

# OpenTheo

## American History and the Historian's Task with Wilfred McClay

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Please note: Unfortunately the audio on this episode cuts in and out from time to time.

Kevin is joined by the distinguished historian, Dr. Wilfred McClay as the two of them talk about the task of the historian in being a “recording angel” of the past. After discussing McClay’s perceptive article “The Surprising Persistence of Guilt” (2017), they turn to McClay’s recent book on American History, *A Land of Hope* (Encounter, 2019). McClay talks about his conversion to Christianity early in his academic career and how that has shaped his work as a historian in mingling celebration and criticism. Finally, McClay asks for prayer as he serves on America’s official 250th anniversary committee making preparations for 2026.

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Introduction and Sponsor [0:00-2:33]

Personal Histories [2:34-9:09]

The Strange Persistence of Guilt [9:10-15:14]

Land of Hope [15:15-21:27]

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250th Birthday of the USA [43:01-51:28]

### Transcript

(upbeat music) - Greetings and salutations, welcome to Life and Books and everything. I'm your host, Kevin DeYoung, and I'm gonna introduce our guests in just a moment, but I wanna welcome you to all of our listeners. Glad to have you with us, and as always,

thank our sponsor Crossway, and today I want to mention new book by Dustin Benj, the loveliest place, the beauty and glory of the church.

That seems like a timely book to reflect upon the glory and the beauty of the church. Obviously, the church always has imperfections, but to reflect on the loveliest place. So this is a new book just coming out this week from Crossway by Dustin Benj, B-E-N-G-E, probably seen the name before, the loveliest place.

So thank you to Crossway, and our guests, I'm really, really excited about. I've read a number of his things, and in particular, the book that we're gonna talk about in just a moment, Dr. Wilfred McLean, we'll go with Bill, since he's a humble scholar, and we're gonna talk about his book, Land of Hope, and Invitation to the Great American Story. There's too much bio here to really do Dr. McLean justice, but he's currently the Victor Davis Hanson Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization at Hillsdale College.

If you never heard of Hillsdale, you should look it up there in southeastern Michigan, wonderful Christian liberal arts school for many years before that. He taught at Oklahoma. He serves on all sorts of boards of directors, ethics and public policy center, senior fellow at the Trinity Forum.

He's written lots of books, and received numerous awards, lots of articles as well, and first things in other places. His book, The Masterless, Self in Society in Modern America, 1994, was winner of the 1995 Award in Intellectual History from the Organization of American Historians. So he's a very well-respected, accomplished historian, and very grateful Bill to have you on.

So welcome to the program. - Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to be with you, and as you know, because we talked a little bit before the interview, I'm admired.

We recently acquainted with an admired. - Well, thank you. - Although, you know, you did think, you know, you did scrape the bottom of the barrel and getting me on, but that - - Well, no, no, no.

I'm very, very pleased to have you on. I wonder, before we talk about history, if you can give us a little personal history, tell us where are you from, and a few of the places you've been, how you got to Hillsdale recently? - Yeah, well, I was born in the Midwest. I was born in Illinois, but grew up in Maryland.

I sort of think of myself as being from both places in a way. Maryland was the age of five on, really. I got all my education in Maryland, both college, went to St. John's College in Annapolis, and then Johns Hopkins involved two more different institutions, which are defined.

St. John's, the people, a place where you're discouraged from reading secondary scholarship. - Yeah, right. - You know, you're encouraged to read the text and confront

even brand, the great, Doyan, Doyan asks if that's the right term of St. John's.

Said, "If you have a long introduction "in your book, rip it out." - Yeah, the idea was to encounter the text correctly, and mediate, and then Hopkins is based on the model of research university of the 19th century, at the first set in the United States. It's retained a lot of that extremely professional period. But it wasn't the place you went about your intellectual curiosity, or building off of the future.

