

The Big Tent

Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, and the transformation of American evangelicalism.

by Peter J. Boyer August 22, 2005

...Graham had figured out how to triangulate American Protestant Christianity.

Graham consolidated that effort nearly fifty years ago, when he opened his first New York crusade, on the evening of May 15, 1957, at the old Madison Square Garden, at Forty-ninth Street and Eighth Avenue. He described himself that night as “fearful,” and, indeed, there was much at stake. It wasn’t a question of Graham’s establishing himself as a national religious figure; he’d already been on the cover of *Time*, had preached to Queen Elizabeth, and had become a pen pal of President Eisenhower. Graham and his team had every reason to expect a successful crusade. The organization’s fabled promotional machine was fully operational, as evidenced by the extensive coverage accorded the crusade by the New York press. The *Herald Tribune* let Graham write a daily column on his reflections on the revival. Nearly a third of the campaign’s initial budget, of a million dollars, was allotted to advertising and publicity, and the old Garden filled to capacity every night. What was at stake for Graham in that first New York crusade was the evangelist’s final break from the fundamentalist wing that had formed him, and his hope of advancing a new evangelicalism that would survive, even thrive, in the cultural mainstream.

This primer on fundamentalism and evangelicalism and the catalytic role evangelist Billy Graham played in the emergence of the new evangelical in the 1950’s is excerpted from an August 22, 2005 article by Peter Boyer from “The New Yorker.” The entire piece can be read online at

http://www.newyorker.com/archives/2005/08/22/050822fa_fact_boyer?



The events that brought Graham to that moment, and to a subsequent bittersweet triumph in New York, had huge consequences, including the marginalization of fundamentalists and the steady withering of the mainline denominations. It is largely because of Graham’s bold course that evangelicalism—a heterogeneous multid denominational movement estimated to number more than fifty million born-again followers, with best-selling books (the “Left Behind” series), megachurches, and the nation’s President, George W. Bush—has attained its current place in American culture as the center of gravity of Protestant Christianity.

In 1918, when Graham was born, to a moderately prosperous Presbyterian farm family in North Carolina, American Protestantism had been a unified faith for fifty years. There were doctrinal differences among Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians, but the mainline denominations, to which most Americans belonged, shared an orthodoxy that, in contemporary terms, might be called fundamentalist. Most professing Christians believed in the divine inspiration and literal truth of the Bible; the divinity of the Virgin-born Jesus Christ; the vicarious atonement by Jesus at the Cross for a fallen mankind; Christ's bodily resurrection; and the validity of Biblical miracles. There once was, in that sense, such a thing as the Christian nation, for which some religious conservatives still pine.

But the fin de siècle had brought a growing acceptance among educated people of Darwin's theory of evolution, which challenged providential creation; the discipline of "higher criticism" asserted human authorship of Scripture; scholars investigating the "historical Jesus" emphasized Christ's humanity rather than his supposed divinity. In 1907, Henry Adams, recalling the era of his childhood, wrote that "in essentials like religion, ethics, philosophy; in history, literature, art; in the concepts of all science, except perhaps mathematics, the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900."

Some theologians, first in Europe, then in American seminaries, assimilated the new thinking and reinterpreted Christianity accordingly. Central to the "modernist" theology was the immanence of God; that is, the notion that the divine will of God could be seen in the progress of man on earth. In this view—the moral-spiritual companion to evolution—mankind was essentially good and wholly perfectible, and would eventually progress to the achievement of God's kingdom on earth. At first, most American Protestants were only vaguely aware of the modernists, and within the denominations, especially the Presbyterians and the Baptists, they were aggressively opposed to modernism. An influential series of books called "The Fundamentals," published between 1910 and 1915, laid out the case for Christian orthodoxy, and provided a body of argument for the opponents of modernism—who came to be called fundamentalists.

