

CD-1045 Transcription

Billy Graham speaks about Ronald Reagan

Billy Graham:

(inaudible). So that fall, he and I happened to be co-speakers at a fundraising thing for the retirement home for film stars in [Living?] Hill, in Dallas. I mean, (inaudible) in Dallas, it's outside of San Ventura. But I was one of the speakers, and we got acquainted for the first time. And so he said when you come out to California, could we entertain you? You know, your wife, and so the first time I think they entertained us was at a little dinner at the Beverly Hilton hotel. And we began a friendship that became quite a strong friendship for a number of years, and then when he became governor, he had me up two or three times to speak to his cabinet, and then the state legislature, Democratic controlled, invited me to address the joint session. Then they had a big battle as to whether he could come and hear me or not, because you had to be invited. [01:00] That was -- made the news. And I knew them as friends, and I never supported him politically, of course. He never asked me. I think he was a little disappointed the first time that he ran against Mr. Ford, that I didn't -- I wouldn't even go to church with him when he came to North Carolina. And then also when he came to Indiana this last time, I was preaching in Indianapolis,

I went over and had breakfast with him, but he was going to church, and one of his men, I won't tell you which one, but he's well known now, I didn't know him at that time, said won't you come and go to church with Mr. Reagan? I said no, I said I'm not going to be that closely identified. I'd already been through all that, and had gotten burnt. (laughter) So, I decided I would not be publicly --

M2:

You also heard those 18 (inaudible) tapes.

Billy Graham:

That's right. (laughter) Definitely, that was influencing. And Mr. Reagan understood that, [02:00] and Nancy understood it. And so he did ask me at the inauguration to lead a prayer, which I didn't think I couldn't get back to the inauguration, because I had been invited to -- I had to be in England for some reason, at the inaugural time. I don't know whether it was the enthronement of the archbishop -- there was something there that I had to go to, and had already scheduled. And I didn't think I could get back for the inauguration, but then he asked me if I would at least participate in the little church service that morning, which I did. The Episcopal church right down from the White House, where he and -- when I walked in about 30 minutes

early, because I'd been interviewed across the street by Barbara Walters on *Good Morning America*, I walked across the street, and with my robe, and there were only two people in there, and that was Frank Sinatra and his wife, and I said Frank, I said, "This is the first time I've ever seen you in church early. (laughter) And on the front row." And I congratulated him, and [03:00] -- but, the Reagans have been wonderful. We've spent the night with them, and talked quite at length, and I can tell you that I personally believe two things about Ronald Reagan that many people will find out in time.

First, I believe he will be a firm friend of Israel. I believe that's a commitment that he has -- that comes from his heart. The second thing, I believe he's firmly committed to peace. I think that he sees himself, I think he does. He sees himself as the possible, like Nixon was able to open the door to China, that he can open the door to the Soviet Union. And I think that -- I thought that last night in his speech, that was going to come out, but he may feel he's not at that point yet. Mr. President is sick, apparently, he couldn't talk about a summit, but I think that's where he wants to head, and have peace. I think that he -- I think his own position is let's destroy these weapons. But how, you know? [04:00] That's the big thing that I think all these presidents and leaders deal with is how do you

get these agreements? It took 10 years to get -- solve one. How do you get all of this? And yet, I believe that's where his heart is, and I think that was increased tremendously after he was shot. I think he had a very deep spiritual experience at that time that involved peace. Because he realized how quickly life can fade, and how tragic that is. And I hope -- I mean, I'm saying more than I've ever said to any group about him. But it'll help you maybe to understand a little bit about him, that most people do not understand. Now his economic policies and all of his, I couldn't possibly go in on, I'm not an economist, and I don't know what's going to happen there. I wish that he didn't have the image of being the rich man's friend, and against the poor. I don't know how that has come about.