Although I managed to build my intellectual curiosity 20, and more importantly, I met my wife. - That's very good. - But everyone says Hopkins, then it's more than redeemed, I get memories.

So yeah, and actually one thing, I think your listeners may be, I was not brought up in the church. I did have a sort of relationship with the Presbyterian church. It's a verna park Maryland, which some of your listeners may be from there.

And it, but I never was confirmed by parents where I think my mother in particular is in the process of losing faith, that just, this has a happy end. And so I wasn't really brought up in any of that. Like the St. John's, that I started taking the Bible seriously, and started reading Aquinas and Augustine, and Anselm, and Kierkegaard, I'm destroyed.

- Oh really? - And Kierkegaard and Dremel, oh yeah. Changed the way I thought about the Bible. And so I, it still was not a Christian.

I would look at, I'd say, I can't affirm those things. I mean, I don't even know what it means to affirm. There was a slow process.

I went into academic life. I taught at Lane University in Berlin. And it was at Tulane that I had serious, converted experience of, so it was happening in all places in the Episcopal church.

- People don't get converted there. - Wow. - That's right.

So it's my main and angling on and off. I'm actually, there was a period of time, which I was at CA, as with very happily so. In Maryland back.

- What church was it? - I lived there for a while on a sabbatical. And we were looking after my mother. - Okay.

- Stroke. So anyway, that's kind of, it's a big part of my task as a joyful, an interesting task, but has been to take an essentially secular formation, intellectual formation, and try to sort of do a Romans 12, kind of rethink of all of it in either the renewal of my mind. I'm still working on it.

I still, people, like, I'm just assuming you had an early and profound formation in the, I am actually less envious than I used to be. I'm still envious, but I do think I have one gift,

see the world as the unbelieving. See, I can really grasp.

It was very hard for people who brought up in the faith, see the world as those who don't, just don't believe it just doesn't. - Yeah. I get that.

- Yeah, that's a real gift. And I think it comes through even in your writing, which is really clear and scholarly, but very accessible. And we have a few overlaps.

We didn't talk about this. I was born in Illinois. I was born south side of Chicago.

And I got married in Maryland. My father-in-law who's now with the Lord, he was a Navy chaplain. He was working at Bethesda, lived in Annapolis.

My wife's parents went to PCA church in Saverna Park. - Well, that's a great church. - Yeah, we got married in Laurel.

- Right. - Glen Park, it was a pastor. I always thought of him as the reincarnation of Jonathan Edwards.

He was such a great pastor. - Yeah. - Wonderful.

- Yeah, so, and I mentioned I was in East Lansing for 13 years. And Hillsdale was, you know, hour and a half down the road and I think very highly of it. I actually, before we get into your book on American history, one of your pieces, I've quoted you many times and I have given you credit for it, but you've showed up in sermons.

- My name is Peton Féloné, and say, "Great, the things of friends are common." - Oh, well, thank you. But it's your article from 2017, in the Hedgehog Review, The Strange Persistence of Guilt. It's been really helpful.

You wanna say something about what prompted you writing that article and what it was about? - It was something, it was really a one-off in a way. I was intrigued by this very, the very question that the title puts forward. Is it why? Why does it, is so much of, I'll tell you the moment that the idea where it began to crystallize was when I was at Tulane and we did a search.

And at that time, there was not a single black person on the faculty at Tulane, which was a disgrace and not something you could easily sort of slough off onto other considerations. So there was enormous amount of pressure on the history of the part, the higher somebody. It's the right pigmentation and cultural background.

I don't wanna visualize it. I actually, even though affirmative action has been on balance, a bad thing, I think it has accomplished many good things. It's a whole discussion.

But anyway, we got to the point where I was the one conservative part. And then when I became a Christian, that was even worse. So I was this sort of person of no account and

being very junior at all.

But all my colleagues got into fighting about who was the more liberal and who was showing implicit racism in their attitudes about this candidate or that candidate. It was just an astonishing spectacle of all of us wanting the same thing. We all wanted to sort of break the color barrier and I'd hardly no doubt about good intentions.