The fundamentalists succeeded for a time, but by the nineteen-twenties the modernists, though a distinct minority, had gained influence in the schools and the ecclesiastical machinery of the denominations. As Kevin Bauder, a fundamentalist theologian and the president of the Central Baptist Theological Seminary, in Minneapolis, puts it, "The result was, for a period of about twenty years, there was all-out war in most of the major Protestant denominations."

In the course of that "war," a Manhattan preacher named Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered one of the most consequential sermons ever preached from an American pulpit. Fosdick, a Baptist minister raised in the old orthodoxy, found his faith transformed by a study of the orthodoxy's hindrance to the progress of mankind. Fosdick was hired as the preacher at the First Presbyterian Church on West Twelfth Street, and on May 21, 1922, he delivered his defense of the modernist case.

Liberal Christians, he said, have assimilated as part of the divine revelation the exhilarating insight which these recent generations have given to us, that development is God's way of working out His will. They see that the most desirable elements in human life have come through the method of development. Man's music has developed from the rhythmic noise of beaten sticks until we have in melody and harmony possibilities once undreamed. Man's painting has developed from the crude outlines of the cavemen until in line and color we have achieved unforeseen results and possess latent beauties yet unfolded. Man's architecture has developed from the crude huts of primitive men until our cathedrals and business buildings reveal alike an incalculable advance and an unimaginable future. Development does seem to be the way in which God works. And these Christians, when they say that Christ is coming, mean that, slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions.

Fosdick's sermon, which he titled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," posited that "multitudes of reverent Christians," among whom he counted himself, saw the Bible as a human record of the progressive unfolding of God's will, not as the literal Word of God. On the "vexed and mooted question of the virgin birth," Fosdick explained, it was "one of the familiar ways in which the ancient world was accustomed to account for unusual superiority" of a "great personality." The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, Fosdick said, was an artifact of early Christian hope, explained by the fact that "no one in the ancient world had ever thought, as we do, of development, progress, gradual change, as God's way of working out His will in human life and institutions."

To the fundamentalists, Fosdick was guilty of rank apostasy, and the following year J. Gresham Machen, a young theologian at the Princeton Theological Seminary, the citadel of Presbyterian orthodoxy, published a book called "Christianity and Liberalism," in which he argued that a theology that denied Christ's divinity and doubted the Bible wasn't Christianity at all but, rather, a distinct and separate religion. As such, Machen argued, liberal theology had no proper place in the Christian seminary or in the Christian pulpit. That reasoning became the defining logic of the fundamentalist movement, and prompted an effort by the Church's national body to force the New York Presbytery to affirm the fundamentals of the faith from its pulpits. The issue was bitterly disputed at the national convention, with Machen's position being argued by the bedrock fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan. One of Fosdick's fiercest allies was the liberal pastor Henry Sloane Coffin, of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. The resolution was passed, Fosdick left First Presbyterian, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., built him a new place in which to preach: the Riverside Church, in Morningside Heights, completed in 1930, which became the home cathedral of liberal theology and social activism.

Machen's formulation—that liberal theology represented a false religion that could not coexist with the true faith—had a scriptural basis in the Apostle Paul's warning to the new Christians in Corinth to steer clear of apostates. ("Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.") This separatist impulse, however, carried the risk of schism and eventual marginalization.

At the Princeton Theological Seminary, the faculty was soundly orthodox through the nineteen-twenties, but it was divided on the question of whether the Church should accept liberals in its midst or turn them out, as Machen insisted. In 1929, after Princeton added members to its board who were sympathetic to the liberal movement, Machen left, and founded a new school—Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia.

The “modernist controversy” soon roiled the missionary field, where Christian missionaries like Pearl Buck were confirming the redemptive promise of other faiths. Machen lost the battle to purify the missions, and he left the Presbyterian Church in 1936 to begin a new, militantly orthodox Presbyterian church. Among hard-line fundamentalists, separatism itself became a doctrine of faith, which required “second-degree” separation even from those Christians who held to the traditional orthodoxy but declined to leave their error-stained churches. Once fundamentalists parted from the mainstream, there was nowhere to search for error but among themselves, where much error was found. (One Baptist group separated on the doctrine that only the King James translation of the Bible contained God’s pure word.) Within months of its founding, even Machen’s new church suffered its own schism, as, eventually, did the new splinter sect.

