

2017

"A Babe in the Woods?": Billy Graham, Anticommunism, and Vietnam

Daniel Alexander Hays

Eastern Illinois University

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"A Babe in the Woods?":

Billy Graham, Anticommunism, and Vietnam

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BY

Daniel Alexander Hays

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Eastern Illinois University

**“A Babe in the Woods?”:
Billy Graham, Anticommunism, and Vietnam**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Humanities
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History

by
Daniel Alexander Hays

Charleston, Illinois

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Contents

Figures.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Evangelical Anticommunist Crusader	10
Chapter 2 Presidential Beginnings with Eisenhower and Kennedy	35
Chapter 3 Escalation with Johnson	67
Chapter 4 “There is no American I admire more than Richard Nixon”	107
Conclusion	155
Archival Collections	161
Bibliography	162

Figures

1	Graham preaches to thousands at his 1949 revival in Los Angeles.....	25
2	Graham and Kennedy smile for the camera at the 1961 Presidential Prayer Breakfast	60
3	Graham preaches to troops during his 1966 Christmas trip to Vietnam.....	94
4	Graham speaks to troops in Da Nang during his second tour of Vietnam.....	101
5	Graham and Nixon bow their heads in prayer at the 1970 Knoxville crusade	131
6	Graham preaches at Honor America Day while protesters stand in the Reflecting Pool	136

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on famous evangelist Billy Graham's role in the Vietnam War, both as a public supporter and private advisor. It argues that, contrary to his self-depiction, he was no "babe in the woods," no mere neophyte or bystander. Rather, America's most famous preacher was an active participant in promoting and even planning the war. Graham's evangelical theology, with his premillennialist beliefs, led to his intensely anticommunist worldview, where communism was the Antichrist. His public support buttressed the presidents prior to and during the Vietnam War and, sometimes, Graham even delved into policy recommendations for the war.

Graham's role in the Vietnam War spanned four presidencies. Beginning with Dwight D. Eisenhower, Graham encouraged the president to strongly respond to the Vietminh victory at Dien Bien Phu. After openly opposing John F. Kennedy in the election of 1960, Graham listened to the president's views on Vietnam and publicly derided communism. Graham grew increasingly intimate with both the presidency and the Vietnam War during the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson. At the requests of Johnson and his generals, the evangelist made two trips to Vietnam, returning both times strongly in support of the war. With his close friend Richard Nixon's ascendance to the presidency, Graham advised that Vietnamization was the key to victory in his "Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War." In addition, while he publicly gave lip service to being apolitical, Graham organized massive events that provided veiled support for Nixon and the war in Vietnam.

This thesis builds on and contributes to the work done by historians on the influence of religion in American foreign policy, notably Jonathan Herzog and Andrew Preston. In addition, it details a side of Graham that is largely absent from or glossed over by the religiously oriented biographies of the famous evangelist.

Introduction

A few years after the end of the Vietnam War, famous evangelist Billy Graham stated, “The whole question [of Vietnam] became a very difficult gray for me. I was just privy to too many conversations on both sides. I would listen to General Westmoreland, Abrams, Zumwalt – I was like a babe in the woods, I didn’t know what was really going on. And then I’d listen to others.”¹ Graham could have mentioned multiple other government officials who kept him informed on the situation in Vietnam: Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon to name a few, although this would have detracted from the detached “babe in the woods” image that he sought to project.

Graham’s actual conduct during the Vietnam War belies any effort to portray himself as a mere bystander. Through its entirety, Graham remained an extremely vocal proponent of the war as a defense against communism, never bending despite the war’s growing unpopularity. Graham promoted the war as a necessity through his public rhetoric on the subject in speeches, crusades, sermons, and radio talks. He urged the public to maintain strength against the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) and People’s Republic of China’s (P.R.C.) communist threats by supporting the war. His rhetoric on communism and Vietnam frequently bordered on apocalyptic. In private, Graham prayed for, listened to, advised, and supported the presidential administrations involved in the war.

This thesis argues that Graham’s religiously influenced anticommunist beliefs and his harsh rhetoric in support of these beliefs led to a strong stance on Vietnam that both influenced and was influenced by Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. Graham was intimately

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¹ Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 432.

involved in politics during the Vietnam War through his friendships with these various presidents, and he served as a policy advisor for both foreign and domestic decisions. Through his relationship with the White House, Graham consciously influenced U.S. foreign policy.

Graham was and still is a political figure. From his bumbling entry into the political sphere during Harry Truman's presidency to the current administration of Barak Obama, Graham forged relationships with every U.S. president. However, Graham's relationships with Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon were special because they show his transition from simply being a mentor to and supporter of the presidency to a political advisor closely involved in presidential administrations and their policies. Beginning with his conversations with Kennedy on the Vietnam War, Graham continued his participation when Johnson assumed the presidency after Kennedy's assassination. During Johnson's presidency, Graham visited Vietnam multiple times to support the troops and evaluate the situation with his own eyes. He used these trips to support the war publicly and further involved himself in the administration's policies. After Nixon's victory in 1968, Graham's role in American politics reached its zenith because of his close personal friendship with Nixon. Graham continued to support Nixon and the war, in the midst of the bombings of Cambodia and scandals of Watergate, and, like Nixon, the preacher experienced a fall from glory as the administration's sins were revealed to the American public and Graham realized the need to stop involving himself so deeply with the presidency.

Billy Graham's role as pastor and advisor to Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon served the charismatic preacher well. Graham earned a reputation as a powerful and influential

religious figure and political player. As this thesis will demonstrate, Graham's Christian theology drove his anticommunist beliefs. His strong rhetoric against communism and the U.S.S.R and the P.R.C. led to his support for the controversial Vietnam War and the presidents directing it. In an interview with *Christianity Today* on January 4, 1974, in the midst of the Watergate scandal and the final phase of the painful Vietnam War, Billy Graham stated, "I have said things to various presidents that could be construed as political advice. I'm not so quick anymore to make political judgements."² At the time, and later in his life, Graham realized the unseemly aspects of a pastor so intimately involving himself in politics and foreign policy, so he repeatedly denied or minimized any role in either. Yet Graham was clearly impelled by his evangelicalism and strong anticommunism to embroil himself in the administrations of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. He was not some unwilling or naïve participant; he was a willful and active member of these administrations and their war in Vietnam.

Organization

Chapter 1 provides a biography of Billy Graham from his birth up to his Los Angeles revival in 1949 and places him in the context of Christian fundamentalism and the rise of evangelicalism. This chapter also details Graham's theology; specifically, his postmillennialism and evangelicalism, and how these beliefs interacted with his view of communism. Chapter 2 describes Graham's first close presidential relationship with Dwight D. Eisenhower, including the start of his friendship with Vice President Nixon and his opinions on the fall of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. In addition to Eisenhower, this

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² Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Center Street, 2008), 228.

chapter covers the Kennedy administration, where Graham's role was largely in opposing Kennedy in the 1960 election. Chapter 3 details Graham's relationship with Johnson, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, and the escalation of Graham's support for the war, as seen in his multiple visits to Vietnam. Chapter 4 analyzes Graham's most politically involved relationship ever with a president: Richard Nixon. This includes the evangelist's policy proposals for the Vietnam War, his public events that supported the war, and his comments on Watergate. Finally, this chapter concludes with his lesser relationship with President Gerald Ford and Graham's comments on the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Historiography

An outgrowth of recent interest in culture and ideology, and the influence of religion on U.S. foreign policy, especially during the Cold War, is an area of rising interest to scholars. Indeed, it has become something of a trend. Historians such as Jonathon Herzog, Seth Jacobs, Philip E. Muehlenbeck, and Andrew Preston, have published significant works positing religion as a deep shaper of attitudes and worldviews that had a profound effect on U.S. policy. This thesis builds on their studies of religion's effect on U.S. foreign policy by focusing on the influence of Billy Graham during the Vietnam War.³

Even with this increased interest in what Herzog termed the "spiritual-industrial complex" where America experienced a deliberate resurgence of religion in society

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³ Jonathan Herzog, *Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, ed., *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); and Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).

during the Cold War, Graham largely has escaped the attention of scholars, although multiple books and articles have been written about him.⁴ John Pollok, a Christian author and Marshall Frady, a journalist, have both written biographies on Graham that focus on his religious influence in American society, although they are largely forgiving of his conduct in the Vietnam War.⁵ Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, both editors for *Time* magazine, co-wrote *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House*, which is an excellent narrative of Graham's relationships with various presidents.⁶ However, Cecil Bothwell, a journalist and politician in Asheville, North Carolina (close to Graham's current home in Montreat), has accused Gibbs and Duffy of treating the preacher too softly. "[Gibbs and Duffy] gently poke at the preacher for his back-room political dealings, carefully skirt his advocacy for war, offer him unearned praise for his leadership on civil rights and wrap it all up as a warm-and-fuzzy paean to his love and faith," lamented Bothwell. This may be because of their association with *Time*, a magazine founded by Henry Luce, a strong anticommunist and Graham supporter. Bothwell himself wrote a book on Graham, entitled *The Prince of War: Billy Graham's Crusade for a Wholly Christian Empire*, which strongly, and often unfairly, attacks Graham's entire career.⁷

Academic studies on Graham exist, although few in number. William C. Martin, a professor emeritus in sociology at Rice University, wrote *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story*, a work focused more on Graham's religion, with politics as an

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⁴ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 6.

⁵ John Pollock, *The Billy Graham Story: The Authorized Biography* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); and Frady.

⁶ Gibbs and Duffy.

⁷ Cecil Bothwell, *The Prince of War: Billy Graham's Crusade for a Wholly Christian Empire* (Asheville, NC: Brave Ulysses Books, 2007), 11.

afterthought.⁸ Richard V. Pierard is perhaps the best scholarly voice on Graham. Pierard, a former historian at Gordon College, has published two excellent articles on Graham and politics, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency” and “Billy Graham and Vietnam: From Cold Warrior to Peacemaker,” in addition to coauthoring a book with Robert D. Linder entitled *Civil Religion & the Presidency*. Although Pierard’s works are substantive, they are fairly dated, published in the 1980s before the availability of much of Nixon’s presidential materials (his library opened in 1990).⁹

David Aikman, a former *Time* journalist and historian, wrote *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence*, a book which provides fine coverage of Graham and U.S. presidents.¹⁰ More recently, historians Stephen P. Miller and Grant Wacker have published works on Graham’s influence in society and politics. Miller’s *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, firmly situates Graham in a regional context and depicts the bastion of his supporters in the south. Wacker, a religious historian at Duke University, authored *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*, arguing that while Graham did not affect public policy, he did shape Americans’ perceptions of the world.¹¹ With most of these scholarly and popular sources, the focus is largely on Graham’s religion, role as a pastor, and influence in American society. There is a gap in the historiography on Graham’s role in the Vietnam War and this study seeks to contribute to the existing historiography by rooting Graham’s anticommunism and

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⁸ William C. Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: Quill, 1991).

⁹ Richard V. Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency” *Journal of Church and State* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 107–127; Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam: From Cold Warrior to Peacemaker,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 10, no. 1 (June 1980): 37–51; and Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion & the Presidency* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1988).

¹⁰ David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

¹¹ Stephen P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Grant Wacker, *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

support for the Vietnam War squarely in his evangelical vision of God's plan for the world. Without an understanding of Graham's intense postmillennial worldview, centered on his Christian faith, there can be no understanding of the role he sought to play at the highest level in U.S. international relations.

Secondary sources on the presidents, of course, abound and Graham is featured infrequently in them. Thomas Carty, author of *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign*, and Shaun Casey, author of *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*, document Kennedy's victory over Nixon in the 1960 presidential election; a race that Graham was intimately invested in.¹² Paul Keith Conkin and Robert Dallek's excellent works on Johnson accurately depict his administration and friendship with Graham.¹³ Stephen E. Ambrose's three volumes on Nixon show excerpts of the relationship that Graham had with the president.¹⁴ Finally, Ambrose's book on Eisenhower and Douglas Brinkley's work on Ford provide needed analysis on the administrations that serve as the bookends of this thesis and show Graham's initial foray into presidential friendships, as well as the changes in his relationship with the presidency after the Vietnam War and Watergate.¹⁵

Finally, because of Graham's prominence, general books on religion in American life depict him as a major influence on American Christianity and society. George M.

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¹² Thomas Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Shaun Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹³ Paul Keith Conkin, *Big Daddy from the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986); and Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); and Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery, 1973-1990* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

¹⁵ Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); and Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Times Books, 2007).

Marsden, emeritus professor of history at Notre Dame, wrote *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, which discusses the hardline anticommunist position of fundamentalists during the Cold War, the similarities between evangelicals and fundamentalists, as well as the break between these two sects of Christianity in the middle of the 20th-century. Although Graham is featured in Marsden's book, the work largely focuses on the unique rise of fundamentalism in the early 1900s, before Graham was an international figure.¹⁶ Randall Herbert Balmer, author of *God in the White House, a History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* and professor of religion at Dartmouth College, provides religious portraits of each of the presidents studied in this thesis. Like Marsden's work, Graham is not the focus of the book, although he is portrayed as a strong religious influence on the presidency.¹⁷ Finally, Balmer, Wacker, and Jon Butler, an emeritus professor at Yale, coauthored *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, which provides background information on Graham and the rise of evangelicalism. These authors argue that religion is "at the heart of the American experience" and posit Graham as an important shaper of this experience.¹⁸ Most of the works on 20th-century American Christianity acknowledge the influence that Graham had in forging evangelicalism, but do not detail the influence that Graham's evangelicalism had on the presidency.

Although multiple sources exist on Billy Graham's life and religious values, few source, other than Bothwell's diatribe, provide an in-depth narrative and analysis of

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¹⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Randall Herbert Balmer, *God in the White House, a History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (New York: Harper, 2008).

¹⁸ Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Herbert Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xi.

Graham's involvement in the Vietnam War. Pierard covers this topic in various articles, but these were written before many of Nixon's presidential materials were available and Pierard does not heavily incorporate Graham's anticommunist preaching into his support for the Vietnam War. Historians increasingly are taking up the topic of religion in general, and the influence of religion, including evangelicalism, on U.S. foreign policy. No evangelical had greater influence on American leaders and their global outlook than Billy Graham. This thesis seeks to fill the gap in the historiography on Graham's relationships with Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, his anticommunist rhetoric, and its effect on policy in Vietnam.

Chapter 1

The Evangelical Anticommunist Crusader

Billy Graham, his beliefs, and his 1949 explosion into American public life with his campaign in Los Angeles cannot be understood apart from a brief history of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. In the early 1800s, in the midst of the Second Great Awakening, evangelicalism gained traction in American churches. This movement centered on the idea that a person was saved by grace alone through their faith in Jesus Christ, in addition to the beliefs that the Bible had absolute authority and that Christians had a duty to spread the gospel message; i.e. evangelism. During this period, many Methodists and Baptists traveled around the country conducting revival meetings, a format that Graham would copy over a century later. A few decades later, evangelicalism experienced another revival and numerous evangelical fundamentalist colleges were started, such as Wheaton College in Illinois. Historian Grant Wacker wrote that “by 1850, some 70 percent of Protestants belonged to one of the two main evangelical denominations, Baptist or Methodist.”¹

Around the turn of the twentieth century, disagreements between these mainline Protestant churches began to occur. These differences centered on modernist liberal theology versus fundamentalist conservative theology regarding the authority of the Bible.² The modernists believed in science and its application to the Bible, while fundamentalists believed that the Bible was scientifically and historically accurate.³ This

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¹ Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 185, 193-94.

² Marsden, 234-35.

³ Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 295.

schism widened with the Scopes Trial of 1925 where the teaching of evolution in public schools was debated.⁴ Fundamentalists and modernists also disagreed on the role of Christians within society. The fundamentalists focused on individual salvation because society was broken, while modernists stressed the importance of reforming society.⁵ Conservatives in mainline denominations joined forces with more fringe elements of Christianity, such as the premillennial dispensational revivalists. Premillennialists believed that the apocalypse was imminent and that they were the key to the survival of civilization. Historian George Marsden wrote that their beliefs were somewhat of a paradox because “as premillennialists they had to say that there was no hope for culture, but at the same time they were traditional American evangelicals who urged a return to Christian principles as the only cultural hope.”⁶

However, the fundamentalists lost the fight for the mainline Protestant denominations, in addition to losing the main seminaries such as Princeton University, and they began organizing separately from these denominations after World War I.⁷ They retreated into independent congregations that often allied themselves with other independent churches. Fundamentalists used radio and publications to spread their message.⁸ In 1919, various fundamentalist groups held a national convention at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.⁹ In 1941, Carl McIntire, an extremely conservative minister,

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⁴ Marsden, 208.

⁵ Matthew Avery Sutton, *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013), 5.

⁶ Marsden, 149, 234-35.

⁷ Sutton, 6.

⁸ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 87-88.

⁹ Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s* (New York: Association Press, 1972), 94.

founded the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches.¹⁰ Some fundamentalists resisted separating from the mainline denominations, such as William B. Riley, who finally gave up control of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1947. Incidentally, Riley picked Graham to succeed him as president of Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis in 1947 and, “although [Riley] did not know it, he had by this time established the link between his work and the resurgent non-separatist fundamentalism (eventually to be known as neo-evangelicalism or evangelicalism).”¹¹

Fundamentalist belief centered on the authority and correct interpretation of the Bible. The Bible was the “Word of God”: it was inerrant, disproved aspects of modern science, and was the answer to all problems in life.¹² Marsden wrote that fundamentalists “supposed that every word of the Bible, rightly translated and interpreted, was factually true.” In addition, fundamentalists believed the apocalypse would occur soon. History, they believed, was divided into seven stages. Humanity was currently at the end of the sixth. In the seventh era, Christ would return and rule for a millennium. After this, God would judge humans and send them to Heaven or Hell. To fundamentalists, this progression of history seemed accurate because the world appeared to be getting worse, with two world wars occurring in the first half of the century. In addition to world politics deteriorating, “leading fundamentalists were commonly found preaching alarmist views of the state of American culture.”¹³ It was too late to save the world, but individual people were redeemable, so fundamentalists emphasized the “conversion experience.”¹⁴

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¹⁰ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 87-88.

¹¹ Marsden, 193-94.

¹² Streiker and Strober, 100-102.

¹³ Marsden, 207, 300-301.

¹⁴ Streiker and Strober, 97.

With this extremely pessimistic view of the world and its future, “fundamentalists were conservative evangelicals who in the first decades of the twentieth century call for a return to what they defined as the ‘fundamentals’ of the Christian faith.”¹⁵

Rise of Graham and the Evangelicals

While the infighting between fundamentalists and modernists raged on, William (Billy) Franklin Graham, Jr. was born on November 17, 1918 in Charlotte, North Carolina. His parents, Frank, Sr. and Morrow Coffey, lived on a large dairy farm. Billy Graham was the oldest of four children; he had two younger sisters and a younger brother. The Graham family was deeply invested in North Carolina and had strong Southern roots: Billy Graham’s grandparents fought in the Civil War as Confederates. His parents were not initially fundamentalists, but they were Christians. The family attended an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and prayer and scripture reading occurred frequently in the house. Aikman wrote, “In January and February 1924, the past and the future of American Protestantism met when [Billy] Sunday held meetings in Charlotte, meetings to which the five-year-old Billy Frank was taken by his father.” Sunday was a renowned evangelist from a previous generation, but paled in comparison to Graham’s eventual fame.¹⁶

During Billy Graham’s teenage years, the family struggled through the Great Depression. When their bank failed in 1933, the family lost its life savings. Adding to their problems, Frank got in a major accident with a rotary saw and almost died. These

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¹⁵ Sutton, 5.

¹⁶ Aikman, 13-14, 21-23, 29.

events prompted Morrow and Frank to turn to fundamentalist Christianity.¹⁷ While Billy Graham may have shared some of their devotion and spirituality, Martin wrote that “when adolescence attacked, Billy Frank eagerly embraced its two leading attractions: baseball and girls.” In the fall of 1934, Graham began what would become his life’s calling.¹⁸ Mordecai Ham, a traveling evangelist, held a series of revival meetings in Charlotte and Graham, a sixteen-year-old boy at this point, underwent conversion on November 6 at one of Ham’s meetings.¹⁹ Years later in his autobiography, Graham wrote, “For all my previous religious upbringing and church activity, I believe that that was the moment I made my real commitment to Jesus Christ.”²⁰ Thomas G. Long, a faculty member in the theology school at Emory University, wrote that Ham’s active and emotional style of preaching permanently influenced the teenager and was reflected in his later career.²¹ After graduating from high school, Graham wanted to attend the University of North Carolina, but Morrow made him go to Bob Jones College, a fundamentalist school in Cleveland, Tennessee (now Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina).²²

Billy Graham started attending Bob Jones College in 1936, but transferred to another school within a year. He felt that the atmosphere of Bob Jones College was too restrictive.²³ The school was notorious for its strict theological interpretations and authoritarian social rules. Graham recalled, “I found myself in an environment so rigidly

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¹⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁸ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 61.

¹⁹ Aikman, 33-34.

²⁰ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 30.

²¹ Thomas G. Long, “Preaching the Good News,” in *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America’s Greatest Evangelist*, ed. Michael G. Long (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 4.

²² Aikman, 37-38.

²³ Ibid., 38.

regimented that it shocked me. Our social life was restricted. Dating had to be scheduled and was governed by the dean's code book.... Even our intellectual life was subject to regulation.”²⁴ While there, he amassed dozens of demerits and struggled in his classwork. Due to a sickness that he acquired while at Bob Jones College, Graham's doctors recommended that he attend school in a warmer climate. When Bob Jones, Sr. heard that Graham was considering transferring, he grew quite angry. Martin wrote that “the decisive break between Billy Graham and the Fundamentalism symbolized by Bob Jones would not come for twenty more years, but the first fissures had already appeared.”²⁵ Before leaving the school, Jones told Graham that “you'll never be heard of” if he left—in hindsight, an extremely misjudged statement.²⁶

Billy Graham transferred to Florida Bible Institute (now Trinity College) in Temple Terrace, Florida in 1937. He quickly stood out at his new school. Martin wrote that “unlike many Fundamentalist preachers, Graham wrote out his sermons in great detail, giving them such catchy titles as ‘Who's Who in Hell’ and ‘Mobilization Under the Blood-Spangled Banner.’” Although Graham was locally popular, he knew that he needed more education than an unaccredited school if he wanted to increase his following, and the opportunity arose while he was at Florida Bible Institute. Elner Eldman, the brother of Wheaton College's president, visited the school, heard Graham speak, offered to pay for his first year of tuition at Wheaton College, and told Graham that he would try to find him scholarships for the rest of his education at Wheaton.²⁷

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²⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 39-40.

²⁵ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 69-70.

²⁶ Aikman, 39.

²⁷ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 77, 79.

After graduating from Florida Bible Institute in 1940, Billy Graham headed to Wheaton, Illinois to start college again, for the third time.²⁸

Wheaton College proved to be greatly influential for Graham for two reasons. First, after fundamentalists lost Princeton University to modernists, Wheaton College became “the intellectual and political center of the Fundamentalist world.”²⁹ Graham finally had an impressive school and a larger audience for his preaching. Second, Billy Graham met his future wife while at Wheaton College: Ruth Bell. She was the daughter of Dr. L. Nelson Bell, a surgeon and Christian missionary to China, who arrived in China in 1916. Ruth was born in China in 1920 and spent much of her childhood there. The family experienced the violent rise of communism firsthand, such as the 1935 murder of missionaries John and Betty Stam by communist soldiers. Although Ruth left for Wheaton College in 1937, some of the family remained in China through much of the Second World War. L. Nelson Bell finally returned to America in 1942, heeding the warnings from the American ambassador of the increasing Japanese threat. Dr. Bell always planned on returning to China but died before Ruth visited her birthplace in 1980, with the aid of former President Nixon. In July 1942, Dr. Bell finally met the man that his daughter was dating. A Ruth Graham biographer, Patricia Cornwell, wrote that immediately “the two men had struck up a friendship that would lead to Dr. Bell’s being Billy’s closest advisor for the next thirty-three years.”³⁰ Both men shared similar fundamentalist beliefs and the conviction that communism was evil. After much

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²⁸ Aikman, 39.

²⁹ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 80.

³⁰ Patricia Cornwell, *Ruth: A Portrait* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 15, 23, 28, 36, 50, 52, 85, 87, 265-70.

deliberation because she felt the call to be a missionary in Tibet, Ruth decided to accept Graham's proposal, and they were married in 1943.³¹

In the same year of his marriage to Ruth, Graham graduated from Wheaton College with a degree in Anthropology and got a job as a pastor at a small church in Western Springs, IL.³² While serving as the pastor, Billy also took over a struggling local religious radio broadcast and turned the program into a success.³³ He recalled, "I built my radio talks around the events of the day.... I began each message with a reference to something people would have been hearing and talking about that very day. Then I moved into a biblical message, showing that God and the Scriptures are relevant to every problem."³⁴ This style of preaching continued into his later sermons.

While Graham was at Wheaton College, a new Christian group known as evangelicals began forming. In 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) formed. This association shared similar beliefs with fundamentalist Christians, but was more moderate in its actions, and sought to shed the negativity associated with fundamentalism and remain a part of mainline American Christianity.³⁵ Another evangelical organization, Youth for Christ (YFC), formed in the 1940s and it aligned with the NAE on doctrine. YFC's mission was to save young people from the world, communists, and modernists, which was very similar to fundamentalist aims, although it was less harsh in its doctrine than fundamentalism.³⁶ Fundamentalists and evangelicals continued to spread throughout the nation, especially as white southerners migrated to the

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³¹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 71-75,

³² Aikman, 44-46.

³³ Streiker and Strober, 29.

³⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 86.

³⁵ Sutton, 7.

³⁶ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 87-88.

Midwest and California. Marsden wrote that southern California became “a center for the old-time religion,” which partially explained the success of Graham’s 1949 revival in Los Angeles.³⁷ Clarifying the distinction between evangelicals and fundamentalists, Graham said, “They think of you as a little softer and more Christ-like.”³⁸

Graham did not stay at the small Baptist church in Illinois for long; he had grander visions. Torrey Johnson, the first president of YFC and one of Graham’s friends, convinced Graham to come work as YFC’s first field representative in 1945.³⁹ Graham began organizing and leading revival meetings all over the country.⁴⁰ He traveled so often that he was United Airline’s “top civilian passenger” in 1945.⁴¹ In the same year, he and Ruth had their first child: Virginia. They would go on to have four more: Anne (b. 1948), Ruth (b. 1950), Franklin (b. 1952), and Nelson (b. 1958).⁴² In addition to his work at YFC, Graham served as the president of Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis from 1947 to 1952.⁴³ In the fall of 1948, Graham took a leave of absence from the YFC to focus on organizing his own revival meetings.⁴⁴ At this point, Graham began planning his breakthrough revival campaign: the 1949 meeting in Los Angeles.

Civil Religion and the Cold War

While American Christianity was evolving and Graham was finding his footing as a YFC worker, changes in American society and foreign affairs led to the rise of what

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³⁷ Marsden, 238.

³⁸ “McNeil/Lehrer News Hour,” Public Broadcasting System, April 17, 1992, collection 74, videotape 42, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL (BGCA).

³⁹ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 91-92

⁴⁰ Streiker and Strober, 29.

⁴¹ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 92.

⁴² Graham, *Just As I Am*, 97.

⁴³ Aikman, 60.

⁴⁴ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 104.

might be described as a civil religion.⁴⁵ The Cold War began in the wake of the Second World War with increasing tension between the two great Allied powers of World War II: the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Historian Andrew Preston wrote that “it was the very nature of the Cold War that allowed religion to play a greater role in international history than ever before.” Since there were few direct military confrontations between the two superpowers during the Cold War, it was really a war of ideas, and religion was a powerful idea.⁴⁶ U.S. presidents saw the importance of religion when framing their foreign policies or when campaigning. Historian Jonathan Herzog wrote, “Whereas early awakenings spread from the bottom up, important components of the 1950s revival came from the top down. In some ways, it resembled an orchestrated makeover painting a veneer of faith across the social and cultural landscape.”⁴⁷

Religion, specifically Christianity, proffered a convenient weapon against communism because American leaders often painted communism in religious-like terms. Similar to Christianity, communism had a plan for redemption, it had saints (Marx and Lenin), and it even had “sacred texts.”⁴⁸ In addition, communism’s explicit atheism was convenient for American leaders because they could draw on the Bible and Christian ideals in their rhetoric against it.⁴⁹ In 1951, President Harry Truman created the Psychological Strategy Board and, in 1952, it decided that the U.S.S.R. would be at a disadvantage if America weaponized religion. The State Department began highlighting

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⁴⁵ For a fuller discussion on American civil religion, see Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Dædalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

⁴⁶ Preston, “Introduction: The Religious Cold War,” in *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), xi.

⁴⁷ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 7.

⁴⁸ Herzog, “From Sermon to Strategy: Religious Influence on the Formation and Implementation of US Foreign Policy in the Early Cold War,” in *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 47.

⁴⁹ Sutton, 8.

America's religious heritage and sent communications to U.S. embassies that covered American religious news and detailed how this news could be used to combat communism.⁵⁰ Jacobs, who labeled the Cold War as America's "Third Great Awakening," noted how General Douglas MacArthur compared America's struggle against the Soviet Union to Jesus' struggle in the Gethsemane shortly before his crucifixion.⁵¹ Further evidence of American leaders' use of religion to combat communism came with Eisenhower's support for the Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem as the leader of South Vietnam, despite his inexperience and unpopularity with certain segments of the population.⁵² Eisenhower, and other American leaders, decided that if religion was prohibited in a country then democracy was inhibited, meaning that religious freedom was an indicator of the threat that a country posed to America.⁵³ Even missionaries were viewed as weapons, as historian Kai Yin Allison Haga noted when writing about religion and the Korean War: "Missionaries and their activities in this Cold War environment were perceived by both politicians and the public as a strategic and important means to spread pro-American information and contain Communism."⁵⁴ Missionaries would be an important source of information again for Graham and Nixon during the Vietnam War. Likewise, the Bells, Graham's in-laws and former missionaries to China, remained a powerful influence on the young preacher.

While American leaders were framing the Cold War in religious terms, the American public experienced something akin to a religious revival. More people attended

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⁵⁰ Herzog, "From Sermon to Strategy," 55-57.

⁵¹ Jacobs, 60.

⁵² Bothwell, 52.

⁵³ Preston, "Introduction," xiv.

⁵⁴ Kai Yin Allison Haga, "Rising to the Occasion: The Role of American Missionaries and Korean Pastors in Resisting Communism throughout the Korean War," in *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 95.

church in the 1950s and supported churches financially. Bible sales hit record highs. In print media, moguls such as Henry Luce ensured that religious figures received excellent coverage because they viewed domestic religious revival as an essential component to successfully beating communism. Christian ideals were added to public statements of nationhood and patriotism. In 1954, Congress inserted the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. When explaining his support for the amendment, Congressman Louis Rabaut (D-MI) tied the resurgence of civil religion to the fight against communism. “You may argue from dawn to dusk about differing political, social, and economic systems, but the fundamental issue which is the unbridgeable gap between America and communist Russia is a belief in the almighty God,” insisted Rabaut.⁵⁵ Similarly, “In God We Trust” became the national motto in 1956.⁵⁶ “Americans,” commented historian Jonathon Herzog, “led by their political leaders, were indeed beginning to believe once again what George Washington had proclaimed 150 years earlier: that the success of any nation was tied intimately to a moral culture, incubated and guarded by religion.”⁵⁷

Following his breakout into American society, Graham emerged a trailblazer in the civil religion movement. Leslie C. Griffin, a scholar on law and religion, wrote that “as America’s pastor, Billy Graham has been an active participant in the nation’s civil religion.” He did this through his repeated public appearances at state events and presidential speeches, where his mere presence bestowed a religious blessing on the

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⁵⁵ Jacobs, 60-65.