Faith, a very wonderful world. But it devolved into this show. Everyone accusing one another of being insufficiently woke would be in the term now.

But it made an enormous impression on me. I thought, this is something that's driven by very powerful things that have a moral component to it. And that the people involved in it are not even a bear.

So it got me thinking and it just is one of those things you think about for years, it wasn't on my end of the path. Kevin, I'm so glad you mentioned it now because I'm just pivoting towards, I wrote that article in the hedgehog and got a huge response. I mean, there were, I got lecture invitations from Australia to it on the basis that it was partly because David Brooks wrote it out and yet some New York Times.

It goes out and there was some other people. So it hit all those channels. But it was just ahead of the, you see 2017, I mean, maybe it wasn't the head of like, certainly was not through the peak tide of wokeness that has now engulfed us and were trying to make sense of.

And by the way, I would normally talk about it. I think it's a bit of work. Right.

And there are genuine more, a lot of things I tried to bring out that are genuine moral issues. I don't ridicule my students who are not from sense that if on environmental issues, I talked about that a really sort of, in a way, don't have any right to exist because they're pardoned for adding the problem, they're consuming other living things which is unjust, even if it's plants. I mean, you know, you should, if you don't, if you have a sort of vestige, a Christian conscience, biblical content, but no way of dealing with or expiating the understanding, understanding sin as part of the human condition, you are in a very bad place.

Yeah. And that's what was so important about the article. And it came out in 2017 and I referenced it in some lectures I gave about the Reformation and about the ongoing importance of Luther and justification because as you said, we're not done with guilt.

In fact, we're a wash and guilt. You go online, Neopuritans, that gives Puritans a bad name, but there's guilt everywhere, but your point was, we have a basic Christian conception of being guilty, but we don't any longer have the Christian mechanism to atone for that guilt. So it's the worst of all worlds.

Yeah, it really is, it really is the worst of all, that's well put. I may steal that from you. With that tradition though.

No, no. Yeah. So anyway, I was actually decided I was going to write a book about it, and I started working.

And then along came this, I really was approached about doing this textbook in American history because of it. And in a funny way, it's in perfect with guilt theme. I had felt this was going to be a complete diversion, but I finally was stopped into doing it.

And it really ended up being a book that attempted to account for our many national sins and transgression in an unwhite wash done, and it's probably the wrong term. Yeah. And unshiver coded way.

But within a larger perspective of what's magnificent in our history and what is possible yet, and that hope, a hope in as many acceptations is really at the heart of it, that there is something special about America in this sense of possibility. That in our times of greatest discouragement and woe, this is sense that we can change it and change our world. And just as the people who came here decade after decade, that century after century believed that they didn't have to be condemned to the conditions of their birth.

And that's, I think, is fundamental in American searching as your life. So, yeah, well, I, I, I had a hard time getting started on it because I find why I recall it, it went to the beach in the summer and I was, I was staying there that we'd never done. It's too much.

And we left early, but I, as I mentioned, right, three or four pages, ridiculous, but that time was crucial to calibrate away from the academic style, to writing something that is really meant to be directed at regular general readers, Americans, and although the target audience was high school students, I always thought of it as they're having something more, sort of more of a reach. And so in a way, I'm not that surprised that the main readership of the book, so far has been adults. People look at the age of 30 for the age of 50, maybe even, but it's finding its way in the school and I'm happy.

Well, what I wanted to do was to make it, is that also to be very, very approachable, readable. So that's actually very hard because-- - That's true. - You know how it is, in your historian, your theologian, you always wanna explain everything, partly to show to the learned audience, hey, I know about all that stuff, right? - Yeah, yeah, I read that book, okay, I know what I'm talking about.

