12-16-2009

Professor Available To Discuss Impact Of Oral Roberts

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Recommended Citation
Wright, Lori, "Professor Available To Discuss Impact Of Oral Roberts" (2009). UNH Today. 293.
https://scholars.unh.edu/news/293

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DURHAM, N.H. – Michele Dillon, religion scholar and professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire, is available to discuss the significance of Oral Roberts in the U.S. evangelical movement. Roberts died Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2009. He was 91.

According to Dillon, Roberts was one of the most visible public faces of the evangelical movement and, notably, was very influential in evangelical circles decades before evangelicalism came to the fore in the political and cultural debates of the 1980s and since.

"He was a pioneer in seeing the religious and cultural influence that can be wielded through television broadcasting. His television shows began in the early 1950s and thus set the scene for the televangelism that is now such a significant part of U.S. politics and everyday life," Dillon says.

"Bringing religion to television also furthered the evangelical view that established Christian denominational churches were not the only or even the most relevant or legitimate sites of worship. One could have a personal relationship with Jesus from within the privacy of one's home -- abetted by television preachers -- but independent of any particular church," she says.

According to Dillon, there is increasing evidence of this autonomous attitude in U.S. society today, irrespective of whether one is evangelical; 16 percent of Americans report no religious denominational affiliation even though most, nonetheless, believe in God/Jesus.

"Oral Roberts also saw the importance of linking evangelicalism to the education system. He founded Oral Roberts University in the early 1960s in Tulsa, a pattern consolidated and used with perhaps greater political effect by Jerry Falwell. In short, Oral Roberts's legacy is substantial and will continue through the various ministries still operating in his name," she says.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

PHOTO
Michele Dillon, religion scholar and professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire
http://www.unh.edu/news/img/dillon.jpg