⁵⁶ Sutton, 9.

⁵⁷ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 78.

government.⁵⁸ Authors Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober posited Graham as the leader of civil religion in America: “Graham is today the leader of the politically decisive majority, the man who more consistently than anyone else articulates the aspirations and fears of the bulk of his fellow citizens. His vision of an America dedicated to God and committed to the ideals and dreams upon which the nation was founded is shared by Middle Americans.”⁵⁹ Graham commanded an enormous following and stood in the vanguard of blending church and state through civil religion.

American civil religion and politicians’ use of Christianity to combat communism was a blessing for fundamentalists and evangelicals, who were virulently anticommunist. Beginning with the rise of communism around World War I, many fundamentalist and evangelical Christians started viewing the Soviet Union and communism as indicative of the end times. The fundamentalist view, wrote historian Marsden, was ironic because premillennialists were supposed to focus on waiting for Christ to return, but instead they adopted a “highly politicized gospel” to combat the signs of the end times. Marsden framed this critique around Richard Hofstadter’s theory of the “paranoid style” in American politics. Fundamentalists saw the world as a fight between God and Satan, and the Russian threat was the work of Satan. Since Satan was working through Russia, fundamentalists believed that “the political battle to defend God’s kingdom could not be entirely postponed until a coming era.”⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ Leslie C. Griffin, “Religious Sanctity and Political Power,” in *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America’s Greatest Evangelist*, ed. Michael G. Long (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 116-17

⁵⁹ Streiker and Strober, 189.

⁶⁰ Marsden, 208-11; see also Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1964, 77-86.

By the late 1940s, fundamentalists and evangelicals began the battle against communism in earnest. As Herzog explained, “Evangelical Protestant leaders were not always at the forefront of the holy war against Communism. But once committed, evangelical leaders took up the torch of religious anti-Communism and carried it furthest into the conflict.” Although they might not have led politicians in the early years of anticommunist rhetoric, these Christian groups were not simply following politicians as Herzog claimed.⁶¹ Fundamentalists organized the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. It was premillennial, anticommunist, and marked the beginning of “fundamentalist super-patriotism.” One of its main objectives was to defend Christian civilization, i.e. America, from communism.⁶² In the 1940s and 1950s, numerous evangelists, such as Verne Paul Kobb, Fred Schwarz, Billy Hargis, and Carl McIntire, led the Christian charge against communism through radio programs, publications, and anticommunist training schools.⁶³ As Jonathon Herzog wrote, “In this new struggle against the hammer, Americans grabbed not only the sword, but also the cross.”⁶⁴

Los Angeles, 1949

The civil and religious battle against communism led to the success of Graham’s revival in Los Angeles in the fall of 1949. Christ for Greater Los Angeles, a group of local businessmen, organized the campaign with Graham (who did not refer to his meetings as crusades yet). They erected a large tent, dubbed the “Canvas Cathedral,” under which to hold the revivals. In the weeks leading up to the meetings, they staged a

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⁶¹ Herzog, “From Sermon to Strategy,” 50.

⁶² Marsden, 152-53.

⁶³ Herzog, “From Sermon to Strategy,” 50.

⁶⁴ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 38.

massive publicity campaign to encourage attendance.⁶⁵ In total, Graham and the organizers spent around \$25,000 on ads and posters.⁶⁶ Wealthy conservative businessmen, including oil tycoons H. L. Hunt and J. Howard Pew, who appreciated Graham's ideological leanings and anticommunist message, often funded his meetings.⁶⁷ In his memoir, Graham recalled that the Los Angeles campaign was not covered in local media prior to its start, and he was worried that the revival would fail because the media just did not seem interested.⁶⁸

Indeed, the revival campaign started modestly—but then rapidly took off. Early meetings sometimes saw three to four thousand attendees, well below the capacity of the tent, but interest in the revival services was increasing. At the revival's scheduled ending of three weeks, Graham and the organizers decided to continue since attendance appeared to be growing. In the first week of the extension, reporters suddenly mobbed the campaign's tent and gave it continued coverage for the next four weeks. A journalist told Graham, "You've just been kissed by William Randolph Hearst," a man that Graham had never met and would never meet.⁶⁹ Apparently, Hearst, a newspaper magnate, appreciated Graham's conservative religious and anticommunist messages and told his editors to "puff Graham."⁷⁰ Martin claimed that Hearst actually began covering Graham's YFC meetings in 1946 after his Chicago rally and that the "Puff Graham" telegram was actually "Puff YFC," but the majority of other Graham biographers claim that Hearst

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⁶⁵ Aikman, 65-66.

⁶⁶ Gibbs and Duffy, 4.

⁶⁷ J. Philip Wogaman, "Truth and Power," in *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America's Greatest Evangelist*, ed. Michael G. Long (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 94.

⁶⁸ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 143.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 146, 148-49, 150.

⁷⁰ Wogaman, 94.

began covering Graham in 1949.⁷¹ Regardless of when Hearst began covering Graham, his newspaper coverage made the revival meetings a massive success. The revival ended up running for 8 weeks, and 350,000 people attended.⁷² In the 72 meetings, Graham preached 65 times. According to Graham, thousands of people accepted Christ for the first time and thousands of Christians recommitted their lives to Christ.⁷³



Figure 1. Graham preaches to thousands at his 1949 revival in Los Angeles.⁷⁴

Although Graham's main focus was on converting unbelievers, a large part of his sermons were about the communist threat. In his opening sermon, Graham stated:

The world is divided into two camps! On the one side we see Communism. On the other, we see so-called Western culture, and its fruit had its foundation in the Bible, the Word of God, and in the revivals of the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁷¹ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 95, 117-118.

⁷² Aikman, 67.

⁷³ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 157.

⁷⁴ *Billy Graham Campaign*, September, 1949, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Archives, Charlotte, NC (BGEA).

centuries. Communism, on the other hand, has declared war against God, against, Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion!... Unless the Western world has an old-fashioned revival, we cannot last!

Graham's statements came in the midst of the public's increased fear of communism.

Shortly before the start of the revival, President Truman announced that the Soviet Union had successfully detonated an atomic bomb.⁷⁵ Graham's revival also occurred in the short break between Alger Hiss' trials for being a Soviet spy, so public tensions were high.⁷⁶

Also occurring during the revival, in the midst of the Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong created the communist People's Republic of China, a move that shocked Graham's father-in-law, who had stated in 1930 that a communist takeover seemed improbable.⁷⁷

Graham's attacks on communism were timely and resonated with the public. As Wacker claimed, "Graham's ability to set traditional theological claims in a setting of national and world crises would rank as one of the hallmarks of his long career."⁷⁸

Grady Wilson, one of Graham's longtime friends and associates, recalled that "Billy was also right strong on that anti-Communism stuff of those days" and this was evident in numerous other sermons that Graham gave during the Los Angeles revival.⁷⁹ In a sermon entitled "Why God Allows Communism to Flourish," Graham explained what God was currently doing in the world. He claimed that "communism is a fanatical religion," and then asked, "Why doesn't God come down to Moscow and wipe the whole thing out?" Graham had a few answers to this question. First, God was silent in Christian history from the life of Malachi to the birth of Jesus, a period of 400 years. God's

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⁷⁵ Frady, 197-98.

⁷⁶ Gibbs and Duffy, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Cornwell, 35.

⁷⁸ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 13.

⁷⁹ Frady, 197.

absence from the world for the present period was then understandable. Second, Graham stated, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ was never intended to bring about [unintelligible] peace.” Graham claimed that Jesus predicted a period in history like the present conditions and said that he would bring a “sword,” instead of peace. Finally, Graham predicted the end times and declared, “The third world war is going to make the others look like a little fish bite.” This war was impending; it would occur “in the next five years.” The war was the apocalypse. It “will sweep civilization into oblivion unless Christ comes and stops it.” Graham tied Christianity to a communism that would usher in the apocalypse soon.⁸⁰

In a strong critique of the Los Angeles lifestyle, Graham elaborated more on the dangers of communism in another sermon entitled “The Choice Before Los Angeles.” Graham said that people of the city had a choice: “Revival or Judgement.” The end of the world was coming, as seen in Truman’s announcement of the U.S.S.R. successfully detonating a nuclear bomb and the strong presence of the “Fifth Column” (communists) in Los Angeles. The city could be next in the long line of cities and towns destroyed by God, such as Sodom and Gomorrah, Nazareth, and Pompeii. An atomic bomb could wipe out the city soon, which is why Graham called the people to repent.⁸¹ Although Graham was extremely vocal about the dangers of communism in Los Angeles, Martin pointed out that Graham’s 1949 diatribes were not his first against communism. In 1947, Graham held a revival in Charlotte where he issued a strong warning about the spread of

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⁸⁰ Graham, “Why God Allows Communism to Flourish,” October 1949, Los Angeles, CA, BGEA, <https://billygraham.org/audio/why-god-allows-communism-to-flourish>.

⁸¹ Graham, “The Choice Before Los Angeles,” 1949, Los Angeles, CA, p. 1-4, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

communism in Europe, as he had seen in his travels.⁸² Although his anticommunist rhetoric began earlier, the 1949 Los Angeles revival is where Graham became famous, in part due to his timely attacks on communism.

The 1949 Los Angeles revival transformed Graham into a national figure. Starting with Hearst's coverage, Graham became a regular feature in national media, especially in Henry Luce's *Time* and *Life* magazines. Luce, the son of Christian missionaries to China, strongly appreciated Graham's anticommunist message and his conservative focus on individual salvation rather than social change.⁸³ When Graham visited South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond in 1950, Thurmond invited Luce to meet Graham.⁸⁴ Luce would eventually become a strong supporter of Diem and a non-communist South Vietnam, and he hoped that the Vietnam War would grow into a war with China so that the Chinese communists would be defeated. Similar to L. Nelson Bell's time as a missionary in China, Luce's experiences strongly shaped his anticommunist beliefs.⁸⁵ Wacker wrote that "publishers knew that the two words *Billy Graham* sold papers," which was a further incentive to cover Graham.⁸⁶ In his biography, Graham wrote, "Overnight we had gone from being a little evangelistic team, whose speaker also served with Youth for Christ and Northwestern Schools, to what appeared to many to be the hope for national and international revival." Interestingly, Graham did not mention the national impact that his anticommunist rhetoric had; he never mentioned communism

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⁸² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 100-101.

⁸³ Wogaman, 94-95.

⁸⁴ Aikman, 73-74.

⁸⁵ Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 445-48.

⁸⁶ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 78.

when recounting the revival in his memoir.⁸⁷ Pierard and Linder concluded that Graham's "meteoric rise to stardom in 1949-50 took the country by surprise, and he became not only the central figure in American evangelicalism for the next three decades but also the confidant of presidents in a manner unparalleled in the nation's history."⁸⁸

Theological Anticommunism

Graham's theological battle against communism continued well past his 1949 breakthrough in Los Angeles. On February 4, 1951, he gave a sermon in Minneapolis entitled "Christianity vs. Communism." As usual, he claimed that the Christian Gospel was the solution to America's problems; in this case, the Korean War. Graham had three major points in this sermon. First, communism was spreading. "Vast areas of the continent of Europe and of Asia are completely under the sway of communism," he warned, "In Korea, the blood of American soldiers is being shed every day to hold back this philosophy of Karl Marx." Communism was even infiltrating American society. Second, American Christians remained largely ignorant of communism's theology and needed to study it in order to oppose it. "Communism is far more than just an economic and political interpretation of life. Communism is a fanatical religion of atheism," he preached. It had a bible: *The Communist Manifesto*. It was also a religion because it promised two things; a new world and a new humanity. In the new world, communism would eradicate war, unemployment, and racism. The new human would not be evil. Graham went so far to say that communist ideology claimed that mankind needed to be "born-again" in order to achieve the new world; a statement that used Christian theology

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⁸⁷ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 158.

⁸⁸ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 191.

to explain communist ideology. Finally, communism could be a manifestation of the Antichrist. Graham preached, “There are strong indications that the 38th and 39th chapters of Ezekiel are devoted almost entirely to the tremendous rise of Russia in the latter days.” He claimed that communism had “all the earmarks” of the Antichrist and that “indications of the anti-Christ” were present in communism, but he did not outright state that communism was the Antichrist. Understanding the inflammatory nature of such a statement, he may have avoided this absolute declaration to protect his image and credibility.⁸⁹

On September 16, 1951, Graham continued his theological diatribe against communism in Hollywood. Referring to American troops fighting in the Korean War, Graham stated, “Last week, 500 of them shed their blood that we might resist communism in the Far East. We’re engaged in a death struggle with communism and in fighting communism I have continually insisted that our government has done some things that it should not have done and left undone much that it should have done.” With this statement, Graham engaged in political discourse and attacked the Truman administration for its supposed missteps and lack of action against communism.⁹⁰ Graham often claimed that he did not make political attacks while preaching. In 1950 he said, “Not once will you hear from this platform an attack, by implication or otherwise, against any religious or political group. The only one I mention from the platform

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⁸⁹ Graham, “Christianity vs. Communism,” *Hour of Decision*, February 4, 1951, collection 191, T56j, BGCA.

⁹⁰ Graham, “Christianity vs. A Bloodless Religion,” *Hour of Decision*, September 16, 1951, collection 191, T88j, BGCA.

occasionally is communism, which is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-American.”⁹¹

However, Graham often preached veiled criticism. Following his critique of the U.S. government, Graham claimed that it was ignoring nationalist China’s fight against the P.R.C. In addition, “Stalin [has a] fixed purpose to master the whole world for communism” and the American government had already given him too many concessions. Graham subscribed to the Munich Doctrine and argued that these concessions would not stop Stalin from expanding his territory. Mixing anticommunist rhetoric and scripture, Graham proclaimed, “Everywhere the followers of communism have gone to every length, short of deliberately starting world war to disturb the peace. The wages of trust in Stalin have been death.” Paraphrasing a portion of Romans 6:23, which states, “For the wages of sin is death,” Graham equated trusting Stalin with sin. As usual, Graham included a dire warning of the impending apocalypse: “In my opinion, before this whole affair is over there is going to be the greatest bloodbath the world has ever known. Never in the history of the world are the nations armed as they are arming now.”⁹²

Graham’s Christian theology buttressed his anticommunist views. Graham’s perception of the world was an evil place controlled by Satan. As a premillennial, Graham believed that Jesus Christ would return soon and that peace would come after his return. William D. Apel, emeritus professor in religious studies at Linfield College, wrote, “Graham’s preaching repeatedly has stressed that Christ must return to earth before any beneficial changes can occur in the world’s order. However, his preaching has

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⁹¹ Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 33.

⁹² Graham, “Christianity vs. A Bloodless Religion;” and Romans 6:23 (English Standard Version).

also projected an optimistic picture of the individual's chances of changing himself and the world around him." Graham believed that the world was irredeemable except through Christ's return, but also paradoxically advocated for individual salvation in hopes of redeeming the world.⁹³ Again, this theological position highlighted Graham's difference from modernist Christians who strongly advocated for transforming society in the present days.⁹⁴ Since Graham viewed communism as the Antichrist, and his premillennialism led him to believe that the apocalypse was imminent, "redemption itself became a defense against communism."⁹⁵

Graham's preaching reflected the importance that he attributed to resisting communism, as it was often at the forefront of his sermons. Borrowing techniques he learned while working for YFC, Graham, "made it a standard aspect of his preaching to proclaim that 'good news' against a contrasting background of bad news from contemporary events and circumstances, leading numerous observers to say that he preached as if he had 'a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.'"⁹⁶ Graham would often begin his sermons with an engaging hook, pulled from current events: Russia, communism, Korea, Vietnam, etc. These hooks buttressed his proclamations of the impending apocalypse. From this point, he would then move into how individual sin led to these worldwide problems. This segued into his detailing of God's plan for individual salvation and then he would end with an altar call. Thomas G. Long wrote, somewhat amusingly, that "the world inhabited by Billy Graham's sermons is forever on

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⁹³ William D. Apel, "The Lost World of Billy Graham," *Review of Religious Research* 20, no. 2 (1979): 138–44.

⁹⁴ Streiker and Strober, 43.

⁹⁵ K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 82.

⁹⁶ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 105.

the brink of total ruination and disaster.”⁹⁷ Graham’s use of communism as a device to prompt fear, however, did not mean that it was simply a tool to manipulate crowds; he really believed it.

As Graham was constructing his theological attacks on communism in the early 1950s, evangelicalism was changing—and Graham was the one changing it. Sociologist William C. Martin labeled 1950s evangelicals as “new evangelicals,” to signify their further departure from fundamentalists. Although Graham and evangelicals subscribed to the majority of fundamentalist teachings, they were more willing to work with non-fundamentalist Christians. “To the New Evangelicals, it was far more important to proclaim the gospel than to defend it,” explained Martin. Although the fundamentalist break with Graham and the evangelicals was gradual, Graham’s 1957 revival in New York was perhaps the defining moment. Per usual, Graham worked with numerous Christian groups to produce the revival. However, many fundamentalist leaders, including Bob Jones, pledged to not support or attend meetings with non-fundamentalists, which permanently separated them from Graham. Martin argued that Graham was now in the “middle ground” of Christians: not on the far-right side of fundamentalists, but also not too liberal. Incidentally, Graham was not invited to Bob Jones’ funeral in 1968.⁹⁸ Since evangelicals were a diverse group that did not come from a single denomination, Marsden posited that “a convenient rule of thumb was that an evangelical was anyone who identified with Billy Graham.”⁹⁹ Graham, now free from the peripheral fundamentalist movement, while still sharing key fundamentalist beliefs such as the

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⁹⁷ Thomas G. Long, 6-9.

⁹⁸ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 206, 224, 239-40.

⁹⁹ Marsden, 233-34.

authority of the Bible and extreme anticommunism, increasingly became a mainstream leader of Christians—and of American society.

Post-Los Angeles Graham exploded onto the national scene. In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), which Balmer described as “a well-oiled corporate machine with advance work that would be the envy of any politician.”¹⁰⁰ This organization was founded to organize all of Graham’s activities and so that Graham could start a nationwide radio broadcast known as the *Hour of Decision*.¹⁰¹ In 1951, at one of Graham’s meetings in Columbia, South Carolina, the term “crusade” replaced “campaign.”¹⁰² Journalist Marshall Frady wrote that “it was peculiarly appropriate that the main medium of his ministry should have come to be termed crusade: it was much that old lusty mix of martial and pious gustos, the cross and the sword – only addressed now, instead of Islam, to Marxism.”¹⁰³ Graham also began writing newspaper columns published across the nation, and, in 1956, founded *Christianity Today* with the aid of his father-in law, Dr. L. Nelson Bell.¹⁰⁴ The magazine was based out of Washington, D.C., providing it with national authority and its’ editors access to politicians.¹⁰⁵ Graham, the theological anticommunist warrior and leader of evangelical Christianity, stood on the main stage of American life and was ready to begin his association with the American presidency.

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¹⁰⁰ Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life*, 374.

¹⁰¹ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 170.

¹⁰² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 126.

¹⁰³ Frady, 418.

¹⁰⁴ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 170.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 42.

Chapter 2

Presidential Beginnings with Eisenhower and Kennedy

Public fame translated into presidential access for Graham, although he ruined his first attempt. A few of Graham's friends in Congress managed to arrange a meeting for him with President Harry Truman on July 14, 1950. Although he had never before met the president, Graham had written to him several times over the previous two years. After the North Korean military invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, he sent Truman a telegraph: "Millions of Christians praying God give you wisdom in this crisis. Strongly urge showdown with communism now. More Christians in Southern Korea per capita than in any part of world. We cannot let them down."¹ Indeed, war in Korea had great immediacy to the Graham family—an immediacy that few Americans shared—as Ruth had spent three years as a high school student in Pyongyang.² Graham received no response to his pleas from the president. When he finally met with Truman, Graham detailed his campaigns around the country, told Truman that he supported his actions against communism in Korea, and then talked with the president about his faith. Their meeting lasted for a little more than twenty minutes and Truman seemed uncomfortable with Graham's preaching about what Truman needed to do spiritually.³

Graham ran into major problems after leaving the White House. He recalled that when journalists asked him about his conversation with the president, "I told them everything I could remember" and gave the press unauthorized quotes from Truman. He

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¹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, xvii-xix.

² Cornwell, 42.

³ Graham, *Just As I Am*, xix-xx.

also made a spectacle of himself by kneeling down on the White House lawn and leading a prayer for reporters.⁴ When Graham contacted Truman in an effort to have the president attend his 1952 crusade in Washington, D.C., Truman refused to appear or even endorse it.⁵ A White House memo detailed his position: “At Key West the President said very decisively that he did not wish to endorse Billy Graham’s Washington revival meeting and particularly he said he did not want to receive him at the White House. You remember what a show of himself Billy Graham made the last time he was here. The President does not want it repeated.”⁶ According to Herzog, Truman “rebuffed Graham for the next seventeen years” following their first meeting.⁷

A Fresh Start with Ike

Learning from his mistakes with Truman, Graham carefully cultivated an intimate relationship with the president’s successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower. In 1951, Sid Richardson, a Texas oil billionaire and friend of Graham’s, forwarded a letter by Graham to General Eisenhower, then the Supreme Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the letter, Graham detailed why Eisenhower should run for office. Journalists Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy noted Eisenhower’s remarkable change of heart: “Eisenhower was sufficiently taken with Graham’s letter that he wrote back directly in November 1951, only a week after noting in his diary how little interest he had in running for office,” and although he still did not want to run for office, he was

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⁴ Ibid., xxi.

⁵ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 209.

⁶ Graham, *Just As I Am*, xxi.

⁷ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 76.

interested enough in Graham's reasoning to maintain a correspondence.⁸ In early 1952, Graham traveled to Paris to meet with Eisenhower, who formally announced his campaign later that year in the spring.⁹ Although Eisenhower never told Graham that he would run, Graham claimed that he left Paris with the "feeling that I had met the next president of the United States."¹⁰

Graham aided Eisenhower during the campaign. The general asked the evangelist to contribute to the religious portions of his campaign speeches. Graham agreed to help, but only if his help would remain anonymous because he did not want to be seen publicly supporting one of the candidates over the other.¹¹ At the same time, Graham was making pointed public statements such as, "We must maintain strong military power for defense at any cost," which he proclaimed outside of the U.S. Capital.¹² Although he did not state it, who was better than a former general for maintaining "strong military power?" During the Republican National Convention, Graham bragged at a press conference of his power and claimed that he could swing sixteen million votes to either candidate.¹³ In addition, Graham was acutely critical of the Truman administration's Cold War policies and its failures in the Korean War.¹⁴ During 1952, Graham visited South Korea to meet with and preach to American troops. While there, he met with Eisenhower's son, Major John Eisenhower. Graham returned to America and met with Eisenhower to brief him on his

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⁸ Gibbs and Duffy, 30-32.

⁹ Frady, 255.

¹⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 191.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Frady, 420.

¹³ Gibbs and Duffy, 37.

¹⁴ Miller, 70.

trip and discuss Bible passages that he could use in his inauguration speech.¹⁵

Eisenhower, a deft politician, knew the value of a friendship with Graham.

After Eisenhower won the 1952 election, Graham maintained his support for the general-turned-president. When Eisenhower gave his inauguration address, Graham compared it to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount on his *Hour of Decision* radio show.¹⁶ Wacker wrote that, for Graham, "Where loyalty to leaders left off and flattery began was not always clear," as seen in Graham's previous statement.¹⁷ In 1953, the BGEA announced that they would open a new office in Washington, D.C. Graham claimed that this was a nonpolitical move; the office existed simply to give spiritual guidance to the nation's leaders.¹⁸ When Eisenhower asked for church recommendations, Graham told him to attend National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.¹⁹ Graham also successfully encouraged the president to attend the first annual Presidential Prayer Breakfast (now the National Prayer Breakfast) in 1953.²⁰

Graham later denied that his relationship with the new president was particularly intimate: "My official interactions with President Eisenhower were always warm and friendly, but they were also mostly formal. I was never invited to the private quarters of the White House, for instance."²¹ While this may be true, his supportive actions were numerous and set the standard for his relationships with future presidents. Although Graham was a registered Democrat (he lived in the South so it made sense for him), his political leanings lay more in line with the Republican Party, hence his strong support for

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¹⁵ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 192-98.

¹⁶ Frady, 257; see also Matthew 5:1-7:29 (English Standard Version).

¹⁷ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 291.

¹⁸ Miller, 73.

¹⁹ Gibbs and Duffy, 39.

²⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

Eisenhower.²² Both men strongly supported a resurgence of Christianity at home and maintaining military strength in the fight against communism abroad.

Graham interacted with the Eisenhower administration and supported the fight against communism in two specific instances; through Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and the fall of Dien Bien Phu. On May 10, 1954, in a letter to Eisenhower while Graham crusaded in Britain, the pastor wrote that “it is difficult for the British to understand the McCarthy hearings, yet it has become so ridiculous that most people are laughing it off and not giving it the serious proportions that they did a few weeks ago.”²³ Graham appeared to be defending McCarthy by saying that public consensus considered the hearings against him to be ridiculous. This lined up with Graham’s other statements on McCarthy’s manhunt for communists in America. In an earlier sermon in 1953, he stated:

While nobody likes a watch dog, and for that reason many investigation committees are unpopular, I thank God for men who, in the face of public denouncement and ridicule, go loyally on in their work of exposing the pinks, the lavenders, and the reds who have sought refuge beneath the wings of the American eagle and from the vantage point, try in every subtle, undercover way to bring comfort, aid, and help to the greatest enemy we have ever known—Communism.²⁴

Graham supported McCarthy’s “Red” hunt even after the Senate censured their fellow member on December 2, 1954, which the evangelist labeled a “disgrace.”²⁵ However, as McCarthy grew increasingly unpopular, Graham distanced himself from the senator and claimed, “I have never met McCarthy [or] corresponded with him.”²⁶ Journalist David Aikman conjectured that Eisenhower might have kept some distance from Graham

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²² Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 41.

²³ Graham to Dwight D. Eisenhower, May 10, 1954, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (copied from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS (IKE)).

²⁴ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 35.

²⁵ Bothwell, 53.

²⁶ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 38.

because he was “something of a loose cannon” with his anticommunist rhetoric and support for McCarthy.²⁷ Although Eisenhower and Graham were not as close as the preacher would be with Johnson or Nixon, both men supported the fight against communism.

In the same May 10, 1954 letter, Graham also wrote, “I have been praying a great deal for you in the last few days as you wrestle with the Indo-China problem. Whatever your ultimate decision, I shall do my best through radio and television to make my contribution in selling the American public. My private opinion is that Indo-China must be held at any cost.”²⁸ Three days earlier, the Vietnamese League for Independence (Vietminh) defeated the French encampment at Dien Bien Phu in northern Vietnam. This battle was a part of the Vietminh’s long struggle since its founding in 1941 by Ho Chi Minh for a united Vietnam free from colonial influence. The French had built the base to prevent the spread of communism and block Vietminh supply lines. The Vietminh began a siege on March 13, 1954, overran the base on May 7, and captured thousands of French soldiers, leading to France’s eventual complete withdrawal from the country. Although Eisenhower gave some material aid to the French during the battle, he avoided direct overt support. In his letter, Graham encouraged Eisenhower to send troops after the French defeat, arguing for the necessity of holding Vietnam, but the president eventually decided against direct intervention.²⁹ However, a year and a half later, Eisenhower sent military advisors to South Vietnam (copying the actions of the Truman administration, which had sent advisors in 1951 to support the French). In the letter, Graham gave the

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²⁷ Aikman, 187.

²⁸ Graham to Eisenhower, May 10, 1954.

²⁹ Bothwell, 52.

president advice on U.S. involvement in Vietnam and offered a blank check by pledging his public support in advance to Eisenhower's decision.

Graham also publicly supported President Eisenhower while he was in office by speaking highly of the president's religious convictions. In a talk at the Chamber of Commerce in New Orleans on October 7, 1954, he claimed that Eisenhower spoke to Graham five days before his inauguration and said, "We must have religious revival." Eisenhower's prayer breakfasts, Graham asserted, were "evidence of a return to religion" in America.³⁰ In August 1955, while speaking at a Boston memorial service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Graham again held up Eisenhower as the pinnacle of Christianity and peace. Referring to the July 1955 conference between Britain, France, America, and the Soviet Union, he stated:

When I saw President Eisenhower on his knees in a Geneva church on the eve of the Big Four conference, beseeching God for wisdom and guidance, a new hope welled up in my heart. At Geneva our President put new wings on the word peace. This word had been stolen by the Communists. He brought it back to America and the entire world is now convinced that America sincerely wants peace and not war.

Graham seemed willing to make peace with the Kremlin, but only if it was sincere on the U.S.S.R.'s part. He called for an end to its "subversive activities" and declared that Americans would "not sell our souls or barter our consciences for any pseudo peace." His support for Eisenhower was unsurprising, but his apparent desire for peace with Russia was. However, his statements may have simply been empty-handed rhetoric because in

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³⁰ Graham, "Chamber of Commerce," October 7, 1954, New Orleans, LA, p. 9-12, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

numerous other sermons Graham compared Russia to the Antichrist; an entity with which Graham would never make peace.³¹

In 1956, Graham embarked on a preaching tour throughout Asia. Writing to Eisenhower on January 7, he said, “If on this trip I can build a little good will for America, I shall be very grateful,” meaning that one of his objectives was to support America’s image around the world. In the same letter, Graham, always a sycophant, told Eisenhower, “Still thinking you’re the greatest President in American history, I am.”³² Prior to his departure, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles briefed Graham on the countries that he would be visiting. Pierard wrote, “There was also a foreign policy dimension to Graham’s presidential connections. His outspoken views on anticommunism made him a useful instrument in the Cold War,” which explained why the president and his staff communicated with Graham before his departure.³³ While in Asia, Graham visited India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Iran. In the midst of preaching to thousands of people, Graham also met with heads of state, such as Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Shah of Iran.³⁴

On March 8, after Graham returned from Asia, a memo circulated in the White House detailing Graham’s trip. It stated that Graham “talked to the heads of the Middle Eastern Countries and feels he has extremely vital information to give to the President.”³⁵ When meeting with Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, and Dulles, Graham explained how to combat communist influence in India by making a show of giving American aid

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³¹ Graham, “Memorial Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 56th Annual Encampment,” August 28, 1955, Boston, MA, p. 7-8, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

³² Graham to Eisenhower, January 7, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

³³ Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 118.

³⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 263-81.

³⁵ Gwen King to Mr. Shanley, March 8, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

to India.³⁶ Dulles told him that spreading the Christian message throughout the world was critical, especially in light of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's recent visit to India.³⁷ Graham's 1956 trip to Asia marked the beginning of his role as an unofficial ambassador for the president and the continuation of his role as advisor on foreign affairs, functions that would only increase during the Vietnam War.