- Yeah, yeah, and then my footnotes are big there. But partly because you do sense the complexity of the subject, and you wanna reflect, you can't indulge either one of those things, writing a book like Land of Hope. They have the courage to leave things out and know that people are gonna say, where's this, where's it, what, what, what, and you don't say enough about this, about the Lithuanian coal miners in East Kentucky.

You know, okay, let that out. - Yeah, that's right. - Well, one of the things that I really appreciate about, and you've hit on it already, you know, the title Land of Hope, An Invitation to the Great American Story.

Some people, given our cultural moment, would say, oh, how dare you, Land of Hope. Do you know, don't you know all of, don't you know, what we did to the Native Americans, and don't you know Jim Crow? But what I appreciate is, you obviously do know those things, and you, I have a mark here, you talk about, you know, the Trail of Tears, it's just one of the most shameful episodes in American history. So you don't, as you said, you don't sugarcoat it, you don't pretend that, for America to be a Land of Hope, is a Land of Perfection or anything close to it, and it's not just a clearing of the throat, yeah, yeah, yeah, we did some bad things, and yet, you do a very good job of holding together a basic cohesive story around this theme that it's a place that people have wanted to come to because there's possibilities, and at its worst, it's an inconsistency with itself.

It's a self hypocrisy, that there are noble ideals, there are real rooted virtue in the American experiment from 1776, that 1619 is not the real genesis of, of course, that matters too, but from Lincoln to MLK, they were always looking back to the founding, and to the importance there, and the ideals there. There's actually some of the Southern Confederates who said, no, no, no, we don't really believe in that founding story. No, the mainstream has been, there's an important story to be told about America, and I think you tell it so well, because you don't pretend that it's all good, and yet you don't go to the other end and say, well, now we can't do anything but self-flagellate.

I've said before, we've moved away from hagiography to hamartigraphy, that being the word for sin. All we can tell is the story about our sins, not as saints. So how did you think about doing that? Because that's when I've recommended the book to people often, that's what I've really been struck by, is how you tell a story of hope without pretending that there aren't really ugly spots in the story.

- No, I mean, I do think you have to have, you have to have a perspective that's outside, you've gone through graduate study and history, and you know what I'm talking about, it's hard to communicate to others who haven't had experience, but there really is a way in which, first of all, graduate school is an enormous piece of an instrument of conformity that people come out of it, and it really has to, there's a lot of talented writers, historians who will name it, and it's conversation, and that you have to kind of divest yourself of what you learn. Now, it's not that it wasn't a value, it's sort of monomaniacal in its obsession with all time, how Martia, and I love that word, did you invent that? I mean, that's-- - As far as I know, I did. - Yes, yes.

- How about the martigraphy, yes. - Okay, that's my second step. - Yeah, well.

- No, that's wonderful. And you have to, there's a professional deformation almost involved in the field. And you're not saying something, if you're not writing a

dissertation, some way critical of America or white America, I know.

And in some ways, the being critical is more important than the affirming of the other. I love a dissertation that works at Rescue African American writers from obscurity. It's really hard to bring America's coming out with a bunch of rights that nobody's ever heard of, and they're not really all of the highest order, obviously, part of it.

But that kind of thing I'm willing to undergo, I'm overextension on that, in the name of something, covering positive legacy, and not aware of it, or more generally, we're not. But it's the taking, it's the sort of making white, I was told the other day that someone called staff at the National Council and these now, sort of being, fighting, fighting this, a kind of major theme. This to me is just, it's ridiculous in addition to being not very productive.

So I think you have to take the critical elements for what's their worst. You have to simplify it, someone, you have to read Howard Zinn's book, People's History in the United States, was probably the most popular text out there. And then, realized, well, there's a difference in saying that Columbus was not a man, there was a man of his heart.

It was not a saint to making him into a deep, right, up to the entire country. This is wrong, actually, it's wrong in terms of, larger sort of historical judgment. But you have to, and I think someone else that, I think people have appreciated it, that I try to be generous towards the past.

