is also Executive Officer of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. His books have been on Southern Baptist Politics, the role of congregations in faith-based welfare reform, the



Grant Wacker, Professor of Church History, Duke Divinity School

ways religion shaped Indianapolis, and congregational response to community change. His most recent work has been on the religious and political views of the "very independent," focusing on flea market dealers. Farnsley pointed out that, depending on the perspective on takes, modern evangelicalism could be increasing, losing, or simply maintaining its grip on public power. If an evangelical is someone with beliefs in an authoritative Bible and personal relationship to Jesus Christ (as most pollsters believe), then the number of evangelicals is growing. However, common evangelical rituals are fading in the face of new styles, which might denote an important sea change in conservative Christianity.

Their comments were followed by more than an hour of animated discussion among more than two-dozen scholars.



Sylvester Johnson (IUB), Candy Gunther Brown (IUB) (Center Research Fellows) and Chris Coble (Lilly Endowment)



Art Farnsley (IUPUI), Center Research Fellow and Director of Public Teaching

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*Religion & American Culture:
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Volume 18, Number 2

Racial Identity and the Civilizing Mission: Double-Consciousness at the 1895 Congress on Africa
by Paul W. Harris

"Terrible Laughing God": Challenging Divine Justice in African American Antilynching Plays, 1916-1945
by Craig Prentiss

"It is a Day of Judgment": The Peacemakers, Religion, and Radicalism in Cold War America
by Leilah Danielson

Review Essay: Where the Action Is—Law, Religion, and the Scholarly Divide
by Sarah Barringer Gordon



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INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS

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7:00-8:30 p.m.
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