Graham also advised Eisenhower on domestic civil rights issues. On March 19, 1956, Congressman Frank W. Boykin (D-AL) wrote to Eisenhower about the ties between fighting communism and civil rights. He stated:

There is another question – this race question – that is truly very serious, because, in my judgement, the Communists are taking advantage of it. I believe that our own Billy Graham could do more on this than any other human in this nation; I mean to quiet it down and to go easy and in a Godlike way, instead of trying to cram it down the throats of our people all in one day, which some of our enemies are trying to do. I thought maybe if you and Billy talked, you could talk about this real, real good.³⁸

Eisenhower responded on March 20 and wrote that he talked to Graham about his role in helping out in the South.³⁹ During their visit, both Eisenhower and Graham agreed on integration; albeit a slow and moderate integration. Subscribing to an evangelical worldview, both men were “skeptical of efforts to legislate morality.”⁴⁰ Following the meeting, Graham began meeting with white and black southern church leaders to encourage them to fight segregation, but also to patiently wait for change.⁴¹ Eisenhower again sought Graham's advice during the crisis in Little Rock in 1957 when the president had to decide on a federal response to a governor who was preventing the integration of a

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³⁶ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 274.

³⁷ Frady, 334-35.

³⁸ Frank W. Boykin to Eisenhower, March 19, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

³⁹ Eisenhower to Boykin, March 20, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁴⁰ Miller, 52.

⁴¹ Pollock, *The Billy Graham Story*, 113-14.

high school. According to Graham, Eisenhower called him to ask if he should send troops to enforce integration and Graham told him that he should. “Some might say I was advising the President on a political issue,” Graham wrote, “I did not see it that way, though. He saw fit to ask my opinion, as I was sure he did of many other counselors. I also believed there were important moral and spiritual issues at stake.”⁴² Wacker disputes the influence that Graham may have had in the Little Rock crisis and claimed that Eisenhower did not want Graham’s advice; he simply wanted his support, which explained why the call was leaked to the press a few hours after it occurred.⁴³ Regardless, the Little Rock crisis showed that Graham had influence with the president, either as an advisor or as a way to gain public support.

The day after their discussion on March 20, Eisenhower publicly affirmed his relationship with Graham and justified the use of religion to combat communism. At a news conference, a reporter remarked that the president gave “a good deal of time to Reverend Graham” and asked if Eisenhower was planning to use religion to fight communism. The president responded, “Actually, this is the first time I had realized I had given a great deal of time to him. I see him normally on a matter of a few minutes, and yesterday, I believe, was probably the longest visit I ever had with him.” Eisenhower then complimented Graham’s spreading of Christianity around the world, but denied that the president had specific plans to mobilize religion against Russia. Rather, Eisenhower claimed, “I have in public talks pointed out that this is, underneath it all, a battle between those people who believe that man is something more than just an educated animal and those who believe he is nothing else. That is exactly what it is. It is atheism against some

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⁴² Graham, *Just As I Am*, 201.

⁴³ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 135.

kind of religion.”⁴⁴ Rather than using Graham and religion to directly attack the Soviet Union, the president claimed that the Cold War was a battle of ideas: religion versus atheism.

Graham also supported Eisenhower during his reelection campaign in the fall of 1956. Prior to the start of the campaign, Graham wrote to Eisenhower and told him, “It seems to me that the next five years are going to be the most crucial in our history. In my opinion, your leadership is absolutely essential, no matter what price you must pay.” He stated that “Divine Providence” put Eisenhower in office and said that the president should run for reelection.⁴⁵ After the Republican National Convention, on August 27, Graham wrote to Eisenhower, “The prayer of dedication at the end of the Republican Convention was magnificent... As you, Mrs. Eisenhower and the Nixons were bowing in prayer, all of us seemed to sense that here were dedicated people to a cause that cannot lose.” He also thanked the president for praising Nixon because the vice president had strong moral character. Finally, Graham gave his endorsement of the president and offered to help in the contest against the Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson. “I shall do all in my power during the coming campaign to gain friends and supporters for your cause. As always, you have my complete devotion and personal affection,” he told the president.⁴⁶

Eisenhower appreciated Graham’s support during the 1956 campaign and capitalized on it. Responding to Graham’s letter of support, the president wrote, “I count

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⁴⁴ Eisenhower, “The President’s News Conference,” March 21, 1956, American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara (APP), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10759>.

⁴⁵ Graham to Eisenhower, August 19, 1955, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁴⁶ Graham to Eisenhower, August 27, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

heavily on your friendship and support now, as I have in the past.”⁴⁷ Soon after, Eisenhower wrote to the chair of the Republican National Committee and quoted portions of Graham’s August 27 letter. He strategized, “It occurs to me that some time during the campaign we might want to call on him for a little help.”⁴⁸ In a letter on December 3, 1957, Graham praised the president for attending church and handling the Russian threat. He wrote, “You are the most remarkable man in history.” Graham also stressed the need for a religious awakening in America in order to fight Russia.⁴⁹ Graham’s public and private support of Eisenhower centered on their mutual belief that American revival was essential in winning the Cold War.

In his autobiography, Graham recalled his anticommunist beliefs during the Eisenhower administration:

I frequently mentioned and preached on the various social and political problems plaguing our country, and I probably spoke about Communism more than most others. I believed that the leaders of Communism, especially in the Soviet Union, had vowed world conquest; many of their published statements said as much. Like millions of others, I honestly feared the spread of Communism to the United States and elsewhere, whether by a fifth column inside society or by armed aggression.... For all of my early anti-Communist diatribes, however, I certainly did not see myself as a Crusader against Communism.⁵⁰

Graham’s 1997 statement was misleading at best. Although he may have not considered himself an anticommunist crusader, his diatribes against communism were numerous and strong. Shortly after the death of Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1953, Graham gave a sermon entitled “Communism and Christianity.” Before a national radio audience, he proclaimed that “millions looked upon [Stalin] as a god,” but he was a tyrant who had “hands

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⁴⁷ Eisenhower to Graham, August 29, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁴⁸ Eisenhower to Leonard H. Hall, September 3, 1956, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁴⁹ Graham to Eisenhower, December 3, 1957, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁵⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 381.

dripping with the blood of millions,” and Russia’s new leader, Georgy Malenkov, was even worse. Although communism was “supernaturally empowered by the devil himself,” Graham claimed that there was still hope for the world because of a “crack” in the Iron Curtain. Russia was anti-Semitic and Graham posited that no nation had ever attacked Jewish people and survived the wrath of God, as seen in Hitler’s downfall. Unlike Russia, America was prosperous because it was a “friend to Israel.”⁵¹ Graham further extolled the evils of Russia in a broadcast on August 9, 1953. He proclaimed, “Once again, true communism is being unmasked as hundreds of American prisoners of war tell horror stories of treatment at the hands of the enemy.” Russia was brainwashing prisoners, waging a subversive fight in American society, and had recently developed a hydrogen bomb. As usual, Graham presented Jesus Christ as the answer to communism, while also claiming that Christianity was more than simply an alternative to communism; it was salvation.⁵² In 1953, the *Chicago Daily News* nicknamed Graham as “Communism’s Public Enemy Number One,” which was a testament to the power of his attacks on communism.⁵³

Graham continued to make strong attacks on communism in the late 1950s. In 1957, he stated, “My own theory about Communism is that it is masterminded by Satan.”⁵⁴ In a sermon entitled “Lessons from Communism” in San Francisco in 1958, Graham gave an update on communism in the world and criticized American Christianity. According to Graham, “Communist agitators are stirring up revolts in many

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⁵¹ Graham, “Communism and Christianity,” *Hour of Decision*, March 8, 1953, collection 191, T165fj, BGCA.

⁵² Graham, “Christianity - the Answer to Communism,” *Hour of Decision*, August 9, 1953, collection 191, T187f, BGCA.

⁵³ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 231-32.

⁵⁴ Cuordileone, 82.

countries,” such as Lebanon, France, and South America, where Vice President Nixon was threatened and humiliated. Graham frequently expressed awe regarding communism’s rise to power, even though it was evil. The evangelist voiced surprise that, in only forty years, communism had grown to cover a third of the world. Communism had an effective propaganda machine and it copied the early Christian church, a foundation to which Graham felt the modern Christian church must return. He declared, “They have sold their doctrine much more effectively than we have sold the world our philosophy of love.” In addition, communists united around the overthrow of capitalism, while Christians were busy growing “soft” and arguing about small theological differences, which may have been a veiled critique of the fundamentalists who were unwilling to collaborate with the evangelical Graham. He also called on Christians to stage a “counterrevolution” and to have a “fanatical dedication” to their ideology like the communists did. While strongly attacking communism and the state of American Christianity, Graham made sure to stress that the Gospel was about more than simply fighting communism; it was about Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ In a similar radio broadcast on August 10, 1958, Graham stated that “country after country continues to fall into the communist orbit,” such as Iraq. America was on the “precipice of Hell” because it had an underworld that could strike a deal with the communists. If America repented and asked God for salvation, its communist problems would be solved.⁵⁶ Salvation was the key to defeating the communists.

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⁵⁵ Graham, “Lessons from Communism,” 1958, San Francisco, CA, BGEA, <https://billygraham.org/audio/lessons-from-communism>.

⁵⁶ Graham, “Christ or Communism for the World,” *Hour of Decision*, August 10, 1958, collection 191, T448f, BGCA.

Eisenhower's presidency was the first in which Graham was actively involved. Through his role as a presidential advisor, public supporter of the president, and opponent of communism, Graham influenced the political sphere. With the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Graham first commented on the situation in Vietnam and pressured a president to fight against communism there. Graham and Eisenhower's relationship continued after his presidency. Four days before his death on March 28, 1969, Eisenhower met with Graham one last time and they had a final conversation about religion.⁵⁷ Wogaman wrote, "Given Graham's enormous influence over millions of people, it is certainly no wonder that successive presidents have found relationships with him to be politically convenient."⁵⁸ Eisenhower was the first of many.

Nixon and the Election of 1960

During Eisenhower's presidency, Graham grew increasingly close with the vice president. Graham met Nixon through a mutual friend, Senator Clyde Hoey (D-NC) and he recalled that they became friends over a game of golf in 1950 or 1951.⁵⁹ The two men were very similar: Graham rose to fame with his anticommunist tirades at his 1949 Los Angeles revival, while Nixon rose to fame through his investigation of Alger Hiss while on the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Although they had different religious backgrounds (Nixon was a Quaker), both men had a shared experience of "revival tents and altar calls," so they were able to speak intimately and knowledgeably about religion with each other. For example, when Nixon was the vice president, Graham

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⁵⁷ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 570.

⁵⁸ Wogaman, 97.

⁵⁹ Miller, 74; and Graham, *Just As I Am*, 441.

was comfortable enough with him to talk about how Biblical prophecies of the end times related to the Cold War and the Middle East.⁶⁰ Gibbs and Duffy wrote, “The men shared, in addition to their passionate anticommunism, a personal primness, fidelity to their wives, and yet a tireless pursuit of their goals at the expense of time with their families.”⁶¹ The two men quickly struck up a deep and politically motivated friendship.

Graham often provided his friend with political advice on communism. In a letter on October 8, 1955, he told the vice president that “the issue of communism is no longer as potent as it was politically in the U.S.,” advising him to appear as less of a hardliner on the issue during the 1960 campaign.⁶² Graham gave this advice in the wake of the McCarthy fallout and it did not reflect a change in beliefs for him; it was simply a change in public rhetoric. On November 10, 1956, Graham wrote to Nixon saying, “I hope that the United States does not make a serious mistake at this crucial hour in history.” In this letter, he advised that America take a strong stance against Russian aggression in Hungary.⁶³ In December 1957, Graham wrote to Nixon praising him because the vice president accurately warned the public of the dangers in the world. He then reminded Nixon of the threat of nuclear war, Biblical prophecy, and that Nixon needed to understand the relationship between the two if he was going to be president. Theologian Shaun Casey wrote, “There is no evidence in any of the Nixon-Graham correspondence to suggest that Nixon shared any of Graham’s apocalyptic premillennial theology. Yet he apparently did indulge Graham and let him make his case on such matters without

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⁶⁰ Miller, 74-76.

⁶¹ Gibbs and Duffy, 58.

⁶² Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 41.

⁶³ Graham to Nixon, November 10, 1956, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (copied from the Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA (RN)).

indicating any skepticism.”⁶⁴ Although Nixon might not have agreed with Graham’s apocalyptic rantings, he needed the evangelist.

Nixon and Graham provided each other with political favors. In 1956, Eisenhower was unsure about keeping Nixon on the ticket as his vice president and considered putting him in his cabinet instead. Graham worked to keep Nixon on the ticket by increasing his public support through numerous speaking engagements for the vice president at Protestant gatherings. Nixon attended Graham’s 1957 crusade in New York City and the two men walked to the stage in front of the 100,000 attendees; a public statement of mutual support.⁶⁵ Graham even asked Nixon to intervene in a Treasury Department tax ruling concerning his magazine, *Christianity Today*, during the final days of 1957. Nixon said that he would work to encourage a favorable ruling for Graham, who, by this point, was one of Nixon’s closest friends.⁶⁶

As the campaigning for the 1960 election between Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy and Graham’s friend Nixon began, Graham increasingly involved himself in the political sphere; even though he made repeated statements that he was avoiding politics, such as his August 1960 statement to *Time* magazine—“I emphatically deny that I plunged into American politics.”⁶⁷ Although Graham privately assured Kennedy that he would support him if he won the election, Graham worked hard to ensure a Nixon victory.⁶⁸ In his private correspondence with Nixon, Graham often proclaimed that Nixon was destined to become the president, and even claimed once that the Kremlin was

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⁶⁴ Casey, 98.

⁶⁵ Gibbs and Duffy, 61, 75.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician*, 430-31.

⁶⁷ Graham to the editors of *Time*, August 28, 1960, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁶⁸ Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 121.

interfering in the election to ensure a Kennedy victory. He wrote, “It has been my conviction since the beginning that Mr. Khrushchev is interjecting himself into the American political campaign.”⁶⁹ Graham also privately met with Martin Luther King, Jr. to convince him to support Nixon rather than Kennedy. He wrote to Nixon, “I think I at least neutralized him. I think if you could invite him for a brief conference it might swing him. He would be a powerful influence.”⁷⁰ He even told reporters that “this is a time of world tension. [It] is a time for a man of world stature. I don’t think it is a time to experiment with novices... But I’m not taking sides,” which caused all of the reporters to laugh.⁷¹

Graham worked behind the scenes with the current president and attempted to manipulate American foreign relations to ensure a Nixon victory. He wrote to Eisenhower on August 4 asking him to “keep Kennedy and Johnson off-balance” by sending “dramatic messages to Congress.” Per usual, he included an excessive amount of praise: “You have shown a humility and courage in the face of tremendous obstacles that can only be compared to Abraham Lincoln.”⁷² Eisenhower responded that he wanted to help Nixon, but that Nixon needed to communicate with him on how to help.⁷³ In a letter to Nixon, Graham outlined how Nixon and the president should talk about Cuba in public. Nixon, the pastor explained, needed to be critical of communist Fidel Castro’s rise since Kennedy was doing this already. In addition, Nixon needed to encourage the president to break diplomatic relations with Cuba. Finally, to counter Kennedy’s

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⁶⁹ Graham to Nixon, May 27, 1960, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁷⁰ Casey, 125.

⁷¹ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 48.

⁷² Graham to Eisenhower, August 4, 1960, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

⁷³ Eisenhower to Graham, August 10, 1960, collection 74, box 1, folder 12, BGCA (IKE).

accusations that Eisenhower lost Cuba, Graham told the vice president that he should start highlighting the countries that went communist under the Truman administration.⁷⁴ Graham displayed a great willingness to manipulate foreign policy toward communist countries to aid Nixon's campaign.

Graham believed that Nixon needed a strong running mate who had the conviction to fight communism in the world. When Eisenhower encouraged Nixon to pick a Catholic running mate, Graham wrote to the vice president telling him that it was a bad idea because Kennedy "will capture the Catholic vote—almost 100 percent of it—no matter what concessions you make." Since Protestant voters outnumbered Catholics by a three to one margin, Graham recommended that Nixon pick Congressman Walter Judd (R-MN), a former Protestant missionary to China. Incidentally, like Henry Luce and Graham's father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell, Judd was an extremely strong opponent of communism in Asia. Judd was a member of the so-called China Lobby alongside Luce and his wife, Ambassador Clare Booth Luce. The informal coalition was a lobbying group that advocated for a nationalist rather than communist China.⁷⁵ Graham, sensing the negative effects of the letter if it was made public due to his repeated insistence of staying out of politics, wrote at the end of the letter, "You would do me a favor by destroying this letter after reading it."⁷⁶ Graham's religious bigotry seemed implicit in this letter: He worried about a Catholic voting bloc so he encouraged a Protestant voting bloc.

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⁷⁴ Graham to Nixon, October 17, 1960, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁷⁵ Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 57-58.

⁷⁶ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician*, 546-47.

While working for Nixon's election, Graham refused numerous requests from Kennedy's campaign to speak against religious bigotry. In early 1960, Kennedy asked the evangelist to sign a letter denouncing religious bias. Graham refused and claimed that he did not want to appear to be endorsing Kennedy.⁷⁷ In August, when Kennedy again asked Graham and other clergy to commit to not making religion an issue in the election, Graham again refused and claimed that he had heard that some Spanish Catholics had prayed that his plane would crash.⁷⁸ Privately, Graham wrote to Lyndon B. Johnson, a friend and the Democrat candidate for vice president, "A rumor has been floating about among certain Democratic Party leaders that I intend to raise the religious [issue] publicly. This is not true. I shall be in Europe just prior to election time and hope to stay as much out of the political campaign as possible. I would appreciate your conveying this to Senator Kennedy at your convenience."⁷⁹ While technically true, Graham continued to raise the religious issue behind the scenes.

Graham encouraged religious bigotry by organizing and attending two Protestant clergy political strategy meetings. He led a meeting in Montreux, Switzerland on August 27, 1960 and invited numerous Protestant clergymen to discuss the presidential election.⁸⁰ In a letter about the meeting, Graham told Nixon that he and Norman Vincent Peale, another prominent Protestant minister, both thought that Nixon should talk about religion more in his speeches. Graham also told the vice president that the majority of Protestant clergy supported Nixon and that he was encouraging people on his extensive

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⁷⁷ Carty, 54-55

⁷⁸ Frady, 442-43.

⁷⁹ Casey, 160.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 123.

mailing list to vote.⁸¹ A follow-up meeting, the National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom, was planned for September 7 in Washington, D.C. Historians disagree on Graham's role in the meeting: Balmer asserts that Graham was an organizer, while Gibbs and Duffy claim that Graham had no involvement.⁸² It is likely that Graham had some influence on it, although he did not attend the meeting. At the meeting, Peale assailed Kennedy and the Catholic Church as harmful to American politics. After the meeting, the press was highly critical of Peale's religious bigotry.⁸³ Unlike Peale, Graham knew to keep his support mostly hidden and, when publicly supporting Nixon, to claim that it was not due to his religion.

Graham likened the election of Nixon to the fight against communism in an article that he wrote for *Life* magazine in October 1960. The election was important, Graham posited, because people viewed the president as the "leader of the free world." Graham claimed that Nixon would be a leader in the fight against communism, something that Kennedy would be unable to do. He stated, "I believe that the Vice President has the qualities and possibilities of being another Abraham Lincoln to lead us in these years of crisis ahead. He is already a world figure of whom Chairman Khrushchev is afraid."⁸⁴ Although the article went unpublished for a variety of reasons (conflicting accounts cite Nixon, Luce, or Graham as the decision-maker in pulling the article), it demonstrates how Graham sincerely believed that the 1960 election would

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⁸¹ Graham to Nixon, August 22, 1960, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁸² Balmer, *God in the White House*, 26-28; and Gibbs and Duffy, 90-95.

⁸³ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 208.

⁸⁴ Graham, unpublished article for *Life* magazine, October, 1960, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

decide whether the free world would fall to the communist menace.⁸⁵ Nixon, writing after losing the election, claimed that publishing Graham's article could have made a difference in the results.⁸⁶

After Nixon lost the election, Graham and the former vice president continued to plot against Kennedy and planned for a future Nixon victory. Shortly after the inauguration, Nixon wrote to Graham thanking him for his political help and stated, somewhat amusingly, "I have often told friends that when you went into the ministry, politics lost one of its potentially greatest practitioners!" Although the two men had been friends for over a decade, Nixon instructed his staff at the bottom of the letter to make sure that Graham's wife was named "Ruth."⁸⁷ Graham wrote to Nixon in May 1961 that he was concerned about America's current foreign policy and that many Americans were worried Kennedy would not be effective.⁸⁸ Nixon responded in agreement and detailed how the two men could criticize the Kennedy administration.⁸⁹ When Nixon gave his infamous "last press conference" on November 7, 1962 after losing the California governor election, Graham wrote words of personal encouragement mixed with apocalyptic predictions to him: "If these were ordinary times then I would say that you probably would be on the sidelines from now on in politics. However, these are not ordinary times. We are on a collision course, and the situation is going to get worse during the next five or six years." In addition, Graham told Nixon that he was one of his closest friends and told him that he had to persevere because, "You have a tremendous

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⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician*, 637-38; Alan Brinkley, 425; Casey, 192; and Graham to Nixon, June 12, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁸⁶ Nixon to Graham, August 17, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁸⁷ Nixon to Graham, January 15, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁸⁸ Graham to Nixon, May 17, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁸⁹ Nixon to Graham, June 5, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

responsibility to live up to the confidence they [Americans] have placed in you.”⁹⁰

Nixon, encouraged and aided by Graham, would return in 1968.

Transitions with Kennedy

After Kennedy won the election, he attempted to bridge the divide that Graham had created between them. Kennedy did not consider Graham an ally, but he needed to avoid alienating the preacher and his constituents.⁹¹ The president elect’s father, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, had heard Graham speak in Germany in 1955 and advised his son to meet with Graham after winning the election. Senator George A. Smathers (D-FL) arranged the meeting between the two men.⁹² After receiving the invitation to visit Kennedy at his father’s house in Palm Beach, Florida, Graham called Nixon, but could not reach him, and talked to one of Nixon’s aides, H. R. Haldeman, instead. Graham said that he was going to meet with Kennedy, but that he was hesitant and still supported Nixon.⁹³

On January 16, 1961, a few days before the inauguration, Graham traveled to Palm Beach.⁹⁴ First, he met with Kennedy’s father, who told him, “When Jack was elected, I told him that one of the first things he should do was to get acquainted with you. I told him you could be a great asset to the country, helping heal the division over the religious problem in the campaign.”⁹⁵ Graham, apparently in agreement, began claiming that the election had brought Protestants and Catholics together soon after

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⁹⁰ Graham to Nixon, November 11, 1962, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

⁹¹ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 54.

⁹² Carty, 49-50

⁹³ Gibbs and Duffy, 107-108.

⁹⁴ Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 121.

⁹⁵ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 394.

Kennedy's inauguration. Graham and Kennedy then played golf for a few hours.⁹⁶ They talked about the second coming of Christ and Graham told Kennedy that Jesus' return was the only thing that would bring true world peace. After golf, Graham recounted:

In the clubhouse afterward, we got into a lively discussion. Kennedy aired his view that the sixties would be filled with challenges, promises, and problems. As we sat relaxing with soft drinks, he began to talk about Vietnam. Kennedy agreed with Eisenhower's domino theory. "If Laos goes," he said, "all of Southeast Asia will go. Then India. We're going to have to do something about it. Eisenhower's got a number of people over there. We can't allow Vietnam to fall to the Communists." That was the first time I heard that Vietnam—that far off country in the Orient—was such a problem. It all sounded remote to me.⁹⁷

This, of course, is an example of Graham's personal revisionism after the end of the Vietnam War. He knew well the problems in Vietnam; he had written to Eisenhower about them in 1954. As the war grew increasingly unpopular, Graham decided to blame it on the Kennedy administration (see chapter 4). This passage in his 1997 autobiography simply buttressed a position meant to deflect criticism away from the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

After their discussion, Kennedy held a press conference and told reporters that Graham would be answering questions, which was a surprise to the pastor. When reporters brought up the issue of religion, Graham, feeling manipulated but in a corner, stated, "I don't think Mr. Kennedy's being a Catholic should be held against him by any Protestant." Kennedy, a smart politician, knew that Graham was compelled to answer that way because he often publicly supported religious toleration, hence his break with the fundamentalists, even though he privately disliked Kennedy's Catholicism.⁹⁸

Interestingly, discussing presidential manipulation with biographer Frady, Graham stated,

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⁹⁶ Frady, 446.

⁹⁷ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 395.

⁹⁸ Carty, 49-52.

“Well I usually *thought* I could tell. Now, I always believed in the sincerity of Kennedy, for instance, because of the way his mother treated me, the way his father treated me. But with some other politicians, if it was an election year, yes, there would be a lot of free-lance photographers around, it seemed.”⁹⁹ As Wacker pointed out, presidents earned their legitimacy by spending time with Graham and photo ops were especially beneficial for a president.¹⁰⁰ The next day, newspapers all over the country ran pictures of Graham and Kennedy meeting together.¹⁰¹

Graham and Kennedy were not close, although they usually publicly supported each other. Their correspondence shows respect, but no intimacy. On December 20, 1961, Graham telegraphed, “Am praying for you and your family at this time. Am certain God will give you strength and wisdom to carry the heavy responsibilities at this momentous hour of history. Am rejoicing over the tremendous success of your South American trip. God bless you.”¹⁰² More than two weeks later, Kennedy replied, “Many thanks for your kind message of December 20th. Your assurance of prayers for me and my family in this difficult period is heartening indeed.”¹⁰³ During his remarks at the Presidential Prayer Breakfast on March 1, 1962, Kennedy applauded Graham and said, “I think, of Reverend Billy Graham, who has served this cause about which I speak so well here and around the world. He has, I think, transmitted this most important quality of our common commitments to faith in a way which makes us all particularly proud.”¹⁰⁴ While

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⁹⁹ Frady, 243.

¹⁰⁰ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 219-20.

¹⁰¹ Gibbs and Duffy, 110.

¹⁰² Graham to John F. Kennedy, December 20, 1961, collection 74, box 1, folder 13, BGCA (copied from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA (JFK)).

¹⁰³ Kennedy to Graham, January 6, 1962, collection 74, box 1, folder 13, BGCA (JFK).

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy, “Remarks at the 10th Annual Presidential Prayer Breakfast,” March 1, 1962, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9080>.

paying lip service to Graham, Kennedy kept his distance. Only one recorded White House visit in Kennedy's diary exists. On September 10, 1962, Graham visited Kennedy for five minutes while the president was meeting with Graham's close friend Eisenhower.¹⁰⁵ However, as he had done during Eisenhower's presidency, Graham continued to visit the White House before and after his international trips.¹⁰⁶



Figure 2. Graham and Kennedy smile for the camera at the 1961 Presidential Prayer Breakfast.¹⁰⁷

Graham recalled that the two men had a positive relationship, but this claim appears to be stretched. He wrote, "Mr. Kennedy had reportedly said I was the only

¹⁰⁵ September 10, 1962, in *John F. Kennedy Presidential Daily Diaries*, Miller Center, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (MC), <http://web2.millercenter.org/jfk/dailydiaries/JFKL-POF-DailyDiary-1962-09.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Frady, 258.

¹⁰⁷ *Dr. Billy Graham and President John F. Kennedy*, February 9, 1961, p. 2, collection 10, box 1, folder 9, BGCA.

Protestant clergyman with whom he felt comfortable.”¹⁰⁸ However, when Graham invited the president to his Chicago crusade in 1962, Kennedy “politely declined” the invitation.¹⁰⁹ Graham claimed that he supported Kennedy’s Peace Corps, which he viewed as a secular version of Christian missionary work. He befriended Sargent Shriver, brother-in-law of the president and creator of the Peace Corps, and worked on a documentary with Shriver on poverty in Appalachia.¹¹⁰ However, Graham also publicly attacked the Peace Corps, saying in 1963 said that it was too “materialistic.”¹¹¹ Most historians concede that Graham was the least close with Kennedy of all his early presidential relationships: Aikman wrote that the two men were “not at all close,” Pierard wrote that “their relations were proper but hardly intimate,” and Streiker and Strober stated that Graham was not an advisor or close friend of the president.¹¹² Wacker concluded that “to some extent they needed each other: Graham needed access to Washington power corridors and Kennedy needed access to Graham’s constituency.”¹¹³ Graham and Kennedy only had a relationship because Kennedy was the president and Graham was an extremely well known evangelist, unlike Graham’s relationships with Johnson and Nixon, which involved friendship as well as politics.

Graham gave foreign policy advice to the Kennedy administration only once, in October 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy’s Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, was giving a speech in Graham’s hometown and visited Graham at his house afterward. Rusk asked Graham what the president should do regarding Cuba and the Soviet Union.

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¹⁰⁸ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 397.

¹⁰⁹ Miller, 261.

¹¹⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 396.

¹¹¹ Streiker and Strober, 62.

¹¹² Aikman, 191; Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 121; and Streiker and Strober, 62.

¹¹³ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 209.

Graham responded, “I think we’d better stand firm,” which is what Kennedy did. While tensions with Cuba were still running high, Graham traveled through South America and met with the Defense Minister of Argentina, who told him, “I want you to convey to the President of that United States that we have two aircraft carriers... and we will put them at the disposal of the United States if it comes to war.” Graham met with Rusk and Kennedy when he returned to the U.S. and, once again, functioned as an unofficial ambassador.¹¹⁴ Although Graham was in a position to also offer advice on the growing problem in Vietnam since Kennedy began sending military advisors and Special Forces to South Vietnam in 1961 and created the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in 1962, Graham’s role as an advisor and ambassador was limited to his comments and meetings on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Throughout Kennedy’s presidency, Graham continued his anticommunist tirades and often attacked the Kennedy administration while doing so. In an interview with his local newspaper during the summer of 1961, Graham claimed that the American people were angry because “we have suffered defeats, and because of Communist threats and infiltration. But they are now tired of being shoved around and are ready to fight if there has to be a showdown.... We oughtn’t to give another inch to Communism.”¹¹⁵ On September 3, 1961, in an address entitled “The Soviet Threat to Life on Earth,” Graham proclaimed to the country via his radio show that there was a “new Soviet policy of terror” because the country announced that they would be resuming their nuclear weapons tests. “All negotiations with the Soviet Union are useless,” he declared, “And when Mr. Khrushchev said that communism will bury us, he meant it.” Cleverly claiming

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¹¹⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 371, 375, 398.

¹¹⁵ Frady, 421.

that the public felt anger at the failures of the State Department, rather than stating it as his personal view, Graham stated that the “impending disaster” was due to the American government’s failures. Graham claimed that communism was one of the “antichrists of history” and that it would eventually be demolished, again tying the defeat of communism to the return of Jesus and the apocalypse.¹¹⁶ Frady wrote that “it was still as if, in this preserving recital of dire speculations, he somehow actually half-longed for the fulfilling resolving Armageddon.”¹¹⁷ Graham’s Christian evangelical faith created a tension: on one hand the mandate to stop communism, while on the other hand, the fulfillment of the Bible through the apocalypse that communism would usher in.

Graham also began increasingly citing the situation in Vietnam as an example of the dangers of communism. On an October 29, 1961 broadcast, he claimed that America could gain a lead in the Cold War if it could successfully develop a “death-ray bomb,” which he claimed that the American government was currently working on. Graham continued with the fantastical delusion that the bomb would send out neutrons, capable of killing people without leveling cities. While America might gain a temporary military advantage over the Soviet Union from such a weapon, Graham cautioned that these bombs could lead to the end of the world. “If there was ever a book in the world that is relevant in the times in which we live, it is the visions of John during those turbulent days of the early church,” he warned. Finally, he claimed that communists were killing

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¹¹⁶ Graham, “The Soviet Threat to Life on Earth,” *Hour of Decision*, September 3, 1961, collection 191, T608g, BGCA.