I try to, in a way, that something like the 1619 Project, seemingly ungenerous and indentuous in its depiction of, but I don't even want to pick on that, 'cause that's very typical. There's just a sense that people the 17th century are whatever, the biggest century. I all right should be held standard of the present.

And if their statues are the city square, have been sitting there, on the cost of time to bring them down. It's time to, you know, how can we admire someone like Jonathan Edwards that mentioned before, right, and own brush with the institutions. How do we admire Frederick Douglass, the great black American, just a great order to, has been out of it, if his statues was torn down, the insufficient weapons right, and it was deemed by the present.

- Famously spoke at Hillsdale. - Oh yes, yes, yes, we have a statue of him right by my office. - Yeah, this is.

- And he's buying every day. - Not many places have statues of Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, Ronald Reagan, I forget which other, Winston Churchill made it. - Margaret Thatcher, yeah.

- Margaret Thatcher. Yeah, no, it's in Madison. And then there's a sort of anonymous civil



war soldier.

Yeah, and in Hillsdale was from the very beginning and been women and people of all weeks. - Founded by abolitionists, right? - Yes. So, we're very proud of that here.

And, but generosity to the past. You know, Jefferson, for example, I think very complicated man, inconsistent man. It's, what I'm trying to, I don't really do this, I try to find a test.

That in some way, we should admire him for his inconsistencies because he at least had, there was a revolution in moral sensibility taking in the West on this issue. And he got the, he understood the revolution or the ideational part of that. What he couldn't do is bring his life into public.

And, you know, this is a very human problem. But I also say, and this is, I think this is part of being a good historian is to know when to quit, historicizing. And, we're talking about the, you know, the anxious assertion of the 1619 project that slavery and anti-Black racism is in our DNA.

Just a stupid thing to say about it. Sure, it doesn't have DNA. Our culture has inertia made.

And it doesn't have, they, but the thing is, who are we given the, the in harmony in our way to be critical? I mean, we float on the ocean of consumer, cheap consumer goods and cheap everything in the Western world because of a whole class of people in, on the other side of the world, you'd never see. Of course, enslaved. In every meaningful sense of the word, slavery hasn't disappeared from the world.

It's, it's, it's, it's been made illegal. That doesn't, that doesn't mean it's, a country like Mauritania, 25 or seven, according to the Constitution. But why is it in our times obsessing about 400 years ago? And there was a problem right now.

That's right. We can actually do something about it. And the scale, actually arguably of our, our complicity in Chinese slavery is so much more than, than the Atlantic slave trade.

You know, just in terms of numbers in terms of the, the kind of, you know, the, the gross, economic. That's right. And we've just gotten through.

I didn't mean to get off on this, but I think it's a big deal. No, no, it didn't. Why? We lose perspective when we obsess over the past.

And it's not as if the past is a bunch of minor peccadillos. I'm not saying that. It's horrifying.

But slavery has been a feature of human civilization, you know, in most places. It's the

rule rather than the exception that Sean LeLence is his wonderful book on why the constitution not gross slavery makes this point that it, the remarkable thing is a society that preys itself from this skirt. And that really begins to try to live out an ideal of, of equality, which I think for us, all really means seeing image of God in every single.

That's right. And there are real important theological intersections. You mentioned image of God.

You also talk about in your book, you talk about the founders and their basic views of humanity and how they're, were shaped, whether implicitly or explicitly by Calvinist, Augustinian views of the human person. It was not a Rousseauian view of humankind that's basically good and human nature's malleable and civilization corrupts. No, it was a view that, you know, famous Federalist Papers 10 or 51, ambition needs to be made to counteract ambition because government is not run by angels.

And I did my historical work is my one beef with the book. I'm not sure if you mentioned John Witherspoon or not. - I don't.

I don't. - I love that. - Keep baby if not it.