In the midst of these convulsions, the 1925 prosecution, in Dayton, Tennessee, of the biology instructor John Scopes for teaching evolution actually served to put fundamentalism on trial. Clarence Darrow’s ridicule and humiliation of the aging William Jennings Bryan was so effective that fundamentalism, born in theological counterrevolt in Princeton, New Jersey, gained a lasting image of Dogpatch theology. By 1940, it had become an uprooted, disputatious, and contracting faith.

With the Protestant establishment now solidly liberal—more liberal than its congregations—and fundamentalists ever more strident and fractured, there remained a vast body of believers who were faithful to the traditional orthodoxy but felt increasingly untethered. By the nineteen-forties, a group of churchmen had emerged who were the theological kinsmen of the fundamentalists but who were embarrassed by the movement’s excesses. They did not share the obsession with separation, and many wished to remain loyal to their denominations and to fight the modernists and liberals from within. Among these was Harold Ockenga, the pastor of the Congregationalist Park Street Church, in Boston. Ockenga had been a student of Machen’s at Princeton, and he had followed when Machen established his own school. But Ockenga became one of fundamentalism’s severest critics, castigating its self-created impotence. “Fundamentalism has lost every major ecclesiastical battle for twenty years,” Ockenga said in a sermon. “Their plan is division in every denomination and every church where Modernism or error appears. The absurdity of division ad infinitum has become apparent.”

Ockenga and other like-minded Protestant conservatives undertook the hard work of forging a new movement, which they called the New Evangelicalism. They built seminaries that prized intellectual rigor, where coherent apologetics could be written and young ministers formed in the conservative theology.

The New Evangelicals saw no reason that the work of social justice should be abandoned to the preachers of the “social gospel” in the liberal churches. In “The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism” (1947), one of the new movement’s founding figures, Carl F. H. Henry, excoriated fundamentalism’s failure to address the world’s social and intellectual needs. A key reason for this failure was the widely held belief among conservative Protestants in the doctrine of premillennial dispensation, which holds that the present age (“dispensation”) might well be the last before Christ’s return to establish a thousand-year reign on earth. This glorious culmination would be signalled by the “rapture”—the lifting up into the clouds of Christ’s living faithful—and a seven-year period of tribulation endured by those left behind. The terrible trials of humankind, in this view, might well portend the joyous conclusion of God’s long drama of humanity.

The New Evangelicals didn’t reject premillennialism or abandon the core tenet of traditional Protestantism—salvation by faith alone. Rather, they proposed that Christians should undertake good works, as evidence of their faith, and engage the secular culture.

By the end of the Second World War, which had effectively demolished Harry Emerson Fosdick’s assurances about the perfectibility of man, the two camps within Protestantism’s conservative wing stood ready to contend for the spiritually hungry. What was needed was some force to galvanize revival, some new voice to renew the mighty faith.

The vessel into which both the fundamentalists and the New Evangelicals ultimately poured their hopes was Billy Graham. His faith, enunciated in that singular Carolina stage English, was unlined by the doctrinal boundaries that might have excluded either wing. “I didn’t know one theological position from another,” he recently told me in New York. “I just knew that I had come to know the Lord as my Saviour.”

Graham was raised on a dairy farm near Charlotte amid flinty Presbyterians who held firmly to the tenets of the old faith, and as he made his way to his calling, and then swiftly to the first rank of evangelists, the men who influenced him were fundamentalists.