¹¹⁷ Frady, 446.

“innocent people” in South Vietnam and used communist atrocities there as an example of the deterioration of the world.¹¹⁸ In another broadcast, he stated:

Laos has just elected a Communist prime minister. The guerilla forces in South Viet Nam are stepped up: there are terrorist attacks against innocent citizens throughout the country. Cambodia, fearful that the United States will not keep Far Eastern commitments, has broken off relations with Thailand and threatened to join the Communist orbit voluntarily.

Graham then accused Kennedy’s State Department of being too optimistic about the future—“like a boy whistling in a graveyard after the sun has gone down.”¹¹⁹ Despite using Vietnam as an example of communist atrocities and setting a precedent of visiting countries threatened by communism, such as South Korea in 1952 and India in 1956, Graham repeatedly declined to lead crusades in South Vietnam. The first request came in 1962 from Saigon-based T. G. Mangham, Jr. The BGEA responded that although Graham was planning an eastern Asia tour, “there does not seem to be any possibility that Mr. Graham could visit Saigon on this trip, much as he would like to. His schedule is very full.”¹²⁰ For now, South Vietnam was threatened by communism, but not so much that a trip was warranted.

Five days before Kennedy’s assassination, in a broadcast entitled “Why Communism is Gaining,” Graham excoriated the liberal administration because he felt that it did not understand communism. Communists wanted world revolution, argued Graham, and extreme liberals did not understand that the communists would never compromise in their quest for world domination. The 1964 election would decide what America would do to combat communism. Graham claimed that there were two sides in

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¹¹⁸ Graham, “How to Combat Communism,” *Hour of Decision*, October 29, 1961, collection 191, T616g, BGCA.

¹¹⁹ Graham, “The Ultimate Weapon,” *Hour of Decision*, 1961, collection 74, reel 1, BGCA (RN).

¹²⁰ Reverend Smyth to T. G. Mangham, Jr., October 22, 1962, collection 17, box 145, folder 14, BGCA.

the election: the liberals; and the group that wanted to fight communism, the conservatives. Graham then detailed exactly what the communist believed: that the “state is supreme;” that international revolution was necessary, as seen in South Vietnam; and that no ultimate moral truth existed. For Graham, American colleges, with their “liberal education,” were very similar to the “teachings of communism” because of their anti-religious and materialist education. Although Graham did not mention it, the public probably viewed Kennedy as someone educated in just such a liberal-leaning institution: Harvard University.¹²¹ Kennedy was the assumed Democratic candidate in the 1964 election, so Graham was implicitly attacking him in this anticommunist tirade.

Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963 startled Graham, although he apparently had premonitions about it a few weeks before the president was killed. Graham claimed that he attempted to contact Kennedy in early November to tell him to cancel his Texas trip, but that he could not reach the president. At Kennedy’s funeral, Graham sat with the deceased president’s friends and family, a testament to Kennedy’s statement about how comfortable he felt around Graham.¹²² For the next few years, Graham spoke highly of the deceased president and tied his work to resisting communism. In a sermon given in April 1964, Graham quoted one of Kennedy’s State of the Union addresses: “Each day the crisis multiplies. Each day their solution grows more difficult. Each day we draw nearer the hour of maximum danger as weapons spread and hostile forces grow stronger.” Graham said that Kennedy was correct and that the

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¹²¹ Graham, “Why Communism is Gaining,” *Hour of Decision*, November 17, 1963, collection 191, T723c, BGCA.

¹²² Aikman, 194-95.

problems of the world, such as communism, were getting worse.¹²³ In a 1964 memorial service, Graham stated that Kennedy stressed the “urgency of communism” in the world and talked about how this “urgency” related to Jesus’ discussion of the apocalypse. Graham also said that Kennedy’s “election helped to end religious bigotry in America,” conveniently ignoring the fact that Graham himself had tried to prevent Kennedy from winning the election because of his Catholicism.¹²⁴ Graham’s rhetoric in support of the president continued for a few years after his assassination, but the pastor eventually resumed criticizing the deceased president and later blamed him for the ultimate failure of the Vietnam War.

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¹²³ Graham, “National Association of Broadcasters,” April 8, 1964, Chicago, IL, p. 2, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

¹²⁴ Graham, “Remarks at Memorial Service for John F. Kennedy,” May 17, 1964, Raleigh, NC, p. 3-5, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

Chapter 3

Escalation with Johnson

Graham immediately reached out to Kennedy's successor the day after the assassination. "I am shocked by the events of this day. I am praying that God will give you grace faith and courage as you assume the great responsibilities of the Presidency," he wrote the new president.¹ Johnson, understandably busy assuming the awesome responsibilities of the presidency, responded two weeks later that he was grateful for the prayer and support "during the extremely trying days immediately after the tragic event in Dallas."² With Johnson's ascension to the presidency, Graham resumed his role as presidential friend and adviser, a role that he had largely lost during the Kennedy administration.

Graham and Johnson became friends in the early 1950s. Sid Richardson, the oil executive who also introduced the evangelist to Eisenhower, introduced Graham to then Senator Johnson at a dinner in Texas and they quickly grew close.³ Graham's first visit to the Johnson White House occurred on December 16, 1963. This trip included a nude swim in the White House pool—a typical activity for Johnson and a surprise to Graham.⁴ Amusingly, Graham did not mention the nudity when describing this visit in his autobiography.⁵ After the visit, Graham, always aware of Nixon's paranoia, assured the former vice president that Johnson "did not mention politics once during the entire

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¹ Graham to Lyndon B. Johnson, November 23, 1963, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (copied from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX (LBJ)).

² Johnson to Graham, December 9, 1963, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

³ Graham, interview by Monroe Billington, October 12, 1983, LBJ, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/biopage.asp>.

⁴ Aikman, 196.

⁵ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 404.

evening.”⁶ Graham stayed overnight at the White House at least 20 times between 1963 and 1969 and made multiple visits to Johnson’s ranch on the Pedernales River in Texas as well.⁷ Graham, when thanking Johnson for allowing him and Ruth to spend the night at the White House, which was a first for the evangelist, wrote to Johnson on August 27, 1964, “The load that you carry so bravely and cheerfully is indeed heavy. I wish it were possible for me to carry part of it for you. About all I can do is pray.”⁸ Johnson, publicly commenting on Graham’s frequent trips to the White House, stated, “I am very blessed with many things but no one is richer in his associations and his friendships than I have been throughout the years. Dr. Billy Graham comes here frequently and gives me strength and comfort and prays over me, and nobody needs a prayer more than I do.”⁹

Graham even visited the president while he was staying at Camp David in 1965 and led religious services for Johnson and the military personnel there.¹⁰ Lady Bird Johnson recalled the weekend at Camp David and painted the picture of an intimate relationship between the two men. She wrote, “Billy Graham does, in fact, look almost too good to be true—so tall and handsome, athletic and intelligent, natural, persuasive, terrifically organized and businesslike—to my thinking, a force for good in this country, and someone I enjoy being around.”¹¹ President Johnson did not record more in his diary and the question of why Graham was at Camp David with Johnson and his military staff, who were likely there to discuss the Vietnam War, remains unanswered.

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⁶ Miller, 97.

⁷ Aikman, 195.

⁸ Graham to Johnson, August 27, 1964, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁹ Johnson, “Remarks at the Retirement Ceremony of Gen. John K. Gerhart, USAF,” April 2, 1965, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26861>.

¹⁰ July 18, 1965, in *Lyndon B. Johnson’s Daily Diary*, LBJ, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/daily_diary/pdf/1965/19650718.pdf.

¹¹ Lady Bird Johnson, July 17 and 18, 1965, in *A White House Diary* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 300-303.

Graham and Johnson's relationship had a spiritual focus as well. Historian Paul Keith Conkin described Johnson as a man with simple Christian beliefs: "For his private purposes, a loose and generalized version of Christian doctrine seemed sufficient. Let the theologians argue niceties of doctrine. His was a rather childlike approach." Graham's faith meshed well with the president's because it was simple and evangelical, and both men were willing to cross barriers between Christian sects.¹² Graham said that Johnson was "very religious," even when the cameras were not around, meaning that Graham thought Johnson had a genuine faith.¹³ Graham recalled:

I knew he was not a saint. When I spoke warmly about his spiritual convictions, I was not forgetting his inconsistencies and transgressions. Did he intimidate me? Maybe just the opposite: I think I intimidated him. He liked having an old-fashioned Baptist preacher around for personal as well as political reasons, but I did not avoid taking issue with him or probing his soul whenever I thought it necessary.

According to Graham, Johnson would even apologize every time he swore in front of Graham, saying, "Excuse me, Preacher."¹⁴ Graham claimed that Johnson did not abuse their relationship, if anything Graham intimidated the president.

Graham became Johnson's "chief spiritual counselor."¹⁵ In a telephone conversation on October 20, 1964, Johnson asked Graham to visit and lead a service on Sunday at the White House. Johnson stated, "We'll just have a good visit and I'll feel stronger next week," showing the support that Graham gave him.¹⁶ In a conversation on September 17, 1965, Johnson called Graham and stated, "He [Calvin Thielman, a mutual

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¹² Conkin, 195-96.

¹³ Graham, interview by Billington.

¹⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 404, 406.

¹⁵ Pierard, "Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency," 122.

¹⁶ Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on October 20, 1964, WH6410.13, 5926, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

friend who was with Johnson] and I are two of your greatest admirers and we've been saying a prayer for you." Graham responded that he would be praying for Johnson's handling of the India-Pakistani crisis. During this call, Johnson even told Graham that he would try to go to his Houston crusade on October 15, which he ended up attending, a first for a sitting President.¹⁷ Graham called Johnson on October 5 and told him, "We [Ruth and Graham] love you, not just as President, but as a man."¹⁸ Bill Moyers, Johnson's press secretary, commented that the two men had "an almost visceral attraction to each other," which was in part due to their similar rural Southern upbringings.¹⁹ Graham and Johnson had a close relationship, but this relationship aligned on more than just personal attraction to each other, it included similar beliefs regarding the state of the world.

The Anticommunist Manifesto

Throughout Johnson's presidency, Graham maintained his strong position against communism; it was during this administration that the preacher issued his strongest rebuke of communism ever. In 1965 (the first year of full-scale U.S. intervention in Vietnam), Graham published *World Aflame*, which was his magnum opus on the impending apocalypse. In his opening paragraph, Graham warned that the world was in "perhaps the last era" of its life due to the atomic bomb. Before reaching the end of his second page, Graham argued that the communist redistribution of wealth to solve

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¹⁷ Graham, Johnson, and Calvin Thielman, telephone conversation on September 17, 1965, WH6509.05, 8884, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

¹⁸ Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on October 5, 1965, WH6510.01, 9019, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

¹⁹ Frady, 260.

economic inequality would not solve the problems in the world, subscribing to the evangelical belief that personal salvation was the key to a better world. Communism was more than simply a non-solution; it was *the* problem. “Communism is a dangerous threat, not only to the West but to Christianity everywhere,” he wrote. It was perilous for multiple reasons, such as Chinese and Russian military advances, aggression, and infiltration in America. As usual, Graham criticized Americans for not matching communist “zeal” and said that communism could be overcome if Christians stood strong. Providing some hope, Graham argued that communism would eventually fail because it did not have the “ultimate answer” found in Christianity. Criticizing Western Christianity again, Graham wrote, “It is my opinion that God may be using Communism as a judgment upon the West. The sins of the West are now so great that judgment is inevitable, unless there is national repentance. God has done this before.”²⁰

For Graham, God’s judgement would be coming in the apocalypse. A true evangelical, Graham argued that God’s salvation was the key to a perfect society and that no social, political, or economic restructuring could drastically improve the world. He wrote:

Communists teach that by revolution and violence the perfect society shall be established here on earth and thereafter all men shall be wholly happy. Communism offers its panacea by compulsion and a forceful redistribution of property. However, all of these schemes are destined to fail and to create other conditions that only the return of Christ can solve.

This return was imminent because the signs that Christ predicted were “converging for the first time:” increased psychological breakdowns, immorality, persecution of Christians, affluence (which communists were using to their advantage to appeal to the

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²⁰ Graham, *World Aflame* (Surrey, UK: Kingswood, 1965), xiii-xiv, 8-11, <http://www.ccel.us/worldaflame.toc.html>.

poor), massive armaments, and the rise of a world dictator. Graham argued that the new world leader “will be the incarnation of Satan, called Anti-Christ in the Scriptures.” For Graham, communism was this antichrist, with its aggressive expansion around the world. All of the signs were converging and the world would soon be “consumed by fire” because God prophesized it, and atomic weapons made it an imminent possibility.²¹

In addition to his apocalyptic anticommunist manifesto, Graham made repeated statements addressing communism during the Johnson administration. At a press conference in San Diego on April 30, 1964, he claimed that few Americans knew about all of communism’s “subtleties and tricks and many of its faces and guises that it goes on.” To fight communism, Graham posited that a person had to understand it and then show the world that Christianity offered a better future.²² In the forward of a book entitled *The Challenge of World Communism in Asia*, Graham wrote that communism was the greatest threat to the world. Interestingly, J. Roscoe Saunders, an American missionary in China, authored the book. Graham was yet again involving himself with the virulently anticommunist missionaries to China.²³ In 1965, Graham proclaimed, “So steady, so deadly has been the encroachment of Communist tyranny on the West that we have been in danger of being hypnotized into a state of unawareness. Communist China is the most dangerous enemy of freedom in the world.”²⁴ Clearly, in Graham’s 1960s rhetoric, China was ascending to, if not surpassing, the threat level of Russia. Graham’s increased concern over China was perhaps due to the influence of Walter Judd, L. Nelson Bell, and other contacts in the “China Lobby.”

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²¹ Graham, *World Aflame*, 203, 210, 216-27, 253.

²² Graham, press conference in San Diego, CA, April 30, 1964, collection 24, box 4, folder 13, BGCA.

²³ Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam,” 40.

²⁴ Frady, 421.

Johnson appreciated Graham's intense anticommunism and Graham often encouraged the president to stand firm. Writing to the president on July 11, 1965, Graham declared, "It is my prayer that you will continue to face the somber realities of this hour with faith and courage. The Communists are moving fast toward their goal of global revolution. Perhaps God brought you to the kingdom for such an hour as this—to stop them. In doing so, you could be the man that helped save Christian civilization." Graham built Johnson up as the man invested by God to stop the communist menace. As usual, Graham included words of encouragement and told Johnson that he liked and supported him.²⁵ Bothwell concluded that "Johnson shared Graham's vehement anticommunist... sentiments."²⁶

In July 1967, Graham spoke in a communist country for the first time when he preached to 2,000 people in Yugoslavia, although his willingness to preach to communists did not lessen his anticommunism.²⁷ Johnson wrote to Graham in the midst of the crusade and told the evangelist that "reports of your European Crusade are truly magnificent. It must be a great satisfaction to you – as it is an inspiration to all men – that so many hearts and once shuttered doors were opened by the strength of your spirit and message."²⁸ The report that Johnson was probably referring to described Graham's crusade in Yugoslavia as the first meeting for Christians behind the Iron Curtain and noted that Graham stated that he would like to hold a future crusade in Russia.²⁹ The crusade in Yugoslavia, Graham believed, represented a major step, although it was not

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²⁵ Graham to Johnson, July 11, 1965, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

²⁶ Bothwell, 93.

²⁷ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 339.

²⁸ Johnson to Graham, July 11, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

²⁹ Press report on Graham, July 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

too far behind the Iron Curtain because the country was not under the Soviet sphere of influence.³⁰ Some Graham biographers, such as William C. Martin, incorrectly posited that Graham was becoming less anticommunist in the 1960s.³¹ Graham was always willing to reach new groups and preaching to communists did not mean that he was compromising his beliefs. Yet if anything, he was fighting communism by preaching in a communist country because he believed that religion was a weapon against communism. Throughout the 1960s, Graham maintained his position that communism was the Antichrist and would usher in the apocalypse.

Domestic Advisor

In addition to being a friend of the president and public opponent of communism, Graham worked directly with the Johnson administration, starting with the election of 1964 even though many evangelical voters were attracted to the president's opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ). Graham had met Goldwater in 1963 and "was favorably impressed with the Arizona senator." Graham also expressed some early hesitation with Johnson and called Nixon in February 1964 to tell him that Ruth was "terribly depressed" because Johnson had "complete ignorance on foreign policy." Graham may have been doing this, however, to maintain Nixon's support and was simply playing both sides.³² Some of Goldwater's campaign staff visited Graham to pitch the idea of him being Goldwater's running mate. Graham was impressed, but quickly refused

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³⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 384.

³¹ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 96; and Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 311.

³² Miller, 102-103.

claiming he could not transition from being a pastor to a politician so quickly.³³ Johnson, wary of the support that Graham had among white evangelicals, closely observed the evangelist's actions, as seen in a White House memo that documented Graham's meeting with the Goldwater delegation.³⁴ Eventually, Johnson told him, "Now, Billy, you stay out of politics," by which he meant, campaign for me, not Goldwater.³⁵

Graham, realizing his loss of power and influence if he campaigned for the unpromising Goldwater, listened to the president's advice and worked toward a Johnson victory. Graham wrote in his autobiography that Johnson asked for his opinion on vice presidential candidates in the summer of 1964. "I smiled and pointed to one name on his list, more guessing than advising. He nodded. The Hubert Humphrey decision had already been made," recalled the pastor.³⁶ However, in Marshall Frady's biography, the minister recollected a different, more politically charged, take on the same story: "I said, 'Hubert Humphrey.' He just nodded. And you know, I've always wondered since then."³⁷ On October 20, the evangelist told the president to stop worrying because "you've got this election, in my opinion, wrapped up and you've got it wrapped up big."³⁸ Graham even witnessed the dirty side of the administration when the president showed him an intelligence report that closely tracked Goldwater's daily movements shortly before the election. "It was unbelievable—and unsettling—to realize what goes on behind the

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³³ Balmer, *God in the White House*, 55-56.

³⁴ Gibbs and Duffy, 128-29.

³⁵ Frady, 266.

³⁶ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 410-11.

³⁷ Frady, 264.

³⁸ Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on October 20, 1964.

scenes in politics,” Graham recalled.³⁹ However, Graham never admonished the president for this surveillance.

The Johnson administration used Graham for political purposes throughout the election, even though the president denied it. In a November 5 phone call to Graham, Johnson stated, “I hope not a single friend of mine put any pressure on you cause I didn’t want them to. I know how you feel and I know what you stand for.” Johnson was apologizing for his campaign staff pressuring Graham to support Johnson, especially after Graham’s daughter, Anne, publicly endorsed Goldwater at a campaign rally. Graham told the president that he held a press conference and said “we oughta all unite behind you, and, uh, pray for you, and that, uh, I, intended to stand by you 100 percent.”⁴⁰

Although the president told Graham that he would never pressure him for support, Johnson had already found ways to gain his endorsement without Graham’s consent. In a phone call between Johnson and Stephen Smith, a Democratic Party operative, on May 11, 1964, Johnson discussed the idea of making a political “pitch” at a Graham event because there would be 40,000 people there and “that would be enough notoriety connected with it because of, uh, uh Graham’s presence... We could take that and circularize the hell out of it, even run it as an ad.”⁴¹ In another telephone conversation on August 22, George Reedy, the press secretary prior to Bill Moyers, asked Johnson, “In view of the fact of this Billy Graham thing for tomorrow, should I tell them [the press] about church or just let it go as usual?” Johnson said yes and utilized Graham’s

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³⁹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 407.

⁴⁰ Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on November 5, 1964, WH6411.08, 6227, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

⁴¹ Johnson and Stephen Smith, telephone conversation on May 11, 1964, WH6405.03, 3381, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

popularity.⁴² Johnson was clearly aware that he could utilize his friendship with Graham for political gains. At the president's inauguration, Billy Graham led the Protestant prayer, an implicit endorsement and blessing of the administration.⁴³ Johnson smartly realized that keeping Graham around would be extremely beneficial to his presidency.

Graham served as a domestic advisor for Johnson, who often sought his help on the issues of civil rights and his Great Society programs. Throughout 1964 and 1965, with Johnson's encouragement, Graham held integrated crusades in the South to increase support for the Civil Rights Act.⁴⁴ In a July 6, 1964 letter, Graham told Johnson that he could not be the chairman of Johnson's citizens committee, which would oversee the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act in the South, although Graham did agree to be on the committee. Graham wrote, "Also, I believe I can contribute far more in the role of a preacher. You once told me that my greatest contribution to America was to keep on doing what I am doing. Certainly the Civil Rights legislation needs to be undergirded by a moral and spiritual awakening." Both Graham and Johnson knew that he could be most helpful to the president as a public supporter and preacher.⁴⁵ In 1967, he supported the President's War on Poverty by telephoning congressmen for a week.⁴⁶ When Johnson offered Graham a formal role in his cabinet or as an ambassador, Graham declined, although he continued to unofficially function in these roles, especially as an advisor on the Vietnam War.⁴⁷

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⁴² Johnson and George Reedy, telephone conversation on August 22, 1964, WH6408.33, 5126, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

⁴³ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 302.

⁴⁴ Pierard, "Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency," 123-24.

⁴⁵ Graham to Johnson, July 6, 1964, collection 318, box 52, folder 2, BGCA (LBJ).

⁴⁶ Frady, 395.

⁴⁷ Aikman, 198.

Although it is clear that Johnson, as did Nixon, abused his friendship with Graham for political purposes, the evangelist also willingly participated in his administration and held a substantial amount of power and influence. In 1966, while giving Graham the Big Brother of the Year award, Johnson publicly affirmed Graham's power at the White House. "Big Brothers of America are honoring you today for your leadership and influence among the youth of our Nation. I know something about that leadership--and I have seen some of the results of that influence. It is no small thing," the president proclaimed.⁴⁸ Giving a joint address with Graham in 1967, the president declared, "In some of our most trying periods, Dr. Graham comes here and gives us counsel and strength.... He is not only a voice that is listened to in this country, but one that is respected throughout the world."⁴⁹

Vietnam Advisor

The president listened to Graham's "voice" particularly when dealing with the trials of the Vietnam War, a fact supported by numerous Graham historians and biographers. Since Graham was staunchly anticommunist, Johnson "could count on Graham to support much of his agenda," including the Vietnam War, wrote historian Stephen Miller.⁵⁰ David Aikman stated that Johnson would ask for the evangelist's opinions on wartime policy.⁵¹ Marshall Frady wrote that "the companionability between Johnson and Graham grew ever warmer as Vietnam smoldered on" and that both men

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⁴⁸ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Presenting the Big Brother of the Year Award to the Reverend William F. Graham," May 10, 1966, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27586>.

⁴⁹ Graham and Johnson, "Remarks to Delegates to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Conference," June 14, 1967, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28302>.

⁵⁰ Miller, 104.

⁵¹ Aikman, 238.

shared certain qualities that tied them together: “steadfastness, resoluteness, unflinching and indissuadable [sic] certitude.” In addition, both men subscribed to the Munich Doctrine, and Graham assured Johnson that the war was moral and that America was destined to win.⁵² Historian Richard V. Pierard wrote that Graham was Johnson’s emergency advisor: “They would often stay up until well past midnight discussing Vietnam or other crises, and the president summoned him when he faced serious problems.”⁵³ Graham denied any intimate role in the administration and claimed, “President Johnson and I often talked about the Vietnam War, but never about the military strategy involved.”⁵⁴ His usage of “military strategy” is somewhat vague, and it is clear that at least Johnson’s general policies toward Vietnam were discussed.

Johnson advisor Bill Moyers recalled the intimate relationship between the two men that focused on the Vietnam War. Moyers recollected how Johnson “would have Billy completely riveted. And most of all he would let him in on state secrets, especially about the war – he’d say, ‘Here’s how I chose those bombing targets, Billy,’ and there’d come this light in Billy’s eyes.” Moyers claimed that “nobody could make Johnson feel he was right quite like Billy Graham did,” explaining why Johnson shared sensitive information with the evangelist. Moyers recalled that Graham would not criticize, question, or challenge the president, he would simply agree with him.⁵⁵ Clearly, the two men talked about military strategy in Vietnam.

Multiple White House decisions and documents suggest the influence that Graham had on Vietnam War policy. Following the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin

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⁵² Frady, 419, 422.

⁵³ Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 122.

⁵⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 415.

⁵⁵ Frady, 262, 264, 422.

Resolution in August 1964, Johnson gained increased power to conduct operations in Vietnam and began escalating the war with a surge of American troops entering Vietnam. On March 2, 1965, Johnson began his aerial bombardment campaign against North Vietnam, an assault that would continue for three years. The operation was codenamed “ROLLING THUNDER,” a reference to Graham’s crusade theme song: “How Great Though Art.”⁵⁶ The exact lyrics are:

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

In Vietnam, American air power was God-like with its “awesome wonder” and “power,” an interesting appropriation of Christian rhetoric for government aims, i.e. civil religion.⁵⁷ Johnson regularly received updates on Graham’s support for him, as is evident from an April 1966 memo that stated that Graham was praying for the president and Vietnam.⁵⁸ White House aides attempted to utilize Graham as their public mouthpiece for Vietnam policy, as seen when Fred Panzer wrote to Johnson on March 10, 1967 recommending that Johnson ask Graham to speak about the “misconception[s]” of the draft, specifically that it was “equal service” rather than a “lottery.”⁵⁹ In September 1967, the president even asked Graham to be on a team that monitored elections in South Vietnam. Although Graham said no, Johnson’s request served as a testament to the power that Graham had over the administration’s actions in the Vietnam War.⁶⁰

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⁵⁶ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 595.

⁵⁷ George Beverly Shea, “How Great Thou Art,” 1969, New York, NY, accessed October 14, 2016, <https://youtu.be/dsrEscUUNMA>.

⁵⁸ Marvin to Johnson, April 5, 1966, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁵⁹ Fred Panzer to Johnson, March 10, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁶⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, 150.

Graham contacted Johnson repeatedly to assure him of his support regarding the war. Writing to the president on July 19, 1966, Graham claimed that the media had misrepresented his comments about Johnson as criticism. "Please be assured that I do not criticize you publicly or privately, even though at times I may not understand or I may disagree with a certain policy or program. I do not want to be considered one of your critics – but one of your boosters and friends," Graham counselled the president.⁶¹ On March 15, 1967, Graham wrote, "Will be praying for you constantly that God will give you wisdom at Guam as you deal with Vietnam situation."⁶² Johnson was in Guam meeting with South Vietnamese leaders, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., and General William Westmoreland, head of MACV. At the press conference afterwards, Johnson maintained his belief that "our military situation is considerably strengthened" and that Hanoi did not want peace.⁶³ Writing to Johnson from his London Crusade in June 1967, Graham supported the president and dismissed his antiwar detractors. He wrote:

You are leading America through one of the most difficult and critical period of history. You most certainly need divine wisdom and strength.... Wherever I speak, the anti-Vietnam demonstrators are there. As a matter of fact, they've been picketing my hotel. Some of my associates have been having "in depth" conversations with them. We are convinced that most of them are completely Marxists and some outright Communists.

Graham also mentioned that he had dinner with some socialists and members of the Labor Party and that the topic of Vietnam came up. According to the evangelist, one of the liberal guests said that the war needed to be won quickly and that America could not

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⁶¹ Graham to Johnson, July 19, 1965, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁶² Graham to Johnson, March 15, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁶³ Johnson and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., "The President's News Conference in Guam Following the Conference," March 21, 1967, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28153>.

pull out. Graham assured the president that he had foreign support and minimized antiwar activists by labeling them as communists.⁶⁴

Even Graham's father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell, used his connection to Graham to advise the president on the war. Writing to Johnson on April 2, 1965, Bell established himself as an authoritative voice by opening his letter stressing his relationship to Graham: "Let me identify myself by saying that Ruth Graham is my daughter so we have to count Billy in as a part of the family." Bell told the president to ignore the liberal clergymen that were antiwar because "they lack competence, and in my opinion, they are presumptuous in trying to advise you." Amusingly, Bell did not consider his advice presumptuous. Bell told Johnson that the antiwar Christians were in the minority and were not representative of the "true Christians in this country." His evidence for this claim was that his and Graham's magazine, *Christianity Today*, had a wider circulation than the more liberal *The Christian Century*.⁶⁵ Johnson wrote back thanking Bell for his support.⁶⁶

Bell wrote to Johnson again on May 13, 1965 and offered the president more explicit support. "Just a note to tell you that your courageous actions in... Vietnam are appreciated by a great many of us. As one said to me yesterday, the flag flies just a little jauntier because our nation is trying to stand firmly in a world dominated by evil," he wrote.⁶⁷ For Bell, American pride was tied to the fight against communism. Although Johnson never explicitly told Bell that he utilized the supportive advice, it is clear the

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⁶⁴ Graham to Johnson, June 30, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁶⁵ L. Nelson Bell to Johnson, April 2, 1965, collection 318, box 52, folder 2, BGCA.

⁶⁶ Johnson to Bell, April 15, 1965, collection 318, box 52, folder 2, BGCA.

⁶⁷ Bell to Johnson, May 13, 1965, collection 318, box 52, folder 2, BGCA.

White House valued Bell's opinions. On February 24, 1966, a memo circulated throughout the White House that included a portion of one of Bell's editorials:

The council fails to see that American intervention in World War II and in Viet Nam occurred after war had begun, and that America's aim in each instance was to bring peace and freedom to enslaved people. Had there been no Communist aggression in Viet Nam, America would not be involved in the present conflict. And America can get out of the country the minute those who really started the war stop it.

Bell criticized the antiwar liberal World Council of Churches for failing to see, in his opinion, that the American war in Vietnam was noble and that the communists started the war.⁶⁸ Throughout the sixties, Bell remained a substantial anticommunist influence on Graham, who stated in 1969 that "Dr. Bell's strength is that I know that he loves me, but he's never been afraid to tell me what was the truth."⁶⁹ Bell's hawkish anticommunist opinions aligned well with Graham and the Johnson administration and again showed the influence of former Chinese missionaries on the Vietnam War.

Public Support for Johnson's Escalation

Graham's close personal relationship with Johnson, strong anticommunist beliefs, and advisory role within the administration drove his public support for the Vietnam War. This support was evident in numerous sermons, press conferences, and comments of his that endorsed Johnson's war efforts and attacked antiwar supporters. Historian Grant Wacker labeled Graham the "Great Legitimater," who, through his public support and presence at events, legitimized the presidency of Johnson and the Vietnam War.⁷⁰

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⁶⁸ Marvin to Johnson, February 24, 1966, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

⁶⁹ Pollock, *A Foreign Devil in China: The Story of Dr. L. Nelson Bell* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1988), 305-306.

⁷⁰ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 24-25.

Talking to the Denver Press Club in 1964, Graham placed his trust in the president and railed that communism needed to be stopped and “the President believes it should be stopped in Vietnam.”⁷¹ In the winter of 1965, Graham defended the president at his crusade in Honolulu, arguing that the war was not Johnson’s fault because he inherited it from the Kennedy administration. Although Graham referred to the war as a “mess,” he did not think that abandoning Vietnam was an option: he said that America could have “an all-out war with Red China or a retreat that will cause us to lose face throughout Asia.”⁷² Losing face in Asia would lead to the expansion of communism.