- Yeah, that's okay. So I did my PhD on Witherspoon and so I'm in focus more on his Scottish career, but certainly he had in effect a very direct impact on Madison, the father constitution. - Oh yeah, absolutely.

- So that Wither Madison was, you know, what sort of Christian he was remains to be seen, but certainly a basic distrust of the human person unfettered from any other constraints. And I think that really shapes too how we do history and what we expect to find in history. So like you said, when we do history, American history or any kind of history, they're not just minor Picadillos.

It's not just, yeah, yeah, a few mistakes. I mean, they're really egregious sins because human beings are really egregious sinners and it's not at all to placate those sins, but we should go with the expectation that there's gonna be a lot of sin here. And so the question is always, not just how were people, but how were they compared to others or how were they compared to their time or what were the known alternatives to acting the way that they did? We can all say, well, we wish they would have acted like people in 2022.

Well, in some ways that would have been good and they would certainly look a scans at us in some ways that we don't act like we're 1776 or whatever the year is. So if we have a proper anthropology, we shot, we should look at the past expecting, of course, when you have millions of people over hundreds of years, whether you call it an American history, white evangelicalism, whatever you wanna look at, you're gonna have a lot of bad things to deal with. But the question is, what did they see as their own motivation?

What were the options available to them and how did they understand themselves and how do we try to fairly, you say at the end here, this line, was it from Butterfield about the historian is a recording angel, not a haunting demon? - Hanging judge.

- Yeah, yeah, from Herbert Butterfield, not a hanging judge. And so you said, "While I try to be objective, "I've not claimed to be neutral in all respects, "there's a crucial difference." So you say, "This book is offered as a contribution "to the making of American citizens, "a patriotic endeavor, as well as a scholarly one." But you say two things, celebration and criticism, and those are not necessarily enemies. And I think any one of us, whether official historians or just erstwhile interested people trying to make sense of the past, should keep those two things in mind.

Do you sense, you're a professional historian, I'm not, but do you sense that we've really lost the plot on this with kind of the guild of historians? I mean, it's-- - Yeah, oh yeah, I do. I do think we have. And I think that the guild has sort of decided that there is no plot.

- That's a good way to-- - There's a good way to-- - The story of sub, the plots of subgroups, which one of my teachers at, I'm not high enough. In the early, as seeing America as a more pluralistic society, when he wrote an information, this very raspy guy himself, he had a great sense of empathy. For the end of his career, he wrote an essay in which he-- You know, this is really getting out of hand.

You know, the story of the subgroup, and I forget how he put it. The story of the subgroups has no meaning apart from the larger story. You know, the pluralist needs the uno.

- Yeah. - To be pluralist rather than just a scatoration of things. And it's a profound, simple, found point.

And I think it's going on in the heat. I think he was at the end of his career. He would never have said this publicly.

I had a conversation. And some regrets about it, had unleashed. There was one other attempt to build a bar of Harvard, being much more pitched at fellow historians.

It was an attempt to sort of tell the whole of it. I don't really-- I don't think it really seems to me. So I-- In the end, she's too dubious about the story to be convincing.

And I say that with all, I get something in my fashion. I don't know that it's repeated. I think, you know, you-- And the story is, in some ways, when I use this word without a majority of intent, a myth, a myth being something, well, what are the things I say in the introduction? And here, what are you reading? America's an aspirational country.

And you don't understand that. You don't take that into account in your pound of a mirror. You're missing a whole dimension.

And so the people who pound away, it's very tiresome. And the idea that American exceptionalism-- this is the preliminary idea of American exceptionalism. Look, I don't actually care that term American exceptionalism.

But I think, you know, who was it? It was the sociologist Robert King Merton, I think, that the social facts are real, even if they are only believed to be real. In other words, you have a whole society of people who believe in the exceptional character of society. It's a fact.

It becomes a fact. It's a fact in our makeup. This is what I've been talking about.