Graham’s own salvation was achieved in November of 1934, on the eve of his sixteenth birthday, when he heard an itinerant preacher named Mordecai Ham, whose hellfire revival, in a wooden-roofed tabernacle, was well into its second month. When Graham speaks of Ham now, he is careful to assert that “there are things I don’t agree with today that he said and did,” an apparent reference to the fact that Ham harbored delusions of a conspiratorial world Jewry. But those delusions would not have stood out in that particular milieu, certainly not to the young man who answered the altar call that night as a choir concluded singing “Just as I Am.” Graham was fixed on the preacher’s accusing stare, which had so unnerved him on previous evenings that he tried moving into the choir to avoid it, before finally submitting and coming forward to accept Christ.

Graham's parents rejoiced in his decision, and when he graduated from high school they prevailed upon him to put aside hopes of attending the University of North Carolina, and to enroll instead at the small Christian college run by the fundamentalist Bob Jones, in Greenville, South Carolina. To Graham, the place seemed like a reform school, with rules against speaking to girls or dallying in hallways, and curfews that were fiercely enforced by the autocratic Jones. Graham was so unhappy there that he became ill, and withdrew after one term. But, looking back, he attributes his own preaching style to what he learned from Jones during his chapel talks at school. "They were so simple, almost juvenile," Graham recalls. "But he had a power of the Lord through him."

Simplicity was the key, Graham realized, and as he began his own preaching, taking a pulpit wherever he could as he made his way through the Florida Bible Institute and then through Wheaton College, in Illinois, he seldom burdened his sermons with nuance or layers of subtext. You're a sinner, Graham preached, but God so loves you that he's given you a way to save yourself, if you'll only say yes. A Billy Graham sermon was not, in itself, the feature that distinguished his ministry; what set him apart was his uncanny ability to achieve conversions at such a consistently high rate. He'd spent a summer as a door-to-door Fuller Brush salesman, and outsold every other Fuller man in two states. Evangelism is measured in won souls, and Graham's productivity at the altar call was unmatched.

At Wheaton, Graham met his future wife, Ruth Bell, who had grown up in China as the daughter of missionaries and would become his most trusted adviser. Within a year of graduating, he had been given a church pastorate in Chicago and a weekly local radio broadcast, both of which he surrendered in order to become the chief evangelist of a nationwide movement called Youth for Christ, founded by a Chicago pastor to minister to servicemen and young people. In 1947, Graham was summoned to Minneapolis by one of fundamentalism's pioneers, William Bell Riley, who made a deathbed plea that Graham agree to take over Riley's Northwestern Schools, a complex that included a Bible college, a seminary, and a four-year liberal-arts college (now Northwestern College, in St. Paul). And so Graham became, at twenty-nine, the youngest college president in America.

Graham, whose theology doctorates are honorary, has always claimed that his greatest regret is his lack of higher education, and when he found himself in a learned forum he would routinely protest, "I'm not a theologian." That demurrer was perhaps justified. The one time that Graham undertook a serious theological inquiry, it nearly took his faith.

The source of his crisis was his close friend and fellow Youth for Christ evangelist Charles Templeton, whom Graham has characterized as one of the very few men he loved. Graham met Chuck, as he called him, onstage at a Chicago rally, and they quickly became the organization's dynamic personalities. The two young men were very different; Graham, with his rawboned amiability, was the essence of country-boy ingenuousness. Templeton seemed to have already lived a full life; a high-school dropout from a broken home in Toronto, he had made his way on his own, starting a

successful career as a newspaper cartoonist while he was a teen-ager. Templeton was Graham's equal, if not his better, as a sermonizer, though he couldn't match Graham's conviction and his power at the altar. As preachers, and as friends, they were perfect complements; they roomed together on an evangelistic tour of Europe, swanking around the wardevastated Continent in their loud suits and hand-painted ties, lifted by the promise of their shared gift.