Graham also made repeated statements that used Christianity to support the war. In a message to the North Carolina Press Association on July 30, 1965, Graham stated, “We [Ruth and I] sensed something of the concern and the burden the President carries in the face of this mounting world crisis. Whatever your politics may be, I can assure you that I have never known a public servant more dedicated to his job than Lyndon Johnson is to the presidency.” Graham did not directly endorse the war but instead supported the president, who supported the war. He continued his sermon by detailing the dangers of communist tyranny and declared, “Do not believe that the Bible teaches pacifism... I believe we should maintain the strongest military establishment on earth.”⁷³ Graham also supported the war by demonizing the enemy at his crusade in Colorado later that fall. According to him, the Viet Cong “seek out the Christian leaders in the villages, cut their tongues out, gouge out their eyes and horribly mutilate their victims.” He also referred to

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⁷¹ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 312.

⁷² “Graham requests prayer for Johnson and Viet Nam crisis,” *Baptist Standard*, March 3, 1965, collection 360, reel 86, BGCA.

⁷³ Graham, “North Carolina Press Association,” July 30, 1965, Asheville, NC, p. 2, 8, 10-11, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

the Viet Cong as “primitive men of the jungle.”⁷⁴ In a September 1965 interview, Graham stated that “the U.S. has a moral obligation to defend freedom in Southeast Asia.” In addition, Graham declared that failing to honor the commitment to Vietnam would result in a loss of faith in America by its allies. Graham claimed that Johnson was continuing the defense of Southeast Asia that Truman started and that 95% of Congress supported the president. Finally, although war was terrible, it was sometimes necessary, and the Bible did not teach pacifism. A transcript of this interview circulated throughout the White House, which showed the administration’s interest in Graham’s public comments.⁷⁵ Although he avoided stating it forthrightly, Graham’s comments on the war bordered on depicting it as a Christian crusade against communism.

This conflation of war in Vietnam and Christianity was also evident in Graham’s sermon at the 1966 Presidential Prayer Breakfast, which Johnson attended. As usual, Graham depicted a world on the verge of apocalypse:

When we read of the scores of little wars in many parts of the world which never make headlines in America – when we read the threatening statements of the Red Chinese and of their growing nuclear capabilities – we sense that something is about to happen. We know that things cannot go on as they are. History is about to reach an impasse. We are now on a collision course.

Christ was returning, according to Graham, but he was not coming peacefully. He quoted Luke 12:49, where Jesus asserted that he would not be returning in peace, but with a sword. Although Graham did not mention South Vietnam by name, he stated, “Those who hate tyranny and love freedom will take sides when little nations suffer terror and

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⁷⁴ “Christian Leaders Prime Targets of Viet Cong, Says Evangelist,” *The Cumberland Presbyterian*, October 5, 1965, collection 360, reel 88, BGCA.

⁷⁵ Graham, interview by Max Goldberg, “Billy Graham Gives Frank Views on War in Viet Nam, Race Riots,” September 25-26, 1965; and Leonard Marks to Jack Valenti, September 25, 1965, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

aggression from those who seek to take their freedom from them.” Communist aggression threatened South Vietnam and America needed to fight for the small country because “to preserve some things, love must destroy others. It is never neutral!” Americans were fighting because they loved freedom, just as Abraham Lincoln fought for freedom in the Civil War.⁷⁶ Historian Richard V. Pierard claimed that although Graham was in favor of the war, “he was circumspect in public comments about Vietnam and careful not to affirm it as a crusade for righteousness in Southeast Asia.”⁷⁷ Pierard was correct that Graham never labeled the war as a crusade, although the preacher clearly depicted it as a Christian war, apparently a war of love.

The BGEA defended the American commitment to Vietnam even more strongly than its leader, Billy Graham. In a series of letters circulated by other newspapers, the editor of the BGEA’s *Decision* magazine, Shirwood Wirt, defended the war against Olive Jones, a woman who wrote to the magazine expressing disapproval of the Vietnam War. On January 11, 1967, Shirwood responded saying that the soldiers were fighting for American freedom and blasting Jones as incapable of understanding the situation:

Perhaps if you had been a Tibetan living in Tibet when the Chinese came through and raped that country, you would understand the nature of the forces opposing us more clearly. Perhaps if you were an East German, living under the domination of Soviet and military occupation and unable to practice your faith or to proclaim it, you would feel a little differently about the men out there holding the line for us now.

Shirwood proudly stated that he would support Johnson and the Vietnam War as long as South Vietnam’s freedom was threatened.⁷⁸ In a follow up letter a month later, Shirwood

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⁷⁶ Graham, remarks at the Presidential Prayer Breakfast, February 17, 1966, Washington, D.C., collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

⁷⁷ Pierard, “Graham and Vietnam,” 41.

⁷⁸ Shirwood Wirt to Olive Jones, January 11, 1967, collection 506, box 21, folder 8, BGCA.

argued that the purpose of the war was not to spread Christianity; it was simply to contain communism.⁷⁹ In an additional letter to Jones in March, Shirwood expanded his argument. He claimed that he was not a colonialist, but that better methods existed to break up the French empire than “communist revolution.” In addition, he posited that the fall of Dien Bien Phu was tragic because it convinced the U.S.S.R. and the P.R.C. “that Southeast Asia was there for the taking.” American troops were fighting for freedom in Southeast Asia against the communist menace.⁸⁰ Wirt’s argument with Jones picked up national and international attention, as papers republished the letters and Wirt sent copies to various congressmen, spreading Graham’s support for the Vietnam War further.⁸¹

In addition to publicly supporting the war and Johnson, Graham condemned the antiwar effort. At his Houston crusade in 1965, which Johnson attended, Graham labeled peace marchers and draft card burners as extremists.⁸² When Martin Luther King, Jr. came out against the war in 1967, Graham responded, “Surely Negroes are divided about the war as the rest of us are, and it is an affront to the thousands of loyal Negro troops who are in Vietnam.” He also claimed that antiwar protests gave Hanoi hope that it could win the war, which would lengthen the war. In addition, these demonstrations gave “comfort to the enemy.” Antiwar protestors should go vote, bristled Graham, instead of demonstrating.⁸³ He also claimed that King’s antiwar protests took away from the civil rights movement.⁸⁴ In 1967, the evangelist asked Johnson to make public the names of

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⁷⁹ Wirt to Jones, February 10, 1967, collection 506, box 21, folder 8, BGCA.

⁸⁰ Wirt to Jones, March 14, 1967, collection 506, box 21, folder 8, BGCA.

⁸¹ “Viet Nam: Mrs. Jones versus Billy Graham,” *Toronto Daily Star*, February 25, 1967; see also numerous letters from Wirt to various Congressmen and a Senator, collection 506, box 21, folder 8, BGCA.

⁸² Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam,” 42.

⁸³ “Demonstrations Prolong War, Billy Graham Charges,” *Religious News Service*, April 27, 1967, collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

⁸⁴ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 129.

individuals in domestic extremist groups. Graham even met with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to learn more about radical groups and their plans to destroy American society.⁸⁵ Universities, Graham argued at a press conference in May 1968, housed radicals seeking disorder, and the Vietnam War was the “judgement of God on America.” Graham wanted peace, he claimed, but he also insisted that America could not withdraw from South Vietnam because “there are millions of little people in Asia that are scared to death that we are going to withdraw. They are depending on us keeping our word.”⁸⁶ In 1969, Graham boldly claimed that antiwar protesters were “radicals” seeking the overthrow of America.⁸⁷ Gibbs and Duffy incorrectly argued that Graham was not for the war; he was simply against dissent.⁸⁸ While Graham was clearly against dissent, without a doubt his actions, writings and words demonstrate that he remained a strong supporter of the war.

As the war became increasingly controversial in the eyes of the public, Graham continued to uphold the war and the president, although he changed tactics and by the late 1960s began downplaying the significance of the war and attempting to avoid commenting on it. Frady correctly argued that Graham engaged in “a peculiar split excursion – half a strenuous labor to keep himself detached from the increasingly virulent controversy over its moral implications, and half a constant covert commendation of the enterprise.”⁸⁹ When commenting on the war in a sermon on April 11, 1967, the evangelist claimed, “Our pornographic literature, our sex films, are giving us a far worse black eye than the Vietnam War.” Later in the same sermon, he preached on the heroism and faith

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⁸⁵ Bothwell, 96-98.

⁸⁶ Graham, press conference in Los Angeles, CA, May 13, 1968, p. 6-22, collection 24, box 1, folder 10, BGCA.

⁸⁷ Bothwell, 96.

⁸⁸ Gibbs and Duffy, 148.

⁸⁹ Frady, 417.

of the U.S. troops in Vietnam.⁹⁰ In another instance of this minimization rhetoric, Graham compared troop deaths to alcohol related deaths on American highways and asked why people did not protest those.⁹¹ Graham's method for dealing with the growing unpopularity of the war, it would seem, rested on comparing the ravages of Vietnam to what he presented as more evil domestic affronts.

In addition to downplaying the significance of the war in the latter half of the 1960s, Graham began claiming personal ignorance on the topic of Vietnam and made repeated statements disassociating himself from his advisory role in the Johnson administration. As early as 1966, Graham was feigning ignorance, as seen in his response to a question about American troops bombing civilian homes in Hanoi. "I have no answer, you know more than I do," he told journalists asking about the bombings. After this expression of unfamiliarity, Graham, exposing his intimate knowledge of the war, claimed that the North Vietnamese had violated the holiday ceasefire because he had seen their troop movements from reconnaissance photos shown to him by military officials.⁹² In the winter of 1967, *The Christian Century* described Graham's actions as "endors[ing] the war in Vietnam as a holy enterprise," causing Graham to issue a sharp rejoinder. "I have been extremely careful not to be drawn into either the moral implications or the tactical military problems of the Vietnam war.... I do not consider myself a foreign affairs expert, nor do I have the answers to the complicated and confusing Vietnam

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⁹⁰ Graham, "Pillars of Freedom, Moral Alternatives," April 11, 1967, San Diego, CA, p. 26, 29, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

⁹¹ Frady, 428.

⁹² Art Vinsel, "Graham Mum on Bombings: Sidesteps War Politics in L.A.," *Independent* (Long Beach, CA), December 28, 1966, collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

situation,” he wrote.⁹³ *The Christian Century* editors responded to Graham’s protestations by writing, “Graham has the right to hold and express opinions on Vietnam. We wish, however, that he would do so without duplicity. He should either drop the image of holy transcendence or the mantle of concerned involvement. God alone is capable of wearing both.”⁹⁴ Graham continued to wear both mantles. At a London crusade when antiwar protesters interrupted his message with signs reading “Think about Vietnam,” the evangelist stated, “I can make no moral judgements on the question of whether we should have troops there in the first place,” but also that “we should see it through to a satisfactory conclusion.”⁹⁵

Graham continued downplaying his advisory role while implicitly supporting the war after the North Vietnamese People’s Army of Vietnam and the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive at the end of January 1968. At a press conference on March 12, 1968, Graham claimed that he would “stay totally out of politics” during the impending presidential election in November. When a reporter asked him about the Tet Offensive, he admitted that he had doubts about the war due to the “credibility gap,” the sense that Johnson was less than truthful about the real state of the war (perhaps indicating a shift in support as his old friend Nixon prepared to run for the presidency). However, Graham said that young men should not avoid the draft because America made a commitment to protecting South Vietnam. Graham also highlighted the many Americans in noncombat roles and the billions of dollars in U.S. aid going to “pacification programs” in Vietnam.

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⁹³ Graham, “Not What He Meant,” *The Christian Century*, March 29, 1967, p. 410-11, collection 506, box 21, folder 8, BGCA.

⁹⁴ “Graham Denounces Dissenters,” *The Christian Century*, May 17, 1967, p. 645, collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

⁹⁵ Frady, 415, 425.

Graham offset his slightly doubtful comments about the war by talking about the positive American actions in Vietnam, such as missionary activities.⁹⁶ In April, the evangelist referred to Johnson as “a great and courageous President” and again stated that the war was Kennedy’s war. Graham backed this claim by arguing that some of Johnson’s war advisors, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, were actually chosen by Kennedy. Asked if the war was moral at a press conference, Graham claimed that he could not comment because the question was complicated and he did not have all the necessary facts.⁹⁷ In December 1968, Graham declared that war would happen until Christ returned and that the use of military force was required because of the sinful nature of humans, but he followed this statement by claiming, “I’ve always been careful not to take any real position on the war, you understand.”⁹⁸ While supporting the Johnson administration and the war, Graham began denying his public backing of and private role in the administration as the war grew increasingly controversial.

Graham’s continued endorsement of the Vietnam War reflected the view of his supporters. After the Tet Offensive, many Christian conservatives felt that Johnson should escalate the war instead of retreating. A poll in the summer of 1968, after Johnson had stopped his Rolling Thunder operation and limited troop deployments, showed that 70% of Missouri Synod Lutherans and 97% of Southern Baptists actually favored an

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⁹⁶ Graham, press conference in Black Mountain, NC, March 12, 1968, p. 1, 8-10, collection 313, box 2, folder 20, BGCA.

⁹⁷ Graham, press conference in Sydney, Australia, April 28, 1968, p. 2-4, collection 24, box 1, folder 9, BGCA.

⁹⁸ Frady, 424.

increase in bombing.⁹⁹ Graham was not alone in his desire to continue the fight in Vietnam. However, as Pierard wrote, “It was the first time he had really confronted the challenge of conflict avoidance, when the public’s longing for moral guidance on a hard issue had to be weighed against the cost of giving it.”¹⁰⁰ Graham’s staunch anticommunism and strong support for the Vietnam War remained unchanged in the late 1960s. He simply grew more careful with his words of support because of the growing antiwar movement.

Vietnam Visits: 1966 and 1968

In the midst of his public support and private advisement, Graham made two Christmastime trips to Vietnam. As previously mentioned, numerous Christian leaders and missionaries in Vietnam wrote to Graham throughout the 1960s pressuring him to visit.¹⁰¹ This pressure was even directed at Johnson, as seen in an air force chaplain’s September 1966 letter to the White House arguing that a Graham visit to Vietnam would be “tremendous” and a “shot in the arm” for the troops.¹⁰² In the fall of 1966, Graham announced that he would be visiting the country over Christmas at the invitation of General Westmoreland. A reporter for *The New York Times* wrote, “Mr. Graham... said the sole purpose of his visit would be to preach the Gospel to American soldiers there. He said he would in no way comment on the war in Vietnam or on the way it was being

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⁹⁹ Preston, “Tempered by the Fires of War: Vietnam and the Transformation of the Evangelical Worldview,” in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 196-97.

¹⁰⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, 147-48.

¹⁰¹ See collection 17, box 145, folder 14, BGCA.

¹⁰² James T.X. Colson to Bill Moyers, September 29, 1966, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

conducted.”¹⁰³ Apparently, the visit was apolitical. According to William C. Martin, Graham expressed a desire to visit Vietnam, which is why Westmoreland invited him, meaning that Graham was the instigator of the trip.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to Johnson shortly before his departure, Graham wrote, “In a few days I will be leaving for Viet Nam to spend Christmas with the troops *as you suggested*. I would appreciate your thoughts and prayers” [emphasis added]. He also expressed his desire to meet with the president when he returned to share his “thoughts and impressions.”¹⁰⁵ Graham traveled to Vietnam at the president’s request, although he wanted to visit the country as well.

Graham arrived in South Vietnam on December 19, 1966. When he landed at the Saigon airport, he met with Westmoreland and held a press conference. Now that he was in Vietnam, Graham admitted that the trip was somewhat political. *Christianity Today* wrote that, “In his opening press conference, Graham said he had come not only to survey Christian work and humanitarian efforts generally, and to preach the Christian message of peace, but to study the U.S. military commitment, which he is asked about everywhere he goes in the world.”¹⁰⁶ Years later, Graham recalled, “When I arrived in Vietnam during one of our trips, reporters climbed all over me, trying to learn whether or not I supported the President’s policy. My answer was always the same: ‘My only desire is to minister to our troops by my prayers and spiritual help wherever I can.’”¹⁰⁷ With typical Graham revisionism, the evangelist failed to mention his purpose of studying the U.S. military’s commitment to Vietnam.

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¹⁰³ “Billy Graham Planning To Visit Vietnam Soon,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1966.

¹⁰⁴ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 344.

¹⁰⁵ Graham to Johnson, November 23, 1966, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹⁰⁶ Dale Herendeen, “Graham Preaches Peace in Vietnam,” *Christianity Today*, January 20, 1967, p. 36-37, collection 360, reel 92, BGCA.

¹⁰⁷ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 415.

Graham then embarked on a whirlwind speaking tour of South Vietnam. On December 22, he preached to five-thousand troops at Long Binh while artillery fired in the distance.¹⁰⁸ On Christmas Eve, he led a candlelight service for GIs at An Khe, while other soldiers stood guard over the base to make sure that the communists did not violate the Christmas ceasefire. *Christianity Today* reported, “Through the night, mortars were fired and flares dropped over the camp at hour intervals, and there were continual reports of VC activity. The evangelist slept little and was jolted awake by the noise.”¹⁰⁹



Figure 3. Graham preaches to troops during his 1966 Christmas trip to Vietnam.¹¹⁰

On Christmas Day, Graham gave a message at Tan Son Nhut Air Base outside of Saigon. He assured the soldiers listening that Americans were proud of them and told

¹⁰⁸ Bothwell, 423.

¹⁰⁹ Herendeen, “Graham Preaches Peace in Vietnam.”

¹¹⁰ *Untitled*, December 25, 1966, collection 622, photo file: BGEA: VIETNAM TOUR, BGCA.

them that “some of the greatest Christians that ever lived were soldiers.” He then asked, “Whatever happened to peace?” Graham answered that Jesus brought a sword to the world and the world was violent because of the sins of men. Vietnam was just a sideshow to the real war, the spiritual war, and Graham preached that “peace in your heart” was the solution. Graham told the soldiers that “the greatest thing that we can do here in Vietnam is not only to stand by these people at this time, but is to live in front of them. Let them see that there is something different about us. And let them see the peace that’s in our hearts and in our lives. And the discipline within our lives.”¹¹¹ During his trip, Graham also met with missionaries, visited wounded soldiers in hospitals, and met with troops on the USS *Kitty Hawk* aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin.¹¹² When he left on December 27, he divulged that he was pessimistic about the war ending anytime soon and termed it “a complicated, confusing and frustrating war.”¹¹³

Although he expressed pessimism for a quick end, Graham returned to America fully in support of Johnson and the war. Johnson congratulated the preacher soon after his arrival, writing on January 1, 1967, “You have raised man’s eyes and lifted his heart in the far corners of the world. Now you have brought your blessings to VietNam.... America’s sons, America’s families and all who share your prayers for peace are proud and grateful for your inspiration.”¹¹⁴ Later that month, Johnson called Graham and said, “I thought you did a wonderful job and I, uh, I thought that whenever you had the time I’d like to get some of your impressions and hear some of your experiences and wonder if

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¹¹¹ Graham, “Christmas Day in Vietnam,” *Hour of Decision*, December 25, 1966, collection 191, T885c, BGCA.

¹¹² “Visit of Dr. Billy Graham,” United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, December 17, 1966, collection 622, box 9, folder 10, BGCA.

¹¹³ “Graham, Leaving Vietnam, Doubts War Will End Soon,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 1966.

¹¹⁴ Johnson to Graham, January 1, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

you and Ruth feel like coming up here anytime soon?” Graham responded that he would like to visit, but first had to go preach at Berkley and quipped, “So I’ll need your prayers there. That’s worse than going to Vietnam.”¹¹⁵ The two men had lunch on January 18 and talked about Vietnam with National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, Secretary of State Rusk, and Cardinal Francis Spellman, the archbishop of New York who had also toured Vietnam over Christmas.¹¹⁶ According to Graham, the president asked for advice on the war and Spellman responded, “Bomb them! Just bomb them!”¹¹⁷ Apparently, Graham answered that he would be limiting his comments to the “moral and spiritual conditions that I found among the American troops.” He claimed that he also told Johnson that he would not advise him on the war, but agreed with the president that “the American people are getting restless over this thing.”¹¹⁸ However, Graham’s recollection is questionable because of his false claims of not having an advisory role in the White House. Other sources on the meeting are scarce, but a White House memo at least noted that the preacher assured the president that troops had “incredibly high morale.”¹¹⁹

Publicly, Graham spoke positively of his experiences in Vietnam and the American soldiers there. Claiming that his visit was not a political show, Graham specified that American generals did not hoodwink him into supporting the war: “I wasn’t brainwashed. I even lived with General Westmoreland for a time. All the men were trying to do was give us the facts, I didn’t feel they were trying to sell me a bill of

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¹¹⁵ Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on January 16, 1967, WH6701.04, 11358, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

¹¹⁶ Gibbs and Duffy, 149; and January 18, 1967, in *Johnson’s Daily Diary*, LBJ, http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/lbj_tools/daily_diary/pdf/1967/19670118.pdf.

¹¹⁷ Bothwell, 429.

¹¹⁸ Graham, interview by Billington

¹¹⁹ Joe Califano to Marie Fehmer, January 20, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

goods.”¹²⁰ In an *Hour of Decision* broadcast on January 1, 1967, Graham proclaimed, “We could not help but agree with Sherman that war is hell. However, we saw something else that was even more dramatic. We witnessed the dedication, discipline, and motivation of Americans in Vietnam,” as seen in the soldiers who gave lessons to the Vietnamese on fighting tactics and modern agriculture. Multiple parts of the trip impressed Graham, such as the conduct of isolated units of American soldiers in Viet Cong territory, high troop morale, and American humanitarian efforts. In an effort to humanize the country to his Christian listeners, Graham stated that claims of South Vietnam being 80% Buddhist were false and that only about 15% of the population was actually Buddhist. The country was experiencing a large growth of Protestantism and Prime Minister Nguyen Ky was only nominally a Buddhist. In addition, the war was a “peace mission” to prevent “Red China” from controlling Southeast Asia and the world. Graham admitted that the war would be lengthy because Hanoi would not compromise, but for him, the war was worth it.¹²¹ In a letter to his mailing list, Graham reiterated the same points. “Whatever we may think of the politics of the war it is our Christian duty to pray for the Vietnamese people and especially for our men, who are making such a heroic effort under the most difficult circumstances,” he wrote his supporters.¹²²

At the end of February, Graham gave a nationally televised interview on his trip to Vietnam. The interviewer, Reverend Ben Haden, described the segment as “a candid discussion on the misunderstood dimension in Vietnam,” which meant propaganda to correct public opinion. Graham depicted the U.S. soldiers as extremely committed to the

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¹²⁰ Frady, 424.

¹²¹ Graham, “Vietnam Impressions,” *Hour of Decision*, January 1, 1967, collection 191, T886j, BGCA.

¹²² Graham to his mailing list, January 25, 1967, collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

cause of containing communism and maintaining freedom in Southeast Asia. He claimed that 70% of American soldiers pulled triggers in battle, compared to only 35% in the Korean War. Graham, an early advocate for the Vietnamization of the war, spoke highly of the people from DaLat, or “mountain people” as he called them. They were excellent fighters that the North Vietnamese feared, according to the evangelist. In addition, Graham said that he was “tremendously impressed” with the Vietnamese pastors and American missionaries he met. During Nixon’s administration, Graham would heavily rely on the advice of these missionaries in Vietnam. Overall, Graham painted a picture to the American public of a war that was going well and a country that was worth protecting.¹²³

Another point that Graham stressed during the interview was his importance within the Johnson administration. Graham claimed that Johnson had asked him three different times to visit Vietnam, which is why Westmoreland invited him. Apparently, Johnson told him, “I want you to go out there and talk to those men and learn all you can about the situation out there.” Clearly, this was a politically motivated trip. Graham supported the president and said, “I would call him a very deeply religious man.” When the interviewer asked what Johnson and Graham had talked about in their post-trip meeting, Graham stated, “Well, Ben, that’s a very difficult thing to summarize so quickly” and then started describing what impressed him in Vietnam. Graham deflected the question about his advice on the war to Johnson in an attempt to maintain a public image of distance from the administration’s actions.¹²⁴

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¹²³ Graham, interview by Rev. Ben Haden, “Billy Graham on Vietnam,” circa February 28, 1967, p. 2, 9, 18, 21, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹²⁴ Graham, interview by Haden, “Billy Graham on Vietnam,” p. 4-5, 7, 26-27.

The television interview was of interest to the Johnson administration.

Presidential aide W. Marvin Watson received a copy of the interview tape from Lester J. Harmon, the Executive Vice President of Battle Advertising Incorporated, who stated that “it is our intention to place this program on as many television stations as possible. We feel it contains the type of information people should know and we are particularly delighted, concerning Graham’s remarks about the President.” Watson agreed and said, “Dr. Graham’s views are always welcomed by the President,” and forwarded a copy of the tape to Johnson.¹²⁵ Johnson appreciated Graham’s support for him and the war, and his administration sought to ensure that the public knew of Graham’s support.

Graham continued to speak in support of the president and the war after his 1966 trip to Vietnam. While in Jamaica in March 1967, he described his visit and claimed that only Johnson had “all the answers” regarding the Vietnam War.¹²⁶ Later that month, Graham again detailed his trip while giving a news conference in Puerto Rico. Graham claimed that he was not a part of the politics of war: “Now I have never taken a side as to the moral issue, as to whether America should be there or should not be there. I felt that this is a decision that the President, the cabinet, the Congress who are elected by the people, this is their responsibility, not mine as a preacher.” Graham claimed that he was only in Vietnam to spread the gospel. In addition, he was surprised by the wealth and beauty of the country, in addition to the peacefulness of Saigon. Reporters, he argued, “have to find something to write,” which is why they depicted Saigon as a violent place,

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¹²⁵ W. Marvin Watson to Johnson, February 28, 1967; Watson to Johnson, March 2, 1967; Lester J. Harmon to Watson, March 2, 1967; and Watson to Harmon, March 8, 1967, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹²⁶ “Billy Graham Addresses Jamaicans on Vietnam,” *Religious News Service*, March 11, 1967, collection 345, box 44, folder 12, BGCA.

thereby blaming the media for the credibility gap. Although he claimed a lack of intimate knowledge of the administration's actions, Graham posited that Johnson was seeking peace and that "we are on the verge now, of what might be very encouraging developments in the Vietnam situation."¹²⁷ For a self-described uninformed preacher, Graham was well informed and quick to comment on the war. Even though Graham's first trip to Vietnam made him pessimistic about achieving a quick victory, he continued to support the war and the president.

Graham did not return to South Vietnam during December 1967 because he was sick, but he toured the country for a second time over Christmas in 1968.¹²⁸ General Creighton W. Abrams extended the invitation to Graham for this second visit. Abrams replaced Westmoreland as head of the MACV in June 1968, shortly after the Tet Offensive. Graham, writing to Johnson in November 1968, said that it was an "urgent invitation" and that "I was reluctant to leave my family but felt after [Abrams'] second communication that I must go, health permitting."¹²⁹ In his response, Johnson wrote, "I am deeply grateful, as I know our servicemen will be, that you have agreed to go to Vietnam over Christmas."¹³⁰ The President then instructed his staff to ensure that Abrams made arrangements for Graham's visit.¹³¹

Graham's 1968 Christmastime tour of South Vietnam was largely the same as his first visit two years prior. He preached approximately two dozen times and visited troops

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¹²⁷ Graham, press conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, ca. March 17, 1967, collection 24, T17, BGCA.

¹²⁸ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 346.

¹²⁹ Graham to Johnson, November 18, 1968, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹³⁰ Johnson to Graham, November 23, 1968, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹³¹ MJDR to Walt Rostow, November 25, 1968, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

in hospitals throughout the country.¹³² Clayton E. Clay, a military chaplain, recalled that Graham preached to him and 5,000 other people in a camouflaged amphitheater at a military headquarters in Phu Bai. He recalled the bravery of Graham's visit because "our headquarters was subject to mortar attacks all the time."¹³³ Graham also spent a night in Da Nang, while the Viet Cong attacked it with artillery. At the Cambodian border, he observed prisoner release negotiations from a helicopter. Similar to his previous trips, he spoke on an aircraft carrier, the USS *Ranger*, and met with evangelical pastors, missionaries, and chaplains.¹³⁴

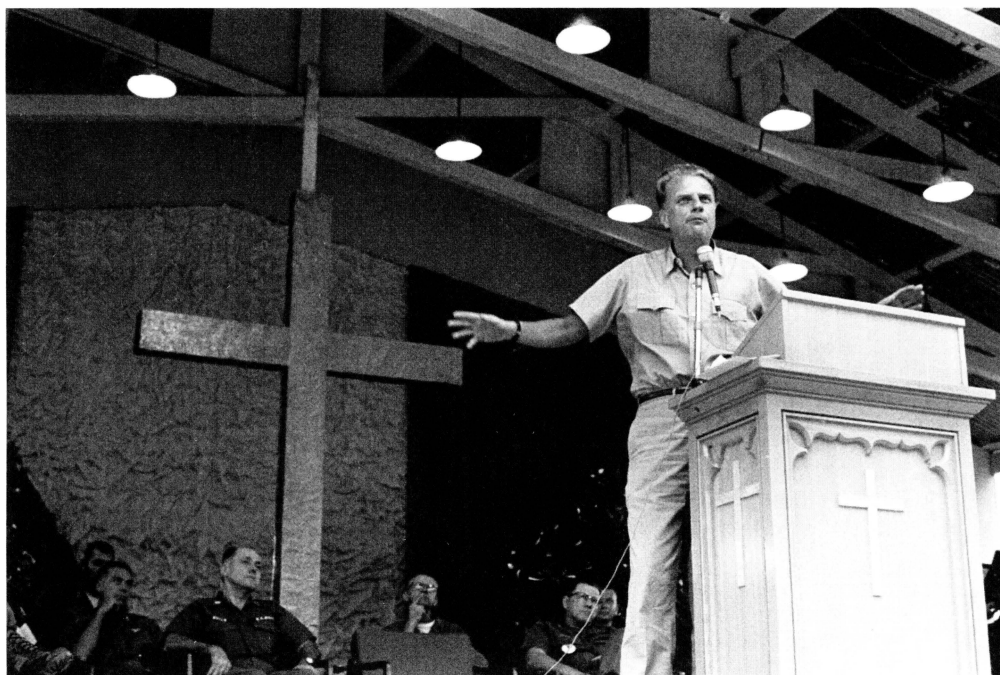


Figure 4. Graham speaks to troops in Da Nang during his second tour of Vietnam.¹³⁵

¹³² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 347.

¹³³ Rev. Clayton E. Clay, interview by Dr. Lois Ferm, May 1, 1989, collection 141, box 47, folder 69, BGCA.

¹³⁴ "Troops Respond to Graham's Messages," *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1969, p. 37, collection 360, reel 97, BGCA.

¹³⁵ John Krill, *Untitled*, December 1968, in the author's possession.