Yes, a myth is not a false, not a lie. I mean, I'm very much in the tradition of Lewis and Tolkien, on race, that is saying-- - True myths, yeah. - Yeah, there are true myths.

And there are myths that are yet to be fulfilled. There are a kind of roadmap of the land that unexplored, yet to be explored. And they're aspirational in character.

I think that-- and this is true in our individual lives. I think one way to make some of this barrier is to ask a bit about the nation. And the gosh, there's so many things to say about that.

But you mentioned the balance of affirmation and criticism, celebration. And I do have a point in the book where I say, don't we do this in our personal relationships? Doesn't a good relationship, good friendship, good marriage, depend on the ability to both affront and to criticisms and accept criticism, accept affirmation. Sometimes people have trouble doing that.

But accept those things in the balance. Just as in the life of the church, celebration and repentance-- - That's right. - Are both art of art of God are, I mean, a very sense.

And it's it frees us from the conflict of our senses. What it costs for celebration. - That's right.

- So there's a balance of these things and that criticism would exit about redemption. 'Cause how many at the unful is, just to say, it's not a very fruitful enterprise. - Well, no, and the people, they're dead.

They can't repent. I don't believe in post-mortem repentance. We can't change what they've done.

And I like, just go back to the point you made about the myth, the story of America. If the only story we tell is celebration, well, that's not honest. But now if the only story we tell is denunciation.

And the irony is, you point this out, I won't grab it, but I underlined it, both at the front and at the end of your book. You talk about American patriotism has typically been

different than blood and soil kind of nationalism. And the irony is, if people want to just break down unrelentingly any sort of story of America as a land of hope, the alternative to bring people together is going to be blood and soil.

That's, it's not gonna be an aspiration. It's not gonna be an idea. It's not gonna be the best of the Western and the Christian moral tradition.

But it's gonna be what we're seeing now. It's going to be increasingly smaller and smaller identity groups. Because we have to find belonging.

We need to be, we all wanna be a part of something bigger than ourselves. And that's one of, I think, the real dangers in continuing to pound away without any balance to it. The forces on lease are not just going to be, you know, academic annoyance.

They're gonna have real world effects where people realize. And if somebody said, if you don't like, if you didn't like the religious right, wait till you see the unreligious right. It's gonna be a lot worse.

- Yeah, I think Rod Dreier said that. - Yeah. - Yeah.

- Yeah. - No, it's coming, it's here. And so I think, you know, I think really, and we can recover this balance that you and I are talking about.

- So I know you got a hard stop. You got a stop coming up. Can I ask you, because I don't know when I'll have you, again, and you're on the planning committee for the 250 year anniversary, right, for the country? - I am, I am.

- Can you tell us any, don't divulge any secrets, you know, are you building another Statue of Liberty or, how's that going? Is this gonna be a good endeavor? - It's going badly because people, you know, there's a sense that this ought to, but some of the, it's a very political committee, you know, the members of the commission are selected by the sort of top figures in the Congress. You know, I was selected by Paul Ryan and others. You know, I actually think there's a core of us that Heather, recognize that we're all sort of in this boat together, but there are definitely people who want to have sure.

So I think we haven't had, we had a whole discussion, I think two hours or so about whether or not this event should be regarded as a celebration, a commemoration, a mere sort of marking of the date. And I, my book was published shortly after we had this discussion and I decided to show up at the meeting with, you know, 30 copies of the book and give them out there. - Well, good.

- The chair of the commission was so grateful. I said, I wanna be about 15 minutes or so, squeeze it into the meeting and talk about it. So I use that, hey, folks, if we don't, this is a celebration, now we are introducing the will and the needs of the American people.

And we also are being blind to the extent to which this country, with all of its faults, has been a beacon in human history. And that was very well received. And I think everybody was happy to get a party favor copy of my book, but that hasn't lasted.

I think actually the election may, that the previous presidential election, they have some beaver, getting the Democrats go home to finally up. But it hasn't really given them any focus. We're, so I'm a little discouraged at the moment.