Templeton had a burning intellectual curiosity, which played at Graham's one insecurity, his middling intellectual firepower. For Templeton, however, that searching began to have a corrosive effect on his faith, and he hoped for resolution by applying for admission to the Princeton Theological Seminary. Despite his incomplete education, Templeton was admitted there in 1948. The skeptical ethos of the school, which by then had become firmly liberal, pulled at Templeton's uncertainty, and gradually his faith began to unravel.

In the winter of 1948-49, Templeton and Graham often met at the Taft Hotel in New York, and for hours Templeton would bombard him with the new hermeneutics he'd learned at Princeton, needling him about his simple certainty. Graham would listen, and try to argue, eventually falling back on his default position—he was no theologian. As Templeton later recalled, Graham told him, “Chuck, look, I haven't a good enough mind to settle these questions. The finest minds in the world have looked and come down on both sides of these questions.”

But Graham began to have his own doubts. Modernism had given way to neo-orthodoxy in fashionable theology, and Graham started to read the leading neo-orthodox thinkers—people like Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr—with their new definitions of the divine “inspiration” of the Bible. It was a critical moment in Graham's career, because the biggest campaign of his life, a 1949 revival in Los Angeles, was looming.

On the eve of that campaign, Graham attended a fundamentalist retreat in the mountains near Los Angeles, and among the young preachers there was Chuck Templeton. He told Graham, “Billy, you're fifty years out of date. People no longer accept the Bible as being inspired the way you do.”

“He said, ‘I'm not even sure I believe in God,’ ” Graham recalls.

Graham's gathering doubt was tormenting him. “I just began to doubt certain passages in the Bible that I couldn't reconcile in my mind,” he told me.

Graham knew that he couldn't conduct a revival on such an unsteady spiritual premise, and that he probably shouldn't be heading a Christian school or seminary if he didn't believe what it proclaimed. In crisis, he grabbed his Bible one night, and headed into the woods.

“I had my Bible, and I opened it on the tree stump,” he says. “I opened it, and I said, ‘Lord, I don’t understand all of this Bible. But I accept it all by faith. I accept it.’ And at that moment I just had a tremendous conviction, and faith.”

The Los Angeles revival was a triumph, helped by a series of fortuitous events. Among the seekers who came forward at Graham’s invitation inside the six-thousand-seat revival tent (“the Canvas Cathedral,” he called it) was the radio star Stuart Hamblen, who began touting Graham’s revival on his broadcast (he also lost a cigarette sponsor by urging listeners to quit tobacco). Another convert was an associate of the mobster Mickey Cohen. William Randolph Hearst, for reasons that he never explained, gave the order to “puff Graham,” and his two dailies played the Graham crusade for every angle.

The Los Angeles campaign made Graham a national figure, and was followed by a similar success the following year, in Boston. There, one of his sponsoring churches was the Park Street Church, whose pastor was Harold Ockenga, the father of the New Evangelicalism. Ockenga had nursed doubts about Graham and mass evangelism, but Graham’s success in New England convinced him that the movement had found its voice.

One afternoon in the summer of 1955, as Graham was playing golf with the Duke of Windsor on a course near Versailles, he received a telegram from George Champion, the executive vice-president of Chase Manhattan Bank, asking him to hold a crusade in New York in 1957. Accepting the invitation, as Graham did, meant forcing the issue between the New Evangelicals and the fundamentalists once and for all. Champion represented the New York Protestant Council, the defining institution of the liberal establishment Church. The council’s sponsorship of the crusade meant Graham’s cooperation with liberal churchmen who not only purveyed adventurous theology but, in some cases, denied the very fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy.

Graham accepted the invitation precisely for that reason. He liked the New Evangelical program of engaging the culture, and, especially, of ecumenical fellowship with Christians with whose doctrines he disagreed—even including Catholics. Associating with Rome was, for Protestant conservatives, an error of the most serious kind, for reasons that were foundational to the Reformation: evangelicals believe in *sola fide*, salvation by faith alone, and in *sola scriptura*, that the Bible is the lone source of authority for Christians. But, in the years after the Los Angeles campaign, Graham had gradually decided that doctrinal differences weren’t that important among Christians. “I just loved all those people whoever they were,” Graham recalls. “They reached out for me. And I responded. I didn’t say to them, but I felt, I love these people. They’re people of God.”