During his trip, Graham contracted laryngitis because, in his words, he spent the entire tour “talking, talking, talking.”¹³⁶ On Christmas Day, he still managed to preach and spoke again on peace at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Graham stated that human sin caused wars and, with his typical apocalyptic rhetoric, proclaimed that “one of these days man will stand with his atomic and his hydrogen bombs, ready to blow the human race out of existence, and the Bible says Christ is going to come back and set up his kingdom.” Only then, would there be “permanent peace.”¹³⁷

Graham returned from Vietnam with much stronger opinions about the war than he had from his 1966 trip. Aikman wrote, “This time Graham returned much more bullish on the war’s outcome than two years earlier. He even declared, ‘There is no question: the war is won militarily.’”¹³⁸ Graham also stated that the war would be over before 1970.¹³⁹ Reporting to Johnson, Graham told the president that the situation was drastically different: “The change in the Vietnam situation since I was there two years ago is like night and day. I came back enthusiastically optimistic about the prospects of Vietnam becoming a strong free nation in Southeast Asia. I am certain that history is going to vindicate the American commitment if we don’t lose the peace in Paris.”¹⁴⁰ At this point, Johnson was a lame duck president, so Graham gave a report to his successor, Richard Nixon, as well. *The New York Times* reported that Graham’s analysis for Nixon reflected “cautious optimism.”¹⁴¹ Graham’s reports to Nixon on the situation in Vietnam continued into the 1970s and will be detailed in the following chapter. Graham’s visits to Vietnam

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¹³⁶ “Laryngitis Strikes Graham,” *The New York Times*, December 26, 1968.

¹³⁷ Graham, “Christmas Day in Saigon,” *Hour of Decision*, January 5, 1969, collection 191, T991d, BGCA.

¹³⁸ Aikman, 200-201.

¹³⁹ Bothwell, 425.

¹⁴⁰ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 347.

¹⁴¹ “Graham Ends Vietnam Visit,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 1968.

did not lessen his support of the war; in fact, he grew stronger in his belief about a U.S. victory after he returned from his second visit.

A Eulogy for Johnson and Escalation

Johnson, broken from the war and struggling to keep his Great Society financially afloat, made a major announcement on March 31, 1968. “So, tonight, in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to deescalate the conflict,” he revealed. It would not be a complete halt to aerial bombing, but the military would stop the majority of attacks by aircraft, infantry, and vessels. While deescalating the American military involvement, Johnson affirmed the country’s commitment: “Our first priority will be to support [South Vietnam’s] effort” to obtain freedom. At the end of his speech, Johnson dropped a bombshell:

With America’s sons in the fields far away, with America’s future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world’s hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office—the Presidency of your country.

Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.¹⁴²

According to Graham, Johnson told him a year before this public announcement that he would not be seeking reelection because he was afraid of dying during his second term.¹⁴³ If Graham is to be believed, Johnson’s decision to not seek reelection was a personal choice rather than a response to the backlash against the war after the Tet Offensive.

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¹⁴² Johnson, “Remarks on Decision not to Seek Re-Election,” March 31, 1968, MC, <http://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/speeches/speech-3388>.

¹⁴³ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 414.

Post-presidency and until his death, Johnson continued his friendship with Graham. Soon after leaving office, Johnson wrote to Graham saying, “My mind went back to those lonely occasions at the White House when your prayers and your friendship helped to sustain a President in an hour of trial.... No one will ever fully know how you helped to lighten my load or how much warmth you brought into our house. But I know.”¹⁴⁴ Graham returned the affirmation of friendship and wrote to Johnson and Lady Bird on May 14, 1969, “There are no two friends that I love and appreciate more. You gave me many opportunities and privileges during your tenure at the White House that I will never forget. I will always be in your debt.”¹⁴⁵ A month before his death on January 22, 1973, Johnson wrote to Graham and said that he and Lady Bird were “reminded once again how grateful we are for the years we have shared. You have truly been friends for all seasons.”¹⁴⁶

Graham gave the eulogy for Johnson at his funeral three days after the president’s death on January 22, 1973. As he grew ill, Johnson had asked Graham to speak at his funeral while Graham was visiting his ranch. “I want you to look in those cameras and just tell ‘em what Christianity is all about. Tell ‘em how they can be sure they can go to heaven. I want you to preach the gospel,” the former president told his confidant. Amusingly, Johnson then followed up with, “But somewhere in there, you tell ‘em a few things I did for this country.”¹⁴⁷ At the service, Graham did exactly what Johnson asked and preached the gospel, in addition to praising the deceased president. Graham proclaimed that Johnson had a “whirlwind of a heart,” that “history will not ignore him

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¹⁴⁴ Johnson to Graham, February 11, 1969, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹⁴⁵ Graham to Johnson and Lady Bird, May 14, 1969, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹⁴⁶ Johnson to Graham, December 5, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹⁴⁷ Gibbs and Duffy, 155.

for he was history in motion,” and that “Lyndon Johnson was on center stage in our generation,” a line that he would reuse in Nixon’s eulogy. Graham highlighted the difficult role of the president in the Vietnam War and stated, “It was his destiny to be involved in a war he never wanted and to search for a peace he did not quite live to see achieved. As President Nixon said Tuesday night: ‘No one would have welcomed this peace more than he.’” Graham originally wrote “tragic war,” before crossing it out and simply calling it a “war,” still refusing to criticize the Vietnam War.¹⁴⁸

Graham continued to speak highly of the deceased president and lamented that so many had protested the war. Speaking at a rally in Charlotte, North Carolina a few days after the funeral, Graham stated, “Most of us were staggered by the enormous things this man did because we had so gotten his administration out of perspective because of the war” and that Johnson did an immense amount of work to bring peace to Vietnam.¹⁴⁹ Years later, Graham recalled that when he was driving to Johnson’s ranch for the funeral he saw students on the side of the road with a sign that read “FORGIVE US, MR. PRESIDENT.” He then wrote, “Student protests over the Vietnam War had grieved Johnson’s heart and had helped end his administration four years before under a cloud of unfinished business in Southeast Asia.”¹⁵⁰ Graham believed that the antiwar movement ended Johnson’s presidency before he could bring peace to Vietnam, although he also claimed that Johnson did not seek reelection due to health reasons, rather than the war.

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¹⁴⁸ Graham, “Funeral of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Order of the Graveside Service,” January 25, 1973, Stonewall, TX, p. 2-7, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

¹⁴⁹ Graham, “Peace Day,” January 28, 1973, Charlotte, NC, collection 26, T51, BGCA.

¹⁵⁰ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 418.

Graham continued to go back and forth about the power that he held during the Johnson administration. In 1979, Marshall Frady interviewed Graham about his time with the Johnson administration and wrote:

Eventually he mentions Johnson.... “The White House became almost my hotel whenever I was up there. But that was back then before –”

And for an instant, his expansive grin goes flat: he announces then with a slightly louder and toneless clang of resolute blitheness in his voice, “But, uh, of course, never again. I mean –” and he gives a quick little cough of a laugh “– I’ve had my turn getting mixed up in politics, you can be sure of that. Oh, no, never again.”¹⁵¹

To Frady, Graham admitted to his role as an advisor and confidant to Johnson. However, in his 1997 autobiography, Graham denied any advisory power in the administration.

Graham claimed that Johnson once left him and Ruth alone in the White House and they went around turning all the lights on. According to him, “That was as much power as I ever exercised in the White House.”¹⁵² In truth, Graham exercised substantial power and influence during Johnson’s presidency, which paved the way for an even greater advisory role on the Vietnam War with the president’s successor.

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¹⁵¹ Frady, 10.

¹⁵² Graham, *Just As I Am*, 410.

Chapter 4

“There is no American I admire more than Richard Nixon”

In the election of 1968, Graham worked hard to ensure that his friend, Richard Nixon, was victorious over Hubert Humphrey, the current vice president. On December 28, 1967, Nixon asked Graham if he should run for president; both men recall the conversation differently.¹ Graham claimed he encouraged Nixon, but did not tell Nixon to run.² Nixon, conversely, remembered Graham proclaiming a Nixon candidacy as God-ordained—words that strongly influenced his decision to run.³ After Nixon announced his candidacy, the evangelist worked behind the scenes for his campaign. Similar to his work for Johnson’s campaign, Graham involved himself in the selection process for vice president and his recommendation, Senator Mark Hatfield (R-OR), was a final contender for the spot, losing only to Spiro Agnew at the end.⁴ Interestingly, Hatfield was a dove on Vietnam, but Graham’s opinions on the war were not changing. He wanted peace, but a peace that was not a loss of face for America.⁵ At the GOP convention in the summer of 1968, Graham worked behind the scenes convincing delegates to vote for his friend rather than California Governor Ronald Reagan.⁶

Graham offered overt support to Nixon during the campaign season. As early as December 1967, before Johnson had even announced his withdrawal from the impending election, Graham waxed at a press conference that Nixon wanted peace in Vietnam, and

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¹ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 131.

² Graham, *Just As I Am*, 444-45.

³ Miller, 130-31.

⁴ Balmer, *God in the White House*, 64.

⁵ Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam,” 47.

⁶ Miller, 132-33.

that he hoped Nixon would win the Republican nomination, but that he would not state if he was voting for Nixon. Graham also claimed that the Vietnam War was not Johnson's war, a claim that Nixon would reiterate to maintain Johnson's support, and that "Johnson will probably go down in history as a great President." Graham also used this conference to stress the need for American troops in Vietnam: "I would not like to see the South Vietnamese people abandoned because I think that thousands of them would be murdered if we just suddenly pulled out."⁷ In March 1968, Graham stated that it would be difficult to remain neutral in the upcoming presidential election because Nixon was one of his "closest friends," but that he would "try to avoid a political involvement" and would not even be telling Ruth who he would be voting for.⁸ At his Oregon crusade in May, Graham publicly declared, "There is no American I admire more than Richard Nixon."⁹ Finally, four days before the election, Graham, contrary to his previous statement about keeping his personal vote private, announced to the world that he voted for Nixon with an absentee ballot. The Nixon campaign ran advertisements featuring Graham's statements. These ads were produced three weeks before Graham's announcement, showing the collusion between Graham and the campaign.¹⁰

Graham's final role in the campaign was as a bridge between the Johnson and Nixon administrations. In his memoir, Johnson recalled that Graham visited him on September 13, 1968 and told him that he had a secret message from Nixon: that Nixon might criticize some parts of the current administration while campaigning, but would

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⁷ Graham, press conference in Atlanta, GA, December 29, 1967, p. 2-13, collection 24, box 1, folder 7, BGCA.

⁸ Graham, press conference in Black Mountain, NC, March 12, 1968, p. 10.

⁹ Gibbs and Duffy, 162.

¹⁰ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 354.

never personally attack Johnson, and that Nixon desired a close relationship with the president. Johnson told Graham to tell Nixon that he would cooperate if Nixon won the election.¹¹

In a phone call on October 10, Graham and Johnson discussed the Vietnam War and Nixon. The president, talking about his war policies, said, “I’m going to do just what I told you I’d do. As the leader of my party and country I’m going to do what I think’s right, but I’m gonna be just and reasonable and fair with every burden, every person.” Graham responded, “Well I think you have been and I think he [likely Nixon] really appreciates your stance on Vietnam.” While Johnson avoided specifics about Vietnam, the conversation made clear that Graham and Nixon had a previous conversation where they talked about the president’s Vietnam policy, and that Nixon told Graham to call the president to reconfirm everything that Graham had said earlier about Vietnam.¹²

Historian Robert Dallek argued that Nixon and Graham effectively “neutralized” Johnson during the campaign, as seen when Johnson kept private his discovery of Greek military dictators financing of Nixon’s campaign, by promising that the president would be credited for helping to end the Vietnam War. He even told a Humphrey advisor, “You know that Nixon is following my policies more closely than Humphrey.”¹³ Shortly after Nixon won the election, Graham wrote to the lame duck president, “I am delighted that the transition between you and Mr. Nixon is going so smoothly. I seriously doubt that

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¹¹ Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 564.

¹² Graham and Johnson, telephone conversation on October 10, 1968, WH6810.03, 13530, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

¹³ Dallek, 578, 580.

there has ever been anything like it in American history.” He also reiterated that Nixon respected Johnson and would ask him for advice while he was president.¹⁴

The transition between the two men was not perfect, however. The day after the election, Graham visited Nixon, who told him:

Billy, you know we’re in a terrible mess in Vietnam. President Johnson has ordered a stop in the bombing, and I think it’s a great mistake. We are on the verge of victory in Vietnam. If we stop bombing now, we are going to be in big trouble. We’ve got to find a way out of the war. While we have plans, we need prayer that God will help us to find a way.

Graham reported this conversation in his biography, although he did not record his response. Still, it is clear that he shared the same pro-bombing hawkish views as the president elect.¹⁵ In addition, Nixon, interpreting Graham’s analysis of Johnson’s support for him differently, announced after winning the election that he was working with the Johnson administration on Vietnam policy. Johnson wrote, “I could not allow the impression to stand that Mr. Nixon had become a kind of co-President,” and informed the press that his administration was the sole decision maker until January 20. Even still, Johnson remained on good terms with his successor.¹⁶

During the Johnsons’ last days, the Grahams stayed with them in the White House. Billy and Ruth spent January 18 and 19 with the president and went to church with his family. Lady Bird wrote that on the drive back from church, “Billy told us of Mr. Nixon’s plans to hold religious services in the East Room, with a different minister each Sunday. Billy was going to conduct the first service next Sunday—a final interesting

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¹⁴ Graham to Johnson, November 18, 1968, collection 74, box 3, folder 6, BGCA (LBJ).

¹⁵ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 450.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 555-56.

touch to the transition.”¹⁷ The next day, Nixon visited Johnson in the White House shortly before his inauguration. Johnson wrote that Nixon repeated what Graham had constantly been telling him: that the soon-to-be president wanted to have a close relationship with Johnson, similar to the relationship between Johnson and Eisenhower.¹⁸ Graham, classically denying his role in his autobiography, wrote, “Some said I was instrumental in the transfer of authority from Johnson to Nixon. As a friend to both, I might have said or done some things that helped in the transition, but I served in no official or even implied capacity.”¹⁹

Graham’s role in the transition between administrations culminated in his prayer at Nixon’s inauguration on January 20, 1969. Before the thousands watching in the audience, including Johnson, and millions watching on television, Graham blessed the administration: “Bless them as a team to lead America to the dawning of a new day with renewed trust in God that will lead to peace, justice and prosperity.” Going even farther, Graham claimed that God chose Nixon: “We acknowledge Thy divine help in the selection of our leadership each four years. We recognize, O Lord, that in Thy sovereignty Thou hast permitted Richard Nixon to lead us at this momentous hour of our history.” In the mind of the evangelist, God placed Nixon on the throne.²⁰

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¹⁷ Lady Bird Johnson, January 19, 1969, in *A White House Diary*, 771.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 564.

¹⁹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 416.

²⁰ Graham, “Prayer by Dr. Billy Graham, January 20, 1969, Washington, D.C, p. 4, 7, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

An Anticommunist in the 1970s?

Throughout Nixon's administration, Graham maintained the anticommunist rhetoric he had been proclaiming for the previous 20 years. Although Wacker argued that Graham's attacks on communism slowed as the 1970s went on, it remains clear that, at least through Nixon's presidency, Graham continued as a red-baiter.²¹ If Graham softened at all, it was on individual countries and not communism in general. In a commencement address at his alma mater in June 1970, he stated:

When Apollo 13 got into difficulty the entire world was united in its concern. Scores of nations, including the Soviet Union, offered their help to the rescue operation. So we as Christians must show the world that we sit where they sit and stand where they stand and bear with them the burden and agony of a world that is lost. As evangelical Christians we cannot exist in a kind of isolation booth. We must not give the impression that we stand apart from the rest of humanity -- but as citizens of heaven we also have responsibilities on earth.²²

In a similar show of appreciation for America's other primary communist enemy, he suggested in 1970 that the Ten Commandments be read in schools and that if these were viewed as too religious then Mao's Eight Values could be used instead, although he backed away from this claim when people accused him of being soft on communism.²³ Conversely, Graham claimed a year later that the teachings of Mao and Christianity were "as far apart as heaven and hell."²⁴ Clearly, his stance was still that of a hardline anticommunist.

Graham's attacks on communism continued to manifest in his sermons. In a message entitled "Illusions" that Graham gave on December 8, 1970 to a college student

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²¹ Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 234.

²² Graham, "World Lost in Space," June 1, 1970, Wheaton, IL, p. 13, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

²³ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 421-22.

²⁴ Graham, "The Way of Cain," April 26, 1971, Lexington, KY, collection 113, F246, BGCA.

association, he detailed numerous popular illusions that were anathema to the Bible. He stated that one of these illusions was “that freedom can survive without a religious faith.” According to Graham, total materialism and secularism led to dictatorship, and “one of the things that distinguishes us from the Communists is our religious faith.” Clearly, fighting communism was necessary for continued freedom.²⁵ With typical apocalyptic rhetoric, Graham claimed in June 1971 that Russia had 22 nuclear missiles pointed at American cities, that Soviet claims of disarmament were false, and that the apocalypse was imminent.²⁶

Graham also attacked communism for its tyrannical style of government. Appearing on *The Dick Cavett Show* on May 7, 1972, Graham was asked if he hated communism. He answered, “Communism I dislike and disapprove of because I believe that communism is not the best system.” Although the American system had problems, it was the best form of government, other than ancient Israel where God ruled. Graham cited Czechoslovakia as an example and claimed that communism only worked when citizens were forced to accept it. In this interview, Graham also posited that he had never taken a public stance on Vietnam, and then, taking a public stance on Vietnam, said that he believed that Nixon’s attack on Cambodia was designed to shorten the war.²⁷ He continued these attacks on communism in a sermon given in Atlanta in June. First claiming that “Nixon has done his best” in the face of “insoluble problems,” Graham placed communism, which was enforced by police states, at the forefront of the world’s

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²⁵ Graham, “Illusions,” December 8, 1970, Montreat, NC, p. 1, 10, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

²⁶ Graham, “Signs of the Times and the Coming Kingdom, Matthew 16:1-4,” June 11, 1971, Chicago, IL, p. 2, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

²⁷ Graham, interview by Dick Cavett, *The Dick Cavett Show*, May 7, 1972, collection 74, T18, BGCA.

problems. In addition, all of the oppressive communist countries were in league with Russia or China.²⁸ For Graham, communism equated to evil because it oppressed the individual.

In multiple newspaper columns spanning Nixon's presidency, Graham refuted questions by readers on the compatibility of Christianity and communism. Graham denied that the early church was communist and wrote "in no way can this Scripture be legitimately used to support Communism." The early church was simply a voluntary collective, which was very different from communism because Marxism "made the state supreme," rather than God. In addition, he wrote that the church did not force its beliefs on others. Since communists did not believe in God, Christians could not be communists. When asked if some agreement could be reached with communists, Graham responded, "As long as Communism is atheistic and totally materialistic, the Christian cannot compromise with it."²⁹ Undoubtedly, Graham maintained his strong stance against communism as the war in Vietnam dragged on and Nixon's foreign and domestic policies faced increased scrutiny.

Part of the Administration

Graham reached the height of his political immersion during Nixon's presidency when he served as both a spiritual and political advisor for the White House. As previously mentioned, Nixon, in conjunction with Graham, planned Sunday church services held at the White House. Graham gave the first sermon on January 26, 1969,

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²⁸ Graham, "Priorities for America," June 20, 1972, Atlanta, GA, p. 4-9, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

²⁹ Graham, published answers to reader questions, 1969-1975, collection 74, box 4, folder 1, BGCA.

which White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, found “very, very impressive.”³⁰ Nixon claimed that the services aimed to reduce the public spectacle that would occur if he traveled to local churches and were not politically motivated.³¹ In reality, the services were extremely political, and Nixon labored to control which specific reporters could attend, in addition to making efforts to limit his exposure to the press.³² In February 1970, a staff secretary wrote to Charles Colson, Special Counsel to Nixon, informing him that the president wanted him to “develop a list of rich people with strong religious interest to be invited to the White House Church services.”³³ The services, it appears, were used to gain financial support from attendees as well as provide a specific image of the president to the press. In his memoir, Graham wrote, “Some of the press were already calling me chaplain to the White House, a title I neither sought nor wanted,” but Graham willingly assumed this role in Nixon’s administration.³⁴

In addition to serving as the White House chaplain, Graham functioned as, in Miller’s words, a “proxy diplomat” for the president.³⁵ In September 1969, Graham wrote to the administration asking what he should say to Golda Meir, the Israeli Prime Minister, to ease tensions in the Middle East and offered to explain Nixon’s position to the Israelis.³⁶ Nixon told Kissinger to direct Graham’s unofficial role as an ambassador and sent a memo to Kissinger asking him to call Graham about it.³⁷ After Nixon announced in mid-1971 that he would be visiting the communist P.R.C. next year, Taiwanese

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³⁰ H.R. Haldeman, January 26, 1969, in *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1994), 22.

³¹ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 247.

³² Haldeman to Mrs. Stuart and Mr. Ziegler, March 17, 1970, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

³³ Staff Secretary to Charles Colson, February 23, 1970, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

³⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 450.

³⁵ Miller, 267.

³⁶ Harold H. Saunders to Henry Kissinger, September 24, 1969, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

³⁷ Bothwell, 105.

leadership reached out to Graham asking him to visit and elaborate on Nixon's position regarding the two countries. Kissinger told Graham to tell the Taiwanese that "we are acutely conscious of the deep and fundamental differences between ourselves and the leadership in Peking," in order to assure them of American support.³⁸ In November 1971, Kissinger also sent Graham a list of talking points for his meeting in Taiwan, including, "It is our hope that improved communications with the PRC will lead to a lessening of tensions in Asia and thus work to the advantage of our allies."³⁹ Haldeman told the evangelist that Nixon would likely cover additional "sensitive material" when they met prior to Graham's departure.⁴⁰ Nixon's trip to a communist country was not in conflict with Graham's worldview. The evangelist had visited Yugoslavia in 1967 and would preach in the Soviet Union in 1982, using religion as a weapon against the Iron Curtain. Graham functioned as an arm of the administration and cooled Taiwanese fears of U.S. overtures to communist China.

Graham continued his diplomatic work for Nixon throughout 1972. He held talks with the Shah of Iran and Kissinger relayed Graham's account of the Shah's advice to the president: Nixon should get out of Vietnam because it would make him a "world leader."⁴¹ In the same year, Nixon asked Graham to meet with Indira Gandhi, the Indian prime minister, to learn what type of American ambassador she wanted and told Graham to report everything back to him. Graham wrote, "He later appointed Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Whether my report influenced the President's decision, I never learned."⁴² As

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³⁸ Gibbs and Duffy, 191.

³⁹ Kissinger to Haldeman, November 19, 1971, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁴⁰ Haldeman to Graham, November 22, 1971, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁴¹ Bothwell, 134-35.

⁴² Graham, *Just As I Am*, 275.

Bothwell wrote, Graham conducted himself as a “well-connected covert political operator,” with his ability to serve as a non-governmental liaison for the president.⁴³

To authors Gibbs and Duffy, Graham amounted to a “de facto member” of Nixon’s administration. In addition to his diplomatic activities, this was especially evident in his work for Nixon’s 1972 reelection campaign, which was by far Graham’s greatest role in a presidential campaign to date.⁴⁴ As early as February 1971, the Nixon administration sought to mobilize Graham, who had expressed keen interest in helping the reelection campaign. A White House list of talking points to raise with Graham detailed, “Naturally we’re very anxious to take advantage of any help you can give us.”⁴⁵ On August 10, 1971, Graham spent the evening on the presidential yacht and, in Haldeman’s words, told Nixon that “what this country needs from the P[resident] is a very strong challenge, rather than the government giving them everything” and that Nixon needed to be reelected next year or there was no “hope” for the country.⁴⁶ In a memo circulated throughout the White House, Haldeman wrote that he would be “responsible for Billy Graham contact also on a regular basis.”⁴⁷ Haldeman directed Graham in his efforts to convince George Wallace to not run as an independent candidate, which would take Southern votes from Nixon, and Graham was successful in this endeavor.⁴⁸ Numerous other talking papers exist for conversations with Graham covering various election topics, such as how to best campaign against George

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⁴³ Bothwell, 12.

⁴⁴ Gibbs and Duffy, 193, 196.

⁴⁵ “Talking Paper, RE: Phone Call to Billy Graham,” February 8, 1971, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁴⁶ Haldeman, August 10, 1971, in *Haldeman Diaries*, 338.

⁴⁷ Haldeman, “Action Memorandum,” February 14, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁴⁸ Haldeman, June 8, 1972; and July 20, 1972, in *Haldeman Diaries*, 472, 484.

McGovern, the Democratic nominee.⁴⁹ Although Graham denied that conversations based on these talking papers actually happened, as Martin wrote, his claim was “clearly contradicted by Haldeman’s acknowledgement that he made the calls and by the unlikelihood that aides would continue to produce the papers if they were not acted upon.”⁵⁰ As seen in the administration’s talking points, Graham served virtually as a member of the president’s 1972 campaign.

Similar to the 1968 election, Graham also worked for Nixon to keep Johnson neutral in the race between Nixon and McGovern, a member of Johnson’s own party. On August 17, 1972, Haldeman wrote in his diary that, “Billy says he helped Johnson modify his [McGovern] endorsement to make it as cool as possible.”⁵¹ A few days later, he noted that Graham reported that Johnson had told McGovern that he would not campaign for him and called McGovern’s vice presidential candidate, Sargent Shriver, ignorant on Vietnam because Shriver had stated publicly that Johnson botched the peace talks in Paris.⁵² Johnson also told Graham to tell Nixon to “ignore McGovern... stay above the campaign, like I did with Goldwater.”⁵³ Although the relationship between Johnson and Nixon, facilitated by Graham, was surprising, it did have boundaries. When the Senate began threatening Nixon with a Watergate investigation in January 1973, the president threatened Johnson with releasing records of Johnson bugging Nixon’s offices in 1968 in an effort to get the former president to pressure Senate Democrats to back off. When Johnson responded that he would make public the Chennault affair, where Nixon

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⁴⁹ “Talking Paper for Reverend Billy Graham,” October 25, 1972; and Gordon Strachan to Haldeman, June 27, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁵⁰ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 399.

⁵¹ Haldeman, August 17, 1972, in *Haldeman Diaries*, 494-95.

⁵² Haldeman, August 22, 1972, in *Haldeman Diaries*, 497.

⁵³ Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician*, 586-87.

communicated through backdoors with South Vietnamese officials that they would get a better peace deal if they waited for Nixon to be elected in 1968, Nixon dropped the matter.⁵⁴ However, through Graham, Nixon had Johnson on his side, at least for the 1972 election.

Four days before the election, Colson told Nixon, “Billy Graham’s thing has moved very well... His statement supporting us, supporting you... He came through very well.”⁵⁵ After Nixon’s inauguration, the president wrote to Graham saying that he was “eternally grateful for your friendship and your support and your prayers over the years,” failing to specifically mention Graham’s recent support for Nixon’s reelection, although this may have been implied.⁵⁶ Clearly, Graham was instrumental in Nixon’s 1972 reelection and, as Haldeman and advisor John Ehrlichman both stated, Graham was a part of Nixon’s “inner circle.”⁵⁷ As an intimate advisor, the evangelist was also included in the formation of Nixon’s war policy.

Confidential Advice on the War

As in the previous administrations, the evangelist received numerous requests to hold crusades in Vietnam, which he always declined, as seen an October 1970 letter from Graham’s crusade organizer to a request: “As far as Vietnam is concerned, Mr. Graham has had several invitations to come for a crusade but has been unable to do any more than express an interest in this.”⁵⁸ Unlike his time in the Johnson administration, Graham did

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⁵⁴ Dallek, 618-19.

⁵⁵ Bothwell, 137.

⁵⁶ Nixon to Graham, January 22, 1973, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁵⁷ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 393.

⁵⁸ Walter H. Symth to Joseph Underwood, October 23, 1970, collection 17, box 145, folder 14, BGCA.

not travel to Vietnam to meet with troops and learn about the war at the president's request. However, Graham made a presidentially endorsed visit to analyze the war in Vietnam to another Southeast Asian country: Thailand.

Graham planned to travel to Asia in early 1969 and, in his biography, he recalled that Nixon learned of the trip and asked him to meet with American missionaries based in Vietnam to get their opinions on ending the war. The evangelist wrote, "I thought he was right in that goal and agreed to listen for ideas while overseas."⁵⁹ Nixon believed that these missionaries might have unique insights because he thought that they understood Vietnam better than the American embassy did.⁶⁰ Graham traveled to Bangkok and met with these missionaries at a three-day meeting beginning on March 24, 1969.

Upon his return, Graham penned a 13-page report with recommendations for the president entitled the "Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War." First, Graham established the authority of his analysis. The missionaries were predominantly hawkish, which was an informed and justified view because they "have a great understanding of the political, cultural, social, and even military situation." In addition, some of the missionaries had met with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu prior to the conference, adding to their expertise. Graham claimed personal knowledge of the war as well because U.S. Admiral John McCain, Sr. had briefed him on the military situation while he was in Bangkok. The missionaries, Graham explained, had "great confidence in President Nixon as our leader," and they believed that the majority of the South Vietnamese people were pro-American and pro-Nixon. However, the missionaries,

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⁵⁹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 453.

⁶⁰ Bothwell, 102.

like many of their South Vietnamese neighbors, were afraid of the Paris peace talks and the potential of a communist takeover if the U.S. gave up on the country.⁶¹

The missionaries listed seven mistaken U.S. actions in Vietnam. First, the “Americanization of the war” had made the war worse. Second, the U.S. military was using outdated fighting tactics learned during World War II. Third, the American military was engaging in work that South Vietnamese soldiers should have been doing. Next, American businesses were corrupting the country. Fifth, “stopping the bombing” was a terrible mistake. The missionaries claimed that the war was almost won, but Johnson’s de-escalation undermined everything. Additionally, the intrusion of U.S. business and American culture was destroying the country. Finally, America was losing the “propaganda war” against the communists. As Graham reported, the missionaries were strongly critical of past and present American actions in Vietnam.⁶²

Graham’s missionaries listed four possible policy options for Nixon; first, an “all out military victory,” which they dismissed as too expensive and too late; second, escalating the war further with increased U.S. military presence, although they claimed that North Vietnam would never surrender, so this was a bad option. Another option was the formation of a coalition government composed of North and South Vietnam, but the missionaries feared a communist takeover of South Vietnam if this occurred. Fourth, the option to permanently divide the country into northern and southern nations was

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⁶¹ Graham, “Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War,” April 15, 1969, p. 1-2, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁶² Ibid., 3-6.

available. Still, as the missionaries themselves recognized, none of these four options were really viable, nor would they be acceptable to much of the American population.⁶³

However, these missionaries believed that the president had a fifth course of action and could win the war in Vietnam by making multiple changes to the American war effort. First, the war needed to be “De-Americanized.” As Graham explained, “Let them fight the war the Oriental way. Let it become once again what it was in the beginning—a war between the Vietnamese themselves.” Although America would be reducing active combat troops in the country, it would increase air support and establish permanent military bases in South Vietnam from which to launch aerial bombardments. Nixon needed to withdraw regular American combat units and leave the fighting to the Special Forces, as Eisenhower and Kennedy had done, and move away from Johnson’s conventional style of warfare. These Special Forces must employ “Oriental methods which seem brutal and cruel in sophisticated Western eyes, but which are being used every day by the Viet Cong.” To reduce corruption, Nixon needed to inhibit the flow of U.S. goods into South Vietnam and remove many of the American troops based in Saigon. These actions would reduce U.S. involvement, while maintaining the American commitment to freedom in South Vietnam.⁶⁴

In addition to these changes to the U.S. military, the missionaries advocated for changes in the South Vietnamese forces as well. The “mountain tribes” should be equipped with weapons because they were intensely pro-American and were excellent guerilla soldiers. South Vietnamese troops, the missionaries pleaded, required better pay in order to motivate them to defend their country. In addition, South Vietnam needed to

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⁶³ Ibid., 6-7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7-11.

do more than simply contain the communist aggression; it needed to go on the offensive. The country should organize a government in exile for North Vietnam, which would encourage and support insurrection in the north. This government could use propaganda and Viet Cong defectors to “expose communist tyranny.” These defectors could also be used “to bomb and invade the north. Especially let them bomb the dikes which could overnight destroy the economy of Vietnam.”⁶⁵ Journalist Cecil Bothwell claimed that bombing the dikes might have killed a million people and would be considered a war crime, but Graham seemed to endorse the proposal.⁶⁶ The missionaries told Graham that their intelligence operations revealed that, out of the 27 million people in North Vietnam, only 10,000 were hardline communists, meaning that controlling the north was possible.⁶⁷

Essentially endorsing these views, Graham wrote, “Why should all the fighting be in the south?” The missionaries also argued that the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), developed under the Eisenhower administration to contain Chinese communism, direly needed an update in order to provide security for the region, in addition to expressing their desires for an Asian summit conference. At the end of the report, Graham concluded, “The Communists are desperately afraid of a well armed South Vietnamese military power with an emphasis on guerilla warfare using Oriental methods. They look upon Americans as inferior. They look upon the other Vietnamese and Orientals as equals.”⁶⁸

After returning from Bangkok and writing the report, Graham, the unofficial advisor, sent his report to Nixon in the spring of 1969 and it circulated widely throughout

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⁶⁵ Ibid., 9-12.