And, you know, we now have this sex harassment thing that has come up that is, I have no idea what it's about, or whether it has deeper causes. I would ask your audience to pray. - And that's a good question.

- That's a good question. - It's a terrible commission. We need your prayers.

I accomplished that. Can I, I'm gonna run over my own time with the time. - So you do.

- Point I've tried to make my fellow comments. Let's not think as the occasion where we have to settle all the scores and say who was right in America history. Think of it instead as one of these big family reunions where every member of the Smith's clan from all of the the Shining Sea and all, they all come together in this very crowd.

And there aren't people on different sides of the party. Who are not speaking. And there are divorces.

There are, you know, all kinds of missingness of life. And they're all kinds of argument, who was right and who was wrong. Let the arguments continue.

They will anyway. - Right. - But instead, let's come together and say, okay, we're big, oral some bunch when we are the Smith family.

And now country is not a family. I know all these analogies that's an analogy. But I think it's a pretty darn good thinking about, you know, that we don't have to decide whether we are all now favorite favorite gay marriages or all now in favor, you know, right to work or whatever.

We don't have to decide. What we have to do is just pause for a moment and say, thank God for what we have. - No, that's-- - And what we've been given.

- Really well good. - We're the imperfect people of the past. And maybe be judged more gently than we are now judging them.

- That's right. Now, that's a wonderful analogy. It's a great way to end too.

And, you know, a family reunion, or we've all been to, you know, I remember going to my grandparents 50th wedding anniversary. And you're there. And if all of the siblings and grandkids and aunts and uncles are all fighting over their politics and guys, this is not

what this day is about.

You can do that on some other days. And so that's true as we approach the 250th anniversary of the country. And it's just a good way to look at life, whether it's history or not.

There are times certainly to duke it out, but so often in the internet just instills this in us. - Yes, I-- - And I feel like so much of the historiography has become this. It's never the wedding anniversary.

It's never the family reunion. It's always in adjudication before the tribunal. - And, and, it's never sent a worship either.

- That's right. - You're talking about a quality of mine that can set aside whatever the antagonism of the moment is to say there's a larger context here. There's something larger, you know, I'm really about worried about my kid or I'm really worried about my car or, you know, putting a new roof on the house or whatever.

- Thinking about that Sunday morning, and, and, and sitting in the pew and listening to you preach, that, that, that's a whole different, and in a way that ability to set things aside and name of some buyer, or at least more, inclusive, more abstract. - Yeah. - That's exactly what you're talking about.

I mean, that, that 50th wedding anniversary, the big family, you know, we need that ability as human beings to say, to have, to give ourselves a Sabbath from our everyday cares. - That's, that's well put. - And, and that's why God laid out the plan for us all we need to follow.

- That's right. - That's right. Let me mention again, for our listeners, the land of hope, here it is very nicely done.

Is it in paperback now? - It is in paperback. And also, I, I do want to make a pitch week. We are coming out with a young reader's edition.

- Yeah. - Just for middle school and younger, we think fifth graders can handle it. - It's a great resource.

Adults can read it. So I, I read it. It's published by encounter books.

They did a nice job. It's well laid out. There's other sorts of resources.

So please check that out. Wilford McLean, land of hope. He has many other books and articles.

And boy, I hope that one place or another we can sit down and talk and maybe miles with. Maybe even Daryl Hart will let me in the room and we can, we can do that. - I just

had dinner with him last night and he was in, he was very pleasant.

- Well, good. - That always helps with. - Oh, well, yeah.

That's right. - You talk John's Hopkins talk. (both laughing) - Well, thank you so much.

- We will do that. - And maybe we'll get your son up. - Yeah.

Wonderful. Thank you so much. - All right.

Bye bye everybody. - Until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever and read a good book.

(upbeat music)

(upbeat music) (buzzer buzzing)

(buzzing)

[buzzing]