There was, of course, great practical value in Graham’s ecumenism. His evangelistic enterprise, based in Minnesota, had branched into publishing, broadcasting, even films, but the core of it all was the crusades, and mass evangelism, as Graham practiced it, required a broad base of local support. “Because Bill was true to his conviction, and didn’t criticize people who maybe didn’t believe theologically like the others did, but he

accepted them all with love, there was a greater willingness to cooperate together,” Cliff Barrows, who has been Graham’s music director and master of ceremonies since the organization was started, says. “We wouldn’t have had some of these great citywide meetings that we’ve had if he hadn’t done that.” It was an arrangement that benefitted all parties. Typically, the Graham people would send an advance team to stay in the city a year before the event, and they would persuade local churches to promote and help organize the crusade. In return, Graham’s organization would assiduously direct harvested souls into the local churches.

In New York, the Protestant churches were in urgent need of new life, which is why the council had extended its invitation to Graham, despite much reluctance in the liberal establishment. Reinhold Niebuhr, dean of the Union Theological Seminary and the most prominent theologian in the United States, actively opposed the Graham crusade in New York. Graham’s message, Niebuhr wrote in *Life*, tended to “negate all the achievements of Christian historical scholarship.” Niebuhr worried about “life’s many ambiguities,” and concluded that Graham’s message—Jesus as the answer to life’s problems—was “rather too simple in any age, but particularly so in a nuclear one with its great moral perplexities.”

Graham, still seeking intellectual respectability, tried to meet with Niebuhr, certain that he could change the theologian’s mind, or, at least, temper his criticism. Niebuhr refused to see him. “I had such great respect for him,” Graham says now.

Graham’s 1957 Madison Square Garden campaign, which had been scheduled to run for two months, lasted nearly the entire summer, culminating in a rally in Times Square, in September, before a crowd the size of a New Year’s Eve throng. Later that year, Harold Ockenga declared that the new moderate movement had indeed found its voice—“Billy Graham, who on the mass level is the spokesman of the convictions and ideals of the New Evangelicalism.”

To the fundamentalists, however, Graham had become Belial, an Old Testament term embodying godless evil. One fundamentalist has written that Graham, in meeting with the liberal church leaders, “was actually locking himself into a room with the Devil, because these men were certainly the Devil’s ministers.” Key fundamentalist leaders, such as John R. Rice, the publisher of the fundamentalist periodical *Sword of the Lord*, had kept their claim on Graham until his New York “compromise,” as the conservatives called it. “It was an obscuring of the very boundary of Christianity itself,” says Kevin Bauder, of the Central Baptist Theological Seminary (the descendant of the seminary that Graham once headed at Northwestern Schools). “What he was doing, from a fundamentalist point of view—from my point of view—was taking religious leaders who had no legitimate claim, properly, to the name Christian, and he was saying to the world, ‘These men are good Christian leaders.’ And, in doing that, what he was doing, I think, was obscuring the importance of the very Gospel that he was at that time preaching. I think that what Dr. Graham did, and what the Neo-Evangelicals did, is the worst thing a Christian can do.”

Graham was deeply troubled by such criticism at the time, but looking back he says, “It doesn’t bother me too much anymore.” In fact, he had begun to redefine himself as “a theological conservative but a social liberal,” as he terms it now. The social liberalism of the New Evangelicalism appealed to Graham, and even Niebuhr allowed that Graham had “sound personal views on racial segregation and other social issues of our time.” At that New York crusade, Graham invited Martin Luther King, Jr., to the platform to lead an opening prayer, introducing him as a leader of “a great social revolution going on in the United States today.”