⁶⁶ Bothwell, 109-110.

⁶⁷ Graham, “Confidential Missionary Plan,” 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10-13.

the White House for the following year. In December, Graham sent the report to Kissinger and wrote that Nixon had told him to send it to Kissinger. He also told Kissinger that the Secretary of Defense, Marvin Laird, was impressed with the report.⁶⁹ Kissinger responded positively: "The missionaries' report reflected a good deal of first hand knowledge, and I found it quite useful. We are looking into the points which they raised."⁷⁰ Clearly, Graham's support influenced the administration or at least buttressed its already developing views on de-Americanizing the war and enacting a policy of Vietnamization.

On November 3, 1969, a few months after Graham's report, Nixon formally announced that his administration was adopting a policy of Vietnamization. "In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam," Nixon explained, "In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace." Nixon claimed that the Vietnamization plan had launched in March when Secretary Laird visited Vietnam to evaluate the situation. Nixon did not mention that this was the same month that Graham visited Bangkok at the president's request and returned with the same conclusion, or that Laird had read the evangelist's report. The president announced that his administration was reducing American troops and training South Vietnamese forces to take over combat, which paralleled Graham's recommendations. Nixon desired a "just and lasting peace" in Vietnam, and he asked the American public to support his policy of Vietnamization to achieve this.⁷¹ Clearly, Graham's "Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War" proved influential within the Nixon administration, and, although Graham claimed

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⁶⁹ Graham to Kissinger, December 28, 1970, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁷⁰ Kissinger to Graham, January 20, 1971, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

⁷¹ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," November 3, 1969, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303>.

in 1989 when the report was released that he was simply reiterating the missionaries' recommendations, these were clearly also Graham's views.⁷² If Graham had disagreed, he would not have written the report and circulated it throughout the administration.

Although Graham remained largely supportive of Nixon's actions in Vietnam, he privately disagreed with the president at least once. In April 1970, Graham learned of the planned U.S. invasion of Cambodia a few hours before the operation began, although he had no role in its planning. Privately, Graham expressed concern for the people of Cambodia to David Poling, the editor of the *Christian Herald*. He followed with, "What can people expect me to do? March in protest? Carry a sign? If I do that, then all the doors to the White House and all the avenues to people in high office in this administration are closed to me." Graham realized that he could only function as an advisor if he did not disagree with the president in public. He did mention to Poling that he had been pushing the administration to accept a negotiated peace and said that he would be meeting soon with Kissinger to discuss this, although this claim does not line up with his mostly hawkish rhetoric, and this disagreement was not characteristic of Graham.⁷³ When Nixon made controversial decisions, Graham usually backed him. For example, Graham later recounted to Frady that "the bombing of North Vietnam that people raised such a hue and cry about, it was to get out, to shorten everything—but not just to pick up and run. Bombing North Vietnam was to show the North Vietnamese that we meant business about a just peace." Graham agreed with Nixon's controversial idea of escalation to achieve an honorable peace in Vietnam. A smart man, Graham realized the

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⁷² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 367.

⁷³ Pierard, "Billy Graham and Vietnam," 47-48.

price of his power in the administration was public support for Nixon even when they disagreed, which was rare.

After giving Nixon his confidential report, Graham continued to advise and support the president throughout his administration. The evangelist called the president on April 7, 1971 to congratulate him for a moving speech on Vietnam that he had given earlier in the evening. He stated, “I want to tell you that that’s by far the best anybody has done on Vietnam. And the—you had me in tears.”⁷⁴ In his speech, Nixon proclaimed Vietnamization a success and promised to increase the rate of troop withdrawals because the South Vietnamese troops were developing into a force that could withstand “Communist aggression.” Nixon also blamed the two previous presidents for starting the war by saying that no American combat forces were in Vietnam when he left the vice presidency in 1961, but 540,000 troops were in the country when he returned to the White House in 1969. At the end of his address, as usual, he reiterated his desire for peace with honor: “That is why I have chartered the course I have laid out tonight: to end this war—but end it in a way that will strengthen trust for America around the world, not undermine it, in a way that will redeem the sacrifices that have been made, not insult them, in a way that will heal this Nation, not tear it apart.”⁷⁵ In their phone conversation, Graham told Nixon that the president had silenced his attackers with his speech and that *The New York Times* was publishing an editorial by Graham the following morning that blamed the war on Kennedy. Nixon responded, “He started the damn thing,” and told

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⁷⁴ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 7, 1971, 001-014, MC, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings>.

⁷⁵ Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia,” April 7, 1971, MC, <http://millercenter.org/president/nixon/speeches/speech-3876>.

Graham that Kennedy's greenlighting of the Diem assassination created the mess in Vietnam. To this, Graham replied, "Right."⁷⁶

Haldeman often functioned as an envoy between Graham and Nixon. On May 8, 1971, Haldeman recorded in his diary that Graham advised that Nixon "get tough" on Vietnam because that was what the public wanted.⁷⁷ Later that day, Nixon gave an address on the situation in Vietnam. He detailed recent North Vietnamese aggression, positing it as supported by the U.S.S.R. Nixon claimed that, through Kissinger, he was negotiating with the North Vietnamese, but they refused to reach a reasonable settlement. Because of this, Nixon was increasing American military action in Vietnam and was mining North Vietnamese ports, taking over railways and communication centers, and continuing air and naval strikes.⁷⁸ As Graham had advised, Nixon "got tough" on Vietnam. Numerous talking papers created by the administration directed Haldeman to get Graham's advice on public opinion on the war, North Vietnamese offensives, American bombing, and secret negotiations.⁷⁹ Even more telling of Graham's involvement was a May 1972 talking points paper for Graham that stated, "Thank you for forwarding the copy of your May 9th Report on Vietnam. It is always helpful to have an informed, non-government analysis of the situation."⁸⁰

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⁷⁶ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 7, 1971.

⁷⁷ Haldeman, May 8, 1972, in *H.R. Haldeman Diaries Collection*, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/haldeman-diaries/37-hrhd-audiocassette-ac21b-19720508-pa.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia," May 8, 1972, MC, <http://millercenter.org/president/nixon/speeches/speech-3880>.

⁷⁹ "Talking Paper for Secretary Connally and Billy Graham Separately," May 8, 1972; "Talking Paper for Secretary Connally and Billy Graham Separately," April 11, 1972; and "Talking Paper for Billy Graham," April 26, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder, 7, BGCA (RN).

⁸⁰ "Talking Paper for Billy Graham," May 16, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

Graham used his influence with Nixon to organize a foreign policy briefing for his friends on August 10, 1971, where Kissinger briefed the invitees who came from various government, media, religious, and business organizations. The guest list included President Nixon; Fred Rhodes, Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration; Paul Harvey, ABC radio newscaster; Dr. Harold Lindsell, editor of *Christianity Today*; the board chairs from Wheaton College and Gordon College; and Bill Walton, president of Holiday Inn. In addition, Stan Mooneyham, an “Expert of the Far East,” attended the briefing, meaning that the discussion likely included, if it was not centered on, the Vietnam War. Graham’s father-in-law, who remained a virulently anticommunist influence on Graham throughout the 1970s, also attended the meeting.⁸¹ Bell published *While Men Slept* in 1970, which lamented the rise of modernism in American Christianity and detailed the death of Christianity in communist countries, particularly China, where Bell had been based as a missionary.⁸² To borrow historian Jonathon Herzog’s terminology, Graham shored up the “spiritual-industrial complex” with this foreign policy briefing, a product of his closeness to the administration.⁸³

Public Support for Nixon’s War

Graham overwhelmingly supported Nixon and his policies in Vietnam from 1969 until the conclusion of American involvement in 1973. When Nixon stated on April 30, 1970 that his administration would be invading Cambodia, the announcement was met with large domestic protests, as Nixon had been promising de-escalation. Less than a

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⁸¹ August 10, 1971, in *Richard Nixon’s Daily Diary*, p. 69-70, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/PDD/1971/057%20August%201-15%201971.pdf>.

⁸² L. Nelson Bell, *While Men Slept* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), vii, 242.

⁸³ Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 6.

month later, Graham invited the president to speak at his crusade in Knoxville, Tennessee, a first for a sitting president.⁸⁴ In response to questions about having the president there, Graham strangely declared, “I wouldn’t think you’d call the President political.” Graham was not this naïve; he was trying to downplay his support for Nixon and role in the administration.⁸⁵ For Nixon, the crusade visit was extremely political and his advisors thought that his appearance would help Republicans running in the south. In addition, Nixon wanted to show the public that he could appear at a college campus, the crusade was at the University of Tennessee’s stadium, in the immediate wake of the May 4 Kent State shootings. Nixon wisely assumed that a Billy Graham rally in the south would be a safe place for an appearance.⁸⁶ Even still, his appearance at the crusade was only announced a day or two in advance, in a failed effort to prevent student protest.⁸⁷

On the evening of May 28, Graham and Nixon stood on the stage together before the thousands of attendees. Graham introduced the president: “I know that all Presidents have had to make hard, agonizing decisions that are often unpopular – but which they think are in the best interest of the country.” Since the job was difficult, and Nixon was the leader of all Americans, he deserved “the sympathy, understanding and prayers of all the American people.” Graham also used his introduction to stress Nixon’s spirituality.⁸⁸ When Nixon spoke, he thanked the crowd for largely supporting him and said, “I can understand why so many of our young people speak of their desire for peace. I want that.

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⁸⁴ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 368.

⁸⁵ Frady, 455.

⁸⁶ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 369.

⁸⁷ Ruth Anne Thompson, “‘A Taste of Student Power’: Protest at the University of Tennessee, 1964-1970,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (1998): 89.

⁸⁸ Graham, “Introduction to President Nixon, May 28, 1970, Knoxville, TN, p. 2, 4-5, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

You want it.”⁸⁹ During his sermon afterwards, Graham preached that American freedom necessitated a fight. Wars, the preacher continued, would not end until Christ returned to earth. Finally, Graham quoted the apostle Paul, who said, “Every Christian ought to obey the civil authority for all legitimate authority is derived from God’s authority, and the existing authority is appointed under God. To oppose authority then is to oppose God, and opposition is bound to be punished.”⁹⁰ Graham thereby elevated the Nixon presidency to one ordained by God, and, ipso facto, to oppose Nixon’s Vietnam policies would be to oppose God.

Throughout the evening, sporadic protests occurred in the stadium. Protestors chanted, “Bullshit! Bullshit! Politics! Politics! Peace Now! Peace Now!” Antiwar activists also staged mock deaths to symbolize the dead in Vietnam.⁹¹ One protestor shouted at the president, “Get out of Vietnam.” Police arrested nine protesters that night and more in the following days based on photographs taken during the event, but most of the charges were dropped.⁹² However, the protesters were largely drowned out by the loud applause for Nixon from the rest of the attendees. A survey of those present at Graham’s crusade determined that 71% had favored Nixon in the 1968 election.⁹³ As previously stated, Nixon smartly assumed that Graham and his followers would support him and his actions in Vietnam.

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⁸⁹ Nixon, “Remarks at Dr. Billy Graham’s East Tennessee Crusade,” May 28, 1970, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2523>.

⁹⁰ Graham, “American Youth at the Crossroads,” May 28, 1970, Knoxville, TN, p. 4, 14, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

⁹¹ Frady, 453.

⁹² Thompson, 91.

⁹³ Donald A. Clelland, Thomas C. Hood, C. M. Lipsey, and Ronald Wimberley, “In the Company of the Converted: Characteristics of a Billy Graham Crusade Audience,” *Sociological Analysis* 35, no. 1 (1974): 55.



Figure 5. Graham and Nixon bow their heads in prayer at the 1970 Knoxville crusade.⁹⁴

In regards to the Cambodian invasion, Graham continued to endorse the administration's actions. Speaking in Denver on June 4, 1970, Graham said, "While the war in Indo-China drags on, there are new gleams of light at the end of the long dark tunnel. We should have never gotten involved in a 'no win' war in Asia. President Nixon has promised to get American combat troops out of Cambodia by July 1, and I believe him – he has promised to 'end' this war, and I believe him."⁹⁵ Graham finally admitted that previous administrations should not have gone into Vietnam, still he refused to criticize the current administration. Graham also characterized the antiwar protests in response to the campaign in Cambodia as "a Satanic spiritual power of evil that is stirring

⁹⁴ *Knoxville Crusade*, May 28, 1970, p. 12, collection 10, box 1, folder 21, BGCA.

⁹⁵ Graham, "A World Lost in Space," June 4, 1970, Denver, CO, p. 7, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

up all the hatred and dissent in this country.”⁹⁶ As Miller wrote, Graham’s comments “often paralleled what pundits would now call the ‘talking points’ of the administration,” understandably so because the administration frequently shared its talking points with Graham.⁹⁷ As journalist Edward B. Fiske wrote at the time in an article for *The New York Times*, Graham initially supported the war, but now desired to end it with the same strategies proclaimed by Nixon.⁹⁸

In 1970, Graham planned and executed what was perhaps his most public support for the Vietnam War yet, albeit public support couched in nonpartisan patriotism. As Pierard wrote, Graham “now desperately wanted to see the war halted, but not at the cost of American defeat,” so he began planning a patriotic rally scheduled for July 4, 1970 as a way to combat domestic protest of Nixon’s Vietnam policies and to keep America united behind its president.⁹⁹ Graham collaborated with *Reader’s Digest* founder Hobart Lewis; together they dubbed the event “Honor America Day.” Graham told event emcee Bob Hope, “Let’s keep it away from the war;” the day was to be more about patriotism than specific policies.¹⁰⁰ Graham planned to hold the event on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and had Walt Disney choreograph the day.¹⁰¹ Although Nixon was not publicly involved in the planning or execution, Martin wrote that the “White House played a central role in its planning and execution.”¹⁰² Apparently, Graham pitched the idea to the president, saying, “Mr. President, everyone talks about what’s wrong with

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⁹⁶ Frady, 428-29.

⁹⁷ Miller, 139.

⁹⁸ Edward B. Fiske, “The Closest Thing To A White House Chaplain: Billy Graham,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 1969.

⁹⁹ Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam,” 48; and Pierard, “Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency,” 125.

¹⁰⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, 187-88.

¹⁰¹ Frady, 426.

¹⁰² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 370-71.

America. Why doesn't someone talk about what's *right* with America?"¹⁰³ The administration's involvement was documented by Haldeman, who wrote in his diary on May 12 that Nixon wanted "to try to implement Billy Graham's idea about a big pro-America rally, maybe on 4th of July."¹⁰⁴ At a press conference the day before the celebration, Graham denied that the event's purpose was to support Nixon and the Vietnam War: "This is not hawks versus doves, Republicans versus Democrats, or whites versus blacks... It is all of us together."¹⁰⁵

In keeping with Graham's intentions, the announcements for the event reiterated that Honor America Day was a non-partisan patriotic day of unity. One press bulletin declared that the purpose was "to demonstrate to the world that while we face problems as individuals and as a nation we are proud of our country and welcome the opportunity to honor America" and "the entire program effort is non-political and non-partisan." The non-partisan nature of the event was symbolized in the naming of honorary chairpersons from both sides of the political aisle: Harry Truman, Mamie Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson.¹⁰⁶ Nixon did not directly involve himself in the festivities, but did send a patriotic recorded address to the attendees.¹⁰⁷ On the event's fact sheet, the stated purpose was to "rekindle the American spirit of patriotism and respect for individual liberties that made America great." This sheet also detailed the elaborate festivities that Graham planned for the day. In the morning, the evangelist would lead a religious service at the Lincoln Memorial. This would be followed by a national salute and parade throughout

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¹⁰³ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 227.

¹⁰⁴ Haldeman, May 12, 1970, in *Haldeman Diaries*, 165.

¹⁰⁵ John Herbers, "Graham Defends Patriotic Rally: He Denies Purpose Is to Aid Nixon's Vietnam Policy," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1970.

¹⁰⁶ Informational bulletin for Honor America Day, July 4, 1970, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

¹⁰⁷ Nixon, "Message to the 'Honor America Day' Ceremonies," July 4, 1970, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2571>.

the city. In the evening, Bob Hope was scheduled to lead a variety show and, in keeping with Fourth of July tradition, the night would end with fireworks.¹⁰⁸

Contrary to Graham's claims that Honor America Day was "all of us together," the event was pro-war and pro-Nixon, as seen in the evangelist's sermon. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Graham gave a sermon entitled, "The Unfinished Dream," a title eerily reminiscent of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon on the same steps in August 1963. Graham stated, "The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:17: 'Honor all men. Fear God. Honor the king.' The king referred to was the Roman Emperor. Since our nation is a republic and not a monarchy, this Scripture could read, 'Honor the nation.'" Even though the government made mistakes, Graham declared that Americans should remain faithful to it. Regarding dissent, he said that "there is too much discouragement, despair and negativism in the nation today" and that protesters amounted to a "small extremist element" that did not represent America. In addition, Graham held up American democracy as superior to communist countries: "We honor America because she has never hidden her problems and faults.... Instead of an 'Iron Curtain' we have a 'picture window.' 'The whole world watches' – sometimes critically and sometimes with admiration, but no one can ever accuse us of trying to hide our problems as some nations do." America, Graham continued, always stood on the side of the oppressed; it was never the oppressor of other nations. Paraphrasing Winston Churchill in his final comment, Graham exhorted, "I say to you today, 'Pursue the vision, reach toward the goal, fulfill the dream – and as you move to do it, never give in! Never give in! Never! Never! Never!"

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¹⁰⁸ "Honor America Day Fact Sheet and Order of Events," circa July 1970, p. 1-3, collection 74, box 5, folder 8, BGCA.

Never!”¹⁰⁹ Graham would repeat this sermon a little over a year later at the Kiwanis International Convention, but with the inclusion of attacks on U.S. senators who were formerly pro-intervention in Vietnam but had changed their minds.¹¹⁰ Graham wisely left this strong rhetoric out of his July 4 sermon, in order to lessen the claims that the rally was in support of Nixon and the Vietnam War.

Thousands of people crowded onto the National Mall to hear Graham speak, including protestors. Historian David R. Swartz claimed that Graham’s choice of 1 Peter 2:17 scared liberal Christians, who believed that Graham meant honor God by honoring Nixon’s war.¹¹¹ Throughout the event, protestors smoked pot, raised Viet Cong flags, and skinny-dipped in the reflecting pool. Mennonite protestors erected a large sign reading, “Hour of Decision: God or Country?,” correctly identifying Graham’s conflation of the two in civil religion and using a reference to his radio program to compel him to pick one.¹¹² Some of the protests turned violent and pro-war marchers fought with antiwar activists throughout the day.¹¹³ In addition, protestors sparred with the police, who used tear gas to neutralize the dissent.¹¹⁴ However, as Graham stated, the protestors at Honor America Day were a minority compared to the thousands that came to support the event.

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¹⁰⁹ Graham, “The Unfinished Dream,” July 4, 1970, Washington, D.C., p. 1-8, collection 74, box 5, folder 8, BGCA.

¹¹⁰ Graham, “Salute to America,” circa June 27, 1971, San Francisco, CA, p. 1-6, collection 345, box 48, folder 5, BGCA.

¹¹¹ David R. Swartz, “The Evangelical Left and the Move from Personal to Social Responsibility,” in *American Evangelicals and the 1960s*, ed. Axel R. Schäfer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 219.

¹¹² Gibbs and Duffy, 189-90.

¹¹³ Bothwell, 121.

¹¹⁴ Gibbs and Duffy, 189.

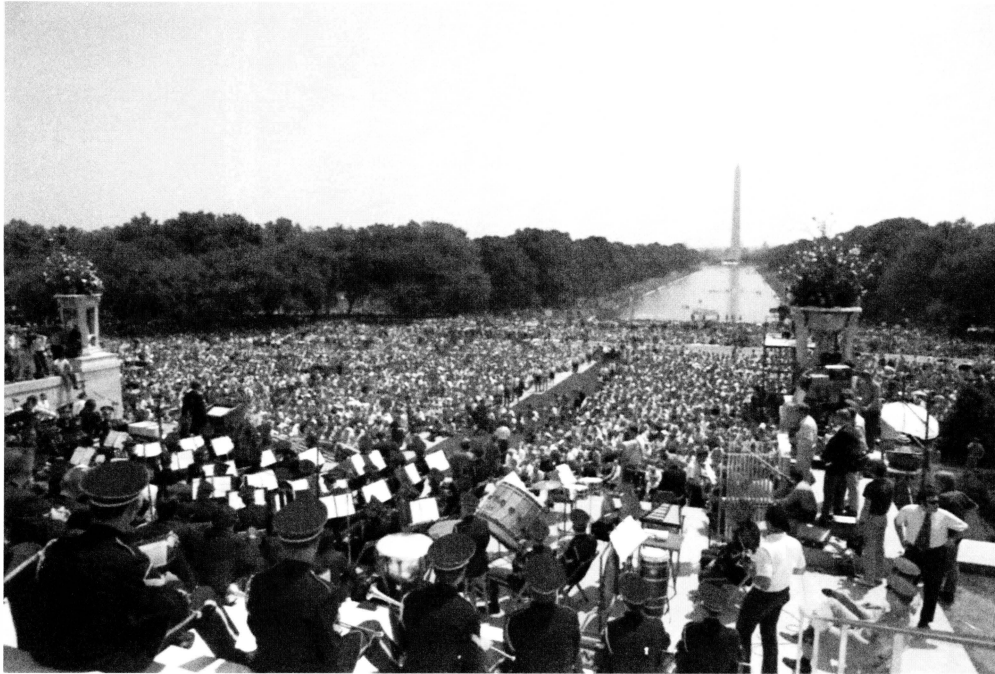


Figure 6. Graham preaches at Honor America Day while protesters stand in the Reflecting Pool.¹¹⁵

After the festivities, Tom Wicker declared in *The New York Times* that “‘Honor America Day’ was doomed to failure.” The war was too divisive, and although Graham was sincere in his efforts, he did not realize that a large portion of Americans had no desire to pay tribute to America.¹¹⁶ Wicker was correct in his assessment that many Americans were unhappy with their country, but he failed to ascertain that Graham knew this and designed honor America day to combat this dissent and support the administration. Graham’s motives were made clear in the analysis of staffer Jeb Magruder, the White House liaison for the event, who wrote that it was “a political event, one in which honoring America was closely intertwined with supporting Richard Nixon, and in particular with supporting his policy in Vietnam at a time when a great many

¹¹⁵ *Untitled*, July 4, 1970, BGEA.

¹¹⁶ Tom Wicker, “In The Nation: Flags, Fireworks and America,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 1970.

people were opposing it with rallies of their own.”¹¹⁷ At Honor America Day, Graham combined Christianity and government in civil religion to support Nixon’s policies in Southeast Asia.

Graham’s next major initiative for Nixon came on October 15, 1971, when the city of Charlotte, North Carolina honored its most famous native by declaring a Billy Graham Day. Nixon and his pastor/advisor attended the festivities together and rode through the city in a convertible while thousands lined their parade route.¹¹⁸ Large violent protests occurred throughout the day, and antiwar banners excoriated Graham’s collusion with Nixon in Vietnam: “Stop the Bloody War... The Church and State, a Holy Alliance?” and “Jesus and Caesar weren’t best friends.”¹¹⁹ Nixon’s agents showed up two weeks in advance to assess the degree of local dissent and Ronald Walker, one of these agents, wrote to Haldeman that protesters would be obscene, violent, and attack Nixon and Graham together. In the margins of the letter, Haldeman noted “Good,” the idea being that the protestors would be perceived negatively by the public if they attacked Nixon while Graham was present.¹²⁰

After the parade, Nixon and Graham took turns giving speeches praising each other. Graham thanked the president for attending and then used his speech as an opportunity to portray Nixon as a moral person: “I remember once I made a suggestion to him. He looked at me and said, ‘Billy, I don’t think that would be morally right.’” He also thanked Nixon for his years of “advice and counsel,” failing to mention the years of

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¹¹⁷ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 227.

¹¹⁸ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 460.

¹¹⁹ Frady, 455-63; and Gibbs and Duffy, 198.

¹²⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, 200.

advice and counsel that he had given the president.¹²¹ Nixon used his speech about Graham to build himself up by association (“I have very much in common with him”) and outlined his plans for future peace:

Now I would like to speak of what this Nation owes to Billy Graham, and how important his ministry at this time in our history is to America and to the world. He mentioned the fact that I shall be making a journey to Mainland China. You also have heard of the fact that I will be making a journey to the Soviet Union. And as these trips take place, and as we end the longest and most difficult war in America’s history, or in any nation’s history for that matter, hope springs up in America, as it can, as it should, that we may be seeing an era in which we can have peace, peace not just for a year, or 5 years, or 10 years, but maybe for a generation, maybe longer than that. That is what we are trying to build.

Nixon highlighted his ending of the war and advertised himself as a peace president.¹²²

After the event, Haldeman recorded in his diary, “Billy did a great job of building the president in his talk, and the president did very well in paying him back for it. It was, all and all, a very good day.”¹²³ On NBC news later that day, correspondent Herbert Kaplow accurately declared, “Politicians seem to feel with enough friends like Billy Graham, a fellow can do pretty well in American politics”¹²⁴

Graham’s unwavering support for the president and the Vietnam War went well beyond these three massive spectacles; it was also evident in his public comments and writings, as seen in his statement on the Mai Lai massacre, when American troops slaughtered hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in March 1968. On April 9, 1971, in the midst of the trials for the American soldiers responsible, Graham published an editorial in

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¹²¹ Graham, “Billy Graham Day,” October 15, 1971, Charlotte, NC, p. 7-9, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

¹²² Nixon, “Remarks at Ceremonies Honoring Billy Graham in Charlotte, North Carolina,” October 15, 1971, APP, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3192>.

¹²³ Haldeman, October 15, 1971, in *H.R. Haldeman Diaries Collection*, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/haldeman-diaries/37-hrhd-audiocassette-ac14b-19711015-pa.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Herbert Kaplow, NBC news broadcast on October 15, 1971, collection 74, V4, 272, BGCA.

The New York Times to offer his views of the massacre. This editorial was the one that he had discussed with the president in their April 7 phone call. First, as he told Nixon, he blamed the war on Kennedy and falsely said that he had first heard about the war in the golf clubhouse when Kennedy told him that South Vietnam must remain free from the communists. He then defended Johnson's escalation, saying that the president's escalation was necessary due to the "political climate." General Sherman had it right, Graham acknowledged, "War is hell," but then, in a weird defense of the massacre, the pastor noted that civilians were always killed in wars, as seen in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In addition, Graham gave anecdotal evidence to minimize the atrocities of the American soldiers. He heard that the Vietcong were murdering villagers in cruel ways as well and used booby-traps and grenades. Graham's final point trivialized the massacre: "We have all had our Mylais in one way or another, perhaps not with guns, but we have hurt others with a thoughtless word, an arrogant act or a selfish deed." Jesus told the accusers who wanted to stone a woman for committing adultery that the one without sin should throw the first stone. Graham claimed that, like William Calley and the other perpetrators, everyone was a sinner. Graham dismissed the American atrocities in the Vietnam War by comparing them to "selfish deed[s]."¹²⁵

Graham continued to support the president and deny his own policy-shaping role in the war. In a May 1972 press conference, Graham stated, "I am hopeful that the war is going to get over with. I am sure this is the hope of President Nixon. I know him well

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¹²⁵ Graham, "Billy Graham: On Calley: Perhaps From Mylai May Emerge Justice Love, Mercy, Peace," *The New York Times*, April 9, 1971.

enough that he is determined to get out of Vietnam.”¹²⁶ The next month, Graham told reporters that Nixon did not ask for his advice on foreign affairs and defended Nixon’s use of force in Vietnam. He stated, “The President’s goal is to keep the peace. His goal is to get out of Vietnam. When the North Vietnamese crossed the DMZ, he had to act fast to save another Dunkirk.” This was a reference comparing the massive Allied retreat in World War II in the face of a German attack to the North Vietnamese “Easter Offensive.” To Graham, Nixon’s military actions had saved the Republic of Vietnam and promised to end the war sooner.¹²⁷ Graham’s public statements on Nixon and Vietnam furthered his already intimate role in the administration and the war.

The Paris Peace Accords

Although he did not lead any of the peace initiatives, Graham remained informed on their progress by the president. In a phone call on October 16, 1972, Nixon shared confidential information with the evangelist: “Well the main thing we’re working on is Vietnam. For your confidential information, Kissinger flew off today, it will be announced tomorrow, to Paris again... We’re working on this thing. We don’t know what’s gonna happen, but we are going to insist on the right kind of settlement or we aren’t gonna settle.” Graham responded that Nixon was correct in seeking an honorable peace and assured him that the public would support him. He commended a recent Nixon speech taking a tough stance on North Vietnam as “tremendous.”¹²⁸

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¹²⁶ “Billy Graham Hails Catholic Participation in ‘Key 73,’” *Baptist Bible Tribune* (Springfield, MO), May 19, 1972, collection 360, reel 104, BGCA.

¹²⁷ “Graham Has Praise for Nixon,” *Biblical Recorder*, June 17, 1972, collection 360, reel 105, BGCA.

¹²⁸ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on October 16, 1972, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape031/031-085.mp3>.