Such gestures alienated many conservatives. “Dr. Graham has declared emphatically that he would not hold a meeting anywhere, North or South, where the colored people and the white people would be segregated in the auditorium,” Bob Jones said, “and I do not think anytime in the foreseeable future the good Christian colored people and the good Christian white people would want to set aside an old established social and religious custom.”

Graham had embarked on a long, inexorable march to the middle, from which he never retreated, and through the years he has progressively softened his views, even on matters touching on core doctrine. As early as his 1949 Los Angeles campaign, when he’d emerged from his battle with doubt, he had decided that Hell was not necessarily a bottomless pit of fire and brimstone but the everlasting punishment of “separation from God.” He has stopped worrying about whether pagans are cut off from salvation, and has even come close to syncretism, suggesting that devout believers of other faiths have found ways of “saying yes to God.”

Dogmatic fundamentalism had been consigned to the margins, and, with the culture wars and the eruption of international terrorism, the very word became anathema. Even Bob Jones III, the president of the university founded by his grandfather, suggested in 2002 that fundamentalism drop the name. “Instead of ‘Fundamentalism’ defining us as steadfast Bible believers, the term now carries overtones of radicalism and terrorism,” he wrote. “ ‘Fundamentalist’ evokes fear, suspicion, and other repulsive connotations in its current usage. Many of us who are separated unto Christ feel it is appropriate to find a new label that will define us more positively and appropriately.” Jones’s suggestion was “preservationist,” a term that, so far, has failed to catch on.

Liberal establishment Protestantism, meanwhile, has found itself riven by flashpoint social issues like same-sex marriage and the ordination of homosexuals. Even as overall church membership in the United States continues to grow—by fully one-third since 1960—the mainline churches have seen their numbers shrink by twenty-one per cent. The trend is noticeably evident in New York City. The First Presbyterian Church continues its ministry in the liberal tradition of Harry Emerson Fosdick, but the most vital Presbyterian church in New York is an evangelical church, Redeemer Presbyterian, that was founded in 1989 and meets in rented spaces, such as the auditorium at Hunter College. Redeemer Presbyterian was begun by Timothy Keller, a graduate of Macheen’s Westminster Seminary, as a ministry for evangelical city professionals, and has grown so prodigiously that the church actively shuns publicity for fear of overgrowth and an

influx of “church tourists.” Its Sunday meetings at Hunter attract a capacity congregation of twenty-eight hundred worshippers, and that is just one of Redeemer’s three Sunday services. The church has spun off more than a score of “plant” churches in the city and elsewhere, including one, the evangelical Emmanuel Church, that holds its weekly services in the James Chapel at the Union Theological Seminary—formerly presided over by Reinhold Niebuhr.

Evangelical churches and organizations have experienced remarkable growth—owing, in large part, evangelicals say, to the doctrinal latitude and character of moderation established by Graham and the New Evangelicals. “I think it put a friendly face on what was thought of as fundamentalism,” Greg Laurie, the senior pastor of the megachurch Harvest Christian Fellowship, in Riverside, California, and a member of the Graham association board, says. “It was appealing, it was engaging, there was a cultural connection. Yet, at the same time, it did not compromise the essential Gospel message, or the Biblical emphasis.”

It is telling that Graham, for his final crusade, chose as his New York chairman Dr. A. R. Bernard, of the Christian Cultural Center, in Brooklyn. Bernard, a former Black Muslim, began his ministry with a storefront church that has grown into a Texas-size megachurch (with a restaurant, fish ponds, and gardens) that is attended by twenty thousand worshippers each week. “We hold to Christian orthodoxy,” Bernard says. “We hold to the authority of Scripture, and we’re very conservative in our views. But we’re not antagonistic to the culture. We believe that we can be a prophetic voice in that culture, understanding that culture, adjusting to it, without compromising our convictions. For too long, Christians tended to speak in a language that only other Christians could understand.”

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