In December 1972, negotiations between North Vietnam and the United States fell apart. Nixon quickly announced renewed bombing of North Vietnam with Operation Linebacker II. This provoked massive retaliatory protests in America. A group of ten religious organizations petitioned Graham to put pressure on the president to stop the bombing.¹²⁹ Graham, sensing the anger directed at him and the president, released a “Statement to Define Dr. Billy Graham’s Position Regarding the Recent Conduct of the Vietnam War.” He desired, the pastor insisted, a “rapid and just peace” and his friend Nixon wanted this as well. Graham did not simply want peace now; he wanted a peace that would be fair and lasting. Graham also clarified what he thought his biblical role was concerning the presidents: “I am convinced that God has called me to be a New Testament evangelist, not an Old Testament prophet! While some may interpret an evangelist to be primarily social reformer or political activist, I do not! An evangelist is a proclaimer of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ and the necessity of repentance and faith.” Graham claimed that his purpose was not to criticize Nixon and his conduct in Vietnam; instead, it was to preach the gospel to him.¹³⁰ Graham’s statement circulated throughout the White House, where a Nixon advisor noted that he made this statement after being quoted that he found the war “deplorable.”¹³¹ In response to calls for him to put pressure on Nixon, Graham also stated: “The president doesn’t call me up and say, ‘Billy, shall we do this or that?’ That just doesn’t happen. I’m not one of his advisers. I’m just a personal friend. That’s all. In no way would he ask me military strategy. He’s never

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¹²⁹ Pierard, “Billy Graham and Vietnam,” 48.

¹³⁰ Graham, “Statement to Define Dr. Billy Graham’s Position Regarding the Recent Conduct of the Vietnam War,” January 5, 1973, p. 1-3, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

¹³¹ Dwight L. Chapin to Haldeman, January 8, 1973, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

even discussed it with me.”¹³² Again Graham publicly denied his advisory role to Nixon, but, behind the scenes, he discussed the war with Nixon extensively and advocated for hawkish policies.

As U.S. involvement in the war moved to its conclusion in January 1973, Graham continued his support, albeit less so than when the war began. In what was perhaps his most critical statement on the war, Graham gave an interview on January 21, 1973 to *The New York Times*. He claimed to have had “grave questions” about the war from its inception. The recent Christmas bombings (Linebacker II), he confessed, left him feeling “gloomy” when the ceasefire he and “all Americans” thought was “imminent” collapsed. The painful war, he concluded, was a “judgement of God on America” and evidence of the impending apocalypse. Yet Graham continued to downplay civilian casualty rates from Nixon’s bombing campaign. He pointed to the thousand people killed every week on American highways due to alcohol and questioned the lack of protests for these tragedies. Indeed, America’s main problem, Graham concluded (articulating an argument that would later become popular among Vietnam revisionists) was a failure to use “overwhelming power”—as the Russians had in Czechoslovakia. “I doubted from the beginning over sending American troops anywhere without the will to win. We entered the war almost deliberately to lose it,” he lamented.¹³³ If Graham doubted, he failed to express these doubts early on in the war and, even with this statement, he was not saying that America should not have sent troops to Vietnam.

Six days later, on January 27, 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed between the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam; resulting in a temporary cessation

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¹³² Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 423.

¹³³ Fiske, “Graham, Tells of Reservations Over War,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1973.

of hostilities between the two small nations and a permanent end to American military involvement in the war. Privately, Graham told Nixon that the president had saved America and gloated, “Some of the liberal commentators seem to be disappointed that you were able to do it!”¹³⁴ Publicly, Graham proclaimed victory to an audience in Charlotte on January 28. Graham supported Nixon by saying that the president only missed his pledge to bring peace to Vietnam during his first term by a single week. He then declared, “American involvement in Southeast Asia is over, we hope and pray, but American involvement at home in many wars is not over.” These wars included American highway deaths, murder, divorce, poverty, and racism. Graham encouraged his listeners to “dedicate ourselves to eradicating these wars.” Finally, Graham offered support to the returning soldiers:

Those men in Vietnam went and obeyed and bravely served and some died and thousands were wounded. And in their hearts, they were giving their today so that our children and grandchildren might have a tomorrow. History will have to judge whether the commitment was right or wrong. But as far as the commitment of those individual soldiers was concerned, it was right.”

The war was over and Graham, correctly reading the divided mood of the country, encouraged the public to view returning veterans as heroes who defended America against communism.¹³⁵

After the war ended, Nixon and Graham continued to discuss it. On February 21, the evangelist again heaped praise on the president, this time for bringing American POWs home as part of Operation Homecoming. Graham told the president, “Congratulation on everything. I think that, uh, these prisoners coming back has just set a whole new mood in the country. And, uh, I think that your determination and

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¹³⁴ Gibbs and Duffy, 218.

¹³⁵ Graham, “Peace Day,” January 28, 1973.

perseverance.... Well, you showed tremendous courage, and you never wavered.” Nixon told Graham that the POWs were proud coming home because America had achieved a peace with honor, instead of accepting defeat like the antiwar activists wanted. Graham blasted Senator Mark Hatfield, the man he once recommended for vice president, as a “big disappointment” because he used the recent presidential prayer breakfast to criticize Nixon for corruption instead of congratulating him for achieving peace in Vietnam. In the same call, Graham remarked that he was forming an opposition group to the liberal World Council of Churches. Nixon responded, “They’re really so close to the communists it’s unbelievable,” and Graham, in agreement, remarked that these religious liberals attacked America instead of attacking communism. Although the war was over, communism remained a threat.¹³⁶ A few months later, Nixon reflected on what he thought his legacy would be to Graham: “We’ve got peace [in] Vietnam and we’re moving along some other things and that’s what history’s gonna remember us for.”¹³⁷

Watergate and Manipulation

Unfortunately for Nixon, history remembered him for something else and as the war wound down, the controversies within his administration piled up. In June 1972, prior to Nixon’s reelection, members of his campaign staff were caught breaking into Democratic offices at the Watergate Hotel. As federal investigations into the administration’s corruption began, Graham wrote to Haldeman on October 21 exclaiming, “It is amazing to me that people who made a hero of Ellsberg for stealing the

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¹³⁶ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on February 21, 1973, RN, <https://nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape043/043-161.mp3>.

¹³⁷ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 11, 1973, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape893/893-005.mp3>.

Pentagon Papers are so deeply concerned about the alleged escapade at Watergate.”¹³⁸

Sixth months later, on April 11, 1973, Graham talked with Nixon about the scandal. Both men agreed that it was not a major problem and Nixon assured Graham that the White House was not involved.¹³⁹ Graham also telegraphed Nixon with biblical words of comfort: “King David had the same experience. He said: ‘They accuse me of thing I have never heard about. I do them good but they return me harm.’”¹⁴⁰

As the public increasingly learned of the complicity of the administration in the break-in and cover-up, Nixon fired some of his aides and felt increasingly isolated from his friends. Speaking to his press secretary, Ron Ziegler, on April 28, the president lamented, “I was rather sorry to see Billy Graham join in the chorus of saying do something, you know. I was really surprised to see him say that.” Apparently, Graham had publicly made a negative remark about the scandal.¹⁴¹ However, Nixon thanked Graham for his support in a phone call two days later after the president asked Haldeman and Ehrlichman to resign. “You know, Ruth, she thinks it’s all a communist plot, left-wing and everything else,” the pastor told the president. Nixon seconded Ruth Graham’s appraisal. He had told the Associated Press, Graham assured the president, that Nixon was humble and had taken appropriate actions. Nixon thanked Graham and said, “Well that’s good of you, Billy. You have been a friend”—a marked shift from the president’s complaints about Graham only two days earlier.¹⁴²

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¹³⁸ Graham to Haldeman, October 21, 1972, collection 74, box 3, folder 7, BGCA (RN).

¹³⁹ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 11, 1973, in *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, ed. Stanley I. Kutler (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 302-303.

¹⁴⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, 221.

¹⁴¹ Nixon and Ron Ziegler, telephone conversation on April 28, 1973, in *Abuse of Power*, 353.

¹⁴² Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 30, 1973, RN, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape045/045-045.mp3>.

The pastor's support continued throughout the Senate hearings on Watergate in the spring of 1973 and even after Nixon refused to release the White House tapes. In a sermon on October 13, Graham attributed Watergate to a "supernatural battle," which minimized the administration's individual sins and instead blamed the forces of evil in the world.¹⁴³ In November, Charles Crutchfield, a radio broadcaster and friend of Graham's, sent Nixon's secretary a copy of Graham's soon to be released "Thanksgiving Statement," where the evangelist outlined his support for the president, praised him for being open throughout the Watergate investigation, and insisted that the president would not resign.¹⁴⁴

As Nixon's collusion in the Watergate cover-up grew increasingly clear, Graham's support of the president faded somewhat. In December 1973, Graham said in *Christianity Today* that he was confident in Nixon's integrity, but that the president had made some mistakes. Historian Stephen Ambrose wrote, "Graham's criticism, mild as it was, hurt a lot, because it was so unusual for him."¹⁴⁵ As previously mentioned, in an interview with the same magazine in January 1974, Graham desperately backpedaled from the administration to which he had grown so close: "I have said things to various presidents that could be construed as political advice. I'm not so quick anymore to make political judgements."¹⁴⁶ Even with this statement, he refused to acknowledge his relationships with presidents as political; they were mistakenly interpreted this way

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¹⁴³ Graham, "Illusions," October 13, 1973, p. 5-6, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

¹⁴⁴ Charles Crutchfield to Rose Mary Woods, circa November 1973, collection 74, box 3, folder 5, BGCA (RN).

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery*, 284.

¹⁴⁶ Gibbs and Duffy, 228.

according to the pastor. Graham also stated, “I can make no excuses for Watergate. I condemn it and I deplore it,” although he still expressed confidence in Nixon.¹⁴⁷

In April, while at a press conference at Kansas State University, Graham said, “The Bible teaches that ‘The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; who can know it.’ And there's a little bit of Watergate in all of us. Only in a transformation that can come about through Jesus Christ can the human heart be changed.” Echoing his statements about the My Lai massacre, Graham minimized the issue by claiming that it was a collective sin. Asked about his lack of criticism of the Vietnam War, Graham gave a surprisingly frank answer: “So in that particular war sometime, someday in memoirs or in some tape recording somewhere I suppose my position will be known, but I expressed it privately. I didn’t publicly because sometimes you can do much more behind the scenes than you can out waving a flag.”¹⁴⁸ Graham admitted to working privately with the Nixon administration on the Vietnam War.

On April 29, 1974, Nixon released transcripts to some of his secret presidential tapes and on July 30, following a subpoena, he released the actual tapes to investigators. Ruth claimed that one of the hardest things her husband ever had to do was read through the transcripts and that Graham even cried while reading them.¹⁴⁹ However, Graham was not primarily upset with Nixon’s role in the Watergate affair; he was upset with the president’s coarse language. Miller wrote, “In a striking manifestation of an all-too-common tendency of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals to focus on readily observed and easily categorized externals of behavior rather than on deeper and more fundamental

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¹⁴⁷ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 428.

¹⁴⁸ Graham, press conference at Kansas State University, March 4, 1974, p. 1-2, 9, collection 24, box 3, folder 24, BGCA.

¹⁴⁹ Aikman, 217.

pathologies, Graham fastened on the omnipresent profanity in the conversations between Nixon and his aides.”¹⁵⁰

Publicly, Graham declared that “Watergate could [‘has’ is crossed out in his speaking notes, evidence that Graham still refused to criticize Nixon outright] become the great illusion. The illusion is that you can have public virtue without private morality. It is ridiculous to think that integrity can somehow be restored by removing one man.” Nixon was not the problem; instead, the nation was morally depraved and Watergate was proof of this.¹⁵¹ Graham also said that at least Nixon “didn’t have nude women running around in the private quarters of the White House” as Kennedy had done and blamed Nixon’s actions on demonic influences through the president’s use of sleeping pills.¹⁵² Graham continuously claimed after the release of the tapes and the resignation of Nixon on August 9, 1974, that “those tapes revealed a man that I never knew.”¹⁵³

Graham’s claim of Nixon being a “man he never knew” fell flat because Graham worked intimately with Nixon and his administration. In his autobiography, he wrote, “Never, in all the times I was with him, did he use language even close to that.”¹⁵⁴ However, as the taped conversations between the evangelist and the president clearly show, Nixon was not prone to hiding his swearing around Graham and their relationship was clearly more politically motivated than Graham would ever admit to.¹⁵⁵ Graham was not some innocent bystander, he frequently agreed to help the administration, such as when he offered advice on the Vietnam War. In return, he used the administration for his

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¹⁵⁰ Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 430-31.

¹⁵¹ Graham, “National Integrity,” May 3, 1974, Phoenix, AZ, p. 17, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

¹⁵² Frady, 484; and Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 434.

¹⁵³ Gibbs and Duffy, 230.

¹⁵⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 457.

¹⁵⁵ Nixon and Graham, telephone conversation on April 7, 1971.

own personal benefit, such as when the evangelist convinced Nixon in 1969 to grant draft exemptions for Graham's staff, and when Graham complained to Nixon in 1971 about an IRS inquiry into the BGEA's finances, resulting in the president ordering Haldeman to attack his enemies instead.¹⁵⁶ Graham was clearly aware of the administration's "dirty laundry."

Conversely, most Graham historians depict him as naïve, rather than deliberate. Pierard, Gibbs, and Duffy wrote that Nixon manipulated Graham throughout his presidency, and Graham was slow to realize it.¹⁵⁷ Wacker posited that "Graham never seemed to suspect that his close personal and pastoral relationships with [Johnson and Nixon] might have influenced his judgment about their judgment."¹⁵⁸ Graham himself wrote that he was naïve, but "I honestly believe my intentions were uncomplicated by personal aims or ambitions."¹⁵⁹ Clearly, Graham was more complicit in the Nixon administration than he was willing to admit, and he used his access to the presidency to further his evangelical belief of containing communism in Southeast Asia.

A Eulogy for Vietnam and Nixon

Compared to the power and access he enjoyed under Nixon, Graham played only a minimal role in Gerald Ford's administration. "Ford was practically egoless, a character trait that Graham embraced," wrote historian Douglas Brinkley.¹⁶⁰ Graham probably appreciated the humility that he saw in the new president after the trauma he experienced

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¹⁵⁶ Bothwell, 112; Nixon and Haldeman, conversation on September 12, 1972, in *Abuse of Power*, 31; and Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 35.

¹⁵⁷ Pierard, "Billy Graham and the U.S. Presidency," 124-25; and Gibbs and Duffy, 230.

¹⁵⁸ Wacker, "Billy Graham's America," *Church History* 78, no. 3 (September 2009): 508.

¹⁵⁹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 452.

¹⁶⁰ Douglas Brinkley, 145.

when he learned of Nixon's sins. Yet Graham, wiser after the Nixon administration, kept his distance. He warned a close pastor friend of the new president, "When you get to the White House, don't play golf with him. Don't go on the *Sequoia* [the White House yacht] with him. Don't make it a social event. Be yourself. You have to try to ground him in scripture."¹⁶¹ Taking his own advice, Ford was the last president with whom Graham played golf.¹⁶² Due to the constant criticisms of his active support for Nixon, when Ford asked if he could attend Graham's crusade in Pontiac, Michigan during the 1976 presidential election campaign, Graham told him that he could attend, but that he could not speak from the stage and the evangelist would also be inviting his opponent, Democrat Jimmy Carter.¹⁶³ Clearly, as Graham listened to and learned from his critics, he backed away from active participation in presidential politics.

The one area where Graham actively worked with the new administration concerned the actions of the previous administration. In his autobiography, Graham wrote, "I wanted Ford to initiate the healing by pardoning Richard Nixon. Although I had personal reasons as well, I believed that a pardon would be good for the office of the presidency."¹⁶⁴ To achieve this, Graham called Anne Armstrong, one of the new president's advisors, and she connected him with Alexander Haig, Ford's Chief of Staff. Haig called Graham and told him that Ford would be in touch with him about pardoning Nixon. When they talked, Graham told Ford that the country would heal if he pardoned Nixon. The president responded that he would think and pray about it. A few days later, on September 8, 1974, Ford pardoned the former president. He later claimed that he made

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¹⁶¹ Gibbs and Duffy, 234.

¹⁶² Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 156.

¹⁶³ Aikman, 224-25.

¹⁶⁴ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 467.

this choice before talking to the evangelist, but Graham's appeal at least buttressed his decision.¹⁶⁵ In a news conference in Los Angeles on the day of the pardon, Graham said that Ford "made the right decision," but did not publicize his involvement. He again reiterated his support for Nixon and said that the former president excelled in foreign policy. As usual, Graham blamed Watergate on the American public and said that it might not have happened if people had been praying for Nixon. "I think the feeling and the mood of the country is let's get some of these things like Watergate and Vietnam and all these things behind us," Graham concluded, speaking perhaps as much for himself as for the country.¹⁶⁶

Unfortunately for Graham, he and the country were unable to put Vietnam "behind us." Around Christmas 1974, North Vietnam began an offensive to gain control of South Vietnam and reunify the country. In the absence of U.S. forces, North Vietnamese troops tore southward and by April 1975 were poised to capture Saigon. A memo within the Ford administration noted that the president had told Graham to call if he needed anything. On April 25, Graham made an urgent call: he needed help evacuating 195 missionaries from the Christian Missionary Alliance still in Vietnam.¹⁶⁷ Graham also pressured the administration to accept South Vietnamese refugees and worked to organize churches to help in the relocation efforts.¹⁶⁸ On April 30, 1975, Saigon fell to the communist attackers and was renamed Ho Chi Minh City. Graham recalled, "I watched on television the rescue helicopters landing on top of the American

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¹⁶⁵ Bothwell, 148.

¹⁶⁶ Graham, press conference in Los Angeles, CA, September 8, 1974, collection 24, T74, BGCA.

¹⁶⁷ Donna to Jack Marsh, April 25, 1975, collection 74, box 1, folder 14, BGCA (copied from the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Grand Rapids, MI (GRF)).

¹⁶⁸ Jim Cannon to Jack Marsh, May 14, 1975, collection 74, box 1, folder 14, BGCA (GRF).

Embassy in Saigon, sensing the desperation of the people who were scrambling to get on board” and that “I too felt strongly the tragedy of Vietnam.”¹⁶⁹

In public, Graham lamented the loss of South Vietnam. On May 4, he delivered a sermon to his national radio audience entitled “The Vietnam Tragedy and the Christian.” Graham stated, “As every American knows this weekend, the war in Vietnam for Americans is over. But in another sense, it is not over.” It was not over because of the refugee crisis, executions taking place in Vietnam, and the loss of U.S. military bases. Graham admitted defeat: “This is the first war that America has ever lost and it will not likely be the last.” American allies in Asia were worried, Graham claimed, because “many believe America refused to honor [its] commitment” to South Vietnam. Still subscribing to the domino theory, Graham posited that Europe could be next in line to succumb to communism and, eventually, America. For Graham, “The tragedy of Vietnam that we have been talking about reminds us that the world is moving toward that last great war: Armageddon.” He told his audience that Biblical scholars thought the end was coming and that Jesus said it would happen under the circumstances that the world was currently facing.¹⁷⁰

Because of the fall of Saigon, Graham now proclaimed outright that “Vietnam has been a tragedy from the very beginning.” He believed that it was a continuation of World War II and was the result of French colonialism. As usual, Graham blamed Kennedy: “The mistakes of many American leaders beginning with the first commitment of President Kennedy until the present hour have been unbelievable.” These accusations of

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¹⁶⁹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 469.

¹⁷⁰ Graham, “The Vietnam Tragedy and the Christian,” *Hour of Decision*, May 4, 1975, collection 191, T1321, BGCA.

culpability were somewhat more subdued than his previous statements because he added that a single president could not be faulted and attributed many of the mistakes to a “supernatural power of evil.” Even in the tragedy, Graham had some good news and shared that the BGEA would be supporting Vietnamese refugees.¹⁷¹ He further elaborated on this at a press conference in June and implored Americans to welcome refugees because they would contribute to American society and “to resist the racial overtones that some have raised in opposition.”¹⁷²

Now that Vietnam was unified under a communist government, Graham revisited some of his earlier statements about the viability of a free South Vietnam. In a published response to a follower’s letter, which posited that Vietnam was now more moral under the control of atheists than when it was supported by American Christians, Graham walked back from his 1967 claim that Christianity was much more prevalent in South Vietnam than often believed. He wrote that Christians had been a “tiny minority” in the country and that even the American military in Vietnam only had a small amount of evangelical Christians serving in it.¹⁷³ For Graham, viewing the country as less Christian, justified the removal of American troops and lessened the pain of losing the country. Referencing the missionaries’ warnings from his still confidential 1969 report on the war, Graham stated in July 1975 at a news conference in Brussels that “I think that the American culture we imported to South Vietnam tended to corrupt the people. Religious leaders in Vietnam have emphasized this to me time after time.”¹⁷⁴ Graham was

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¹⁷¹ Graham, “The Vietnam Tragedy and the Christian,” May 4, 1975.

¹⁷² “Graham pleads for open hearts for Viet refugees,” *The Forgotten Men* 4, June 1975, collection 360, reel 110, BGCA.

¹⁷³ Graham, published answer to reader’s question, July 7, 1975, collection 74, box 4, folder 1, BGCA.

¹⁷⁴ Untitled, *Conservative Digest* (Falls Church, VA), September 1975, collection 360, reel 111, BGCA.

searching for reasons to explain the communist takeover and these reasons included Kennedy's failures, lack of Christianity in the country, and cultural corruption. With the fall of Saigon, Graham's long war was finally over.

Graham and Nixon remained friends up until Nixon's death on April 22, 1994. Five days later, Graham led the funeral for his closest presidential friend. Graham proclaimed that "most of us have been staggered by the many things that he accomplished during his life." Graham followed with, "However, there was another more personal, more intimate and more human side to Richard Nixon – that his family, neighbors and friends that are gathered here today would know. It was a side that many people did not see, for Richard Nixon was a private person and perhaps even a shy individual whom others sometimes found hard to get to know." Graham avoided mentioning Watergate or the still-controversial Vietnam War, but this statement may have been a reference to the private paranoid Nixon that was revealed in the Watergate tapes. As usual, Graham defended Nixon as a very religious man and stated that the president did not want to show off his faith, which is why he created the Sunday services at the White House, without acknowledging that these services were used, if not created, for political purposes by the administration. Publicly reminiscing on Nixon's role in history, Graham declared, "During his years of public service, Richard Nixon was on center stage during our generation," again neglecting to mention how Graham himself was often right behind the curtain functioning as an advisor on the Vietnam War.¹⁷⁵

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¹⁷⁵ Graham, "Funeral of Richard M. Nixon," April 27, 1994, Yorba Linda, CA, p. 8-12, BGCA, <https://sites.google.com/a/my.wheaton.edu/graham-sermons>.

Conclusion

In his 1997 autobiography, Billy Graham, reminiscing on his 50-year relationship with the American presidency, concluded:

If I had to do it all over again, I would also avoid any semblance of involvement in partisan politics. On the whole, as I've already said, my primary concern in my contacts with political leaders has been as a pastor and spiritual counselor, not as a political advisor.... And yet there have been times when I undoubtedly stepped over the line between politics and my calling as an evangelist.¹

While admitting some “semblance of involvement,” Graham failed to detail, or even acknowledge, his concrete advisory role in the White House during the Vietnam War. He knew it unseemly at the time, and later he sought to disassociate himself from an unpopular, failed war. But Graham legitimated and perhaps even prolonged the War in Vietnam.

Beginning with his 1949 breakout revival in Los Angeles, Graham's intense anticommunism drove his career. An evangelical with fundamentalist roots, Graham was a premillennialist and believed that humanity was entering its last days. To him and many others at the time, communism appeared to be the great evil prophesized about in Revelation, the apocalyptic final book of the Bible. Paradoxically, Graham sought to prevent the apocalyptic spread of communism while also yearning for the return of Jesus that would occur at the end of the world.² For Graham, anticommunism also had a personal component. With his marriage to Ruth, the evangelist grew close to L. Nelson Bell, who had experienced the horrors of communism as a missionary in China.

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¹ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 724.

² Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 535.

Graham's beliefs led him to vehemently attack the Antichrist wherever it manifested, such as in Vietnam.

Graham's evangelical anticommunism aligned with the American government's use of civil religion. American religion, the belief was, contained the antidote for the spreading disease of atheistic communism. Christianity experienced a resurgence in 1950s America, and both missionaries and government officials attempted to spread it abroad. Graham presided over this civil religion in America through his prayers at presidential inaugurations, speaking at prayer breakfasts, and depictions of the presidency as God-ordained. As Andrew Preston posited, "any account of the Cold War that ignores religion is not necessarily wrong, but to a great extent incomplete and therefore inadequate."³ Graham's role in the war reveals the extreme influence of religion on American foreign policy, both as an ideological weapon and as a tool to depict the world in Manichean terms. The Vietnam War cannot be fully understood without an exploration of the religious anticommunism that drove it.

Graham pressed his evangelical anticommunism on all of the presidents in office throughout the Vietnam War. When Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed the presidency in 1952, Graham found a leader sympathetic to his opinions, and encouraged Eisenhower to show strength in the wake of the French loss at Dien Bien Phu. With the victory of John F. Kennedy over his good friend Richard Nixon, Graham largely took a break from his growing role in the White House, but still pushed his anticommunist beliefs on the administration with his counsel during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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³ Preston, "Introduction," xviii.

When Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency and then escalated the war in Vietnam, Graham publicly defended the increasingly beleaguered president and privately encouraged him to remain firm in Vietnam. The evangelist traveled to Vietnam twice during Johnson's presidency at the requests of Johnson and the leaders of MACV. Graham returned to America and reported on the situation in Vietnam to the president, while also proclaiming the necessity and virtue of a free South Vietnam on television and at his crusades. At Johnson's funeral, Graham lamented that the president never saw peace in the war that he unwillingly inherited from the Kennedy administration.

With Richard Nixon's ascension to the presidency, Graham's role in the administration and the war reached a zenith. Graham publicly portrayed Nixon as God-ordained and defended the president, even as Nixon's corruption grew increasingly clear. In addition, the evangelist led massive rallies that offered veiled support for the Vietnam War. Privately, Graham stressed the merits of Vietnamization with his 1969 "Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War," a strategy that the Nixon administration shortly thereafter adopted. With the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, the preacher praised Nixon for resisting communism and bringing peace to Southeast Asia. Two years later, Graham lamented the fall of South Vietnam and predicted the spread of communism throughout Europe and America because of it.

His credibility damaged by his association with the war and the presidency, Graham has always claimed naivety. The majority of Graham's biographers have withheld much criticism of the evangelist for his documented role in the White House and his counsel on the Vietnam War, which has furthered the spread of Graham's "babe in the woods" imagery. Graham's depiction of himself as naïve is a slight of hand to

avoid responsibility for and association with an unpopular war and the presidents that directed it.

Although Graham lessened his role in the political sphere following the catastrophes of Vietnam and Watergate, his influence continued, as recognized by multiple scholars who designate him the father of modern religious political conservatism. In response to the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, Graham and a few evangelical leaders, such as Francis Schaeffer and Harold O. J. Brown, formed the Christian Action Council (presently known as Care Net) in 1975 to combat abortion.⁴ The conservative religious fight against abortion continued with Rev. Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority," an organization founded in 1979 that was integral in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.⁵ Incidentally, during Reagan's presidency, Graham finally held crusades in the U.S.S.R. and P.R.C., perhaps softening his stance on communism following the trials of the Vietnam War, or simply continuing to use religion to pierce the Iron Curtain.⁶ The difference between Falwell's new religious right approach to religion and politics and Graham's was that Falwell called for more overt religiously charged rhetoric and political actions, whereas Graham publicly downplayed his role in the White House and the Vietnam War.⁷ As Stephen P. Miller summarized, Graham advocated for "Christianity *in* Politics—Not *as* Politics."⁸

Graham's influence and power remain a part of the modern political landscape. Grant Wacker wrote, "The 2008 and 2012 elections saw all three of the prime players—

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⁴ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 238-39.

⁵ Marsden, 242.

⁶ Graham, *Just As I Am*, 499, 540, 595.

⁷ Bothwell, 155.

⁸ Miller, 201.

John McCain, Mitt Romney, and, after he became president, Barack Obama—making the expected pilgrimage to Montreat.”⁹ The current president, Donald Trump, has also embraced the Graham family and attended Graham’s 95th birthday party in 2013.¹⁰ Immediately after Trump’s victory in the 2016 election, Franklin Graham, Billy Graham’s oldest son and the current president of the BGEA, declared that God aided Trump in his victory. “I believe that God’s hand intervened Tuesday night to stop the godless, atheistic progressive agenda from taking control of our country,” Franklin proclaimed—reminiscent of his father’s repeated claims of God-ordained presidents and tirades against atheistic communism.¹¹ It seems, in some ways, that the son was repeating the errors of the father. Indeed, Billy Graham has tried to obfuscate and distance himself from a long record of supporting and promoting the Vietnam War, a conflict he, in fact, saw from beginning to end as essential to America’s future and God’s plan. He was as clear on the subject as was his son on the 2016 election.

Yet in 1979, in an interview with Marshall Frady, Graham scrambled awkwardly to create an alternative history:

The whole question [of Vietnam] became a very difficult gray for me. I was just privy to too many conversations on both sides. I would listen to General Westmoreland, Abrams, Zumwalt – I was like a babe in the woods, I didn’t know what was really going on. And then I’d listen to others. Especially when I’d go into Britain or Sweden, I’d get great criticism. In northern Italy once, we had a press conference in Turin, and a very vigorous reporter kept after me, he said, “Now, somebody’s wrong in this thing. Both sides can’t be right, can they? So which side is wrong? Just tell us – which side are you on?” Well, by then I had decided, I told him, “Now, as a world evangelist, for me to try to go around the world and try to say what is morally right over here, and what is morally wrong

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⁹ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 217.

¹⁰ Sally Quinn, “Billy Graham gets an all-star tribute for his 95th birthday,” *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2013, <http://wpo.st/u36J2>.

¹¹ Lindsey Bever, “Franklin Graham: The media didn’t understand the ‘God-factor’ in Trump’s win,” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2016, <http://wpo.st/xV6J2>.

over there, I'm just not going to get involved in that kind of thing." I continued to pray about Vietnam – I prayed about it, and prayed about it, and I couldn't seem to get any leading finally except just to stay out of the whole matter.¹²

Throughout the entirety of the Vietnam War, Graham stressed his evangelical anticommunism on the presidential administrations directing the war. He remained a staunch believer in the necessity of a free South Vietnam and recommended specific policy actions to achieve this. Graham did not “not stay out of the whole matter” and was clearly no “babe in the woods.”

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¹² Frady, 432.

Archival Collections

American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara (APP)

Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College, IL (BGCA)

BGEA: Audio Tapes, collection 26

BGEA: Crusade Activities, collection 17

BGEA: Decision Magazine, collection 506

BGEA: Oral History Project, collection 141

BGEA: Papers of Cliff Barrows, collection 622

BGEA: Records of the Hour of Decision Radio Program, collection 191

BGEA: Records of the Media Office, collection 345

BGEA: Records of News Conferences, collection 24

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Clippings File, collection 360

Ephemera of William Franklin Graham, Jr., collection 74

Papers of Lemuel Nelson Bell, collection 318

Papers of Robert C. Van Kampen, collection 313

Papers of Robert O. Ferm, collection 19

Records of BGEA: Board Books, collection 10

Records of BGEA: Films and Video, collection 113

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Archives, Charlotte, NC (BGEA)

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS (IKE)

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Grand Rapids, MI (GRF)

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA (JFK)

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX (LBJ)

Lyndon B. Johnson's Daily Diary

Oral History Collection

Miller Center, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (MC)

Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA (RN)

H.R. Haldeman Diaries Collection

Richard Nixon's Daily Diary

White House Tapes

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