Bernard:

Following up on my dear friend Dick's [05:00] question, my name is Bernard [Hyde?], I'm here as a private citizen. I'd just like to know, I think Dick was trying to get more of a response to your feeling about the state of anti-Semitism? After all, you view America very high, with very deep conviction. And you have this unique opportunity, and I think it would be very interesting to see how you see it, the situation, with anti-Semitism. Do you see it growing, or what do you see?

Billy Graham:

No. You know, I really don't. This is a point that has to be watched all the time, and I think you all do a very good job doing it. But I just do not see anti-Semitism in America. I do feel it in Europe. I do feel it in some other parts of the world, but I don't feel it in America. I think that the -- that there's a great love in America for the Jewish people, especially among the Catholics and the Protestants [06:00] in comparison to, let's say 40 or 50 years ago. And I think that -- I just, it may be that I move in a circle that is unnatural, I don't know. But I do not see this anti-Semitism. Now, I know you have a swastika here, and one there, and on the synagogue, and so forth. It would seem to me that they are -- that that's a tiny little wasp sting compared to what the vast overwhelming majority of Americans think and feel. I do know that probably there was some feeling, I have never heard it expressed directly to me, because they know where I stand, so they probably wouldn't say it to me, but during the oil crisis, in which they feel like they have to placate the nations of the Middle East, and make concessions that normally might not be made. And if Nigeria withholds their [07:00] oil, and some of the others reduce theirs, and Saudi Arabia reduces theirs, they may have this come up again one of these days, in which Israel has every right to feel nervous. But you -- and especially if you're

dealing with people like the PLO, who certainly hold the view, or at least from all I can read, that Israel should not exist, they should be pushed into the sea, and all of that sort of thing. And -- but I do believe that you have been very fortunate in recent leadership in the White House. Now even Nixon, as much as people didn't like him, I think Mrs. Mayer said in her book that she never -- that he never broke his word once. Once his word was given, that was it. And the -- Israel had never had a better friend in the White House. She said in her memoirs. And I think that she would be in a position to know, and I just know a few little things about [08:00] what he stood for. But he did have, I have read, anti-Semitic subconscious feelings. Whether that's true or not, I never saw it or heard it. He never said anything anti-Semitic around me.

Bernard:

It might interest you and the people in this room to know, they may not know, that the chief rabbi, Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, just visited with Reagan, and strangely enough, or just, I don't know if it's strange or not, but anyway, he said the same words that you just said, about the heart. Leveled right in on the heart of Reagan. He just visited with Reagan yesterday.

Billy Graham:

That's good, because I know --

Bernard:

Yeah, it just came over the wire.

Billy Graham:

-- I know that -- you know, he has a very -- you know, he himself said he has a soft touch, but he has a very tender heart. Much more than I think any president I've known. And -- but people don't know him, they don't know that side of him, because [09:00] he's come across as a conservative, set in concrete, and inflexible. As you said last night, the great stone face, and all the rest of it. Well in person, that's not the kind of person he is.

Brian:

Brian (inaudible) I'm the president of the (inaudible). And I'm asking this question without any knowledge, and perhaps it's an inappropriate question, but my question is this. When you are preaching during a crusade, do you preach on the subject of anti-Semitism? And if you don't, would you, if you began to believe that the (inaudible) more serious problem than the (inaudible)?

Billy Graham:

Absolutely. I have spoken about it a number of times in certain situations where I've been informed that there is some outbreaks, and I would come out as strong as I know how. I would be willing to almost tour the country and make speeches if it would help any, if I felt it was [10:00] a big problem. I was asked that by Dan Rather on the *60 Minutes*, when they interviewed me. And he asked that question. And I told Dan, yes, I said I would speak as strongly as I could on this subject.

Brian:

And let me just ask you one other question, (inaudible). And I ask this only out of utter respect, because I must say, I'm almost awed by you, and I appreciate (inaudible). But I just had the opportunity to read (inaudible) book, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. It seems to me to make a fairly compelling case for the continuing problem of anti-Semitism. And in other parts of the world, probably it's much more serious than here. Do you have the opportunity to speak to that problem, in that part of the world? Or will you have that opportunity in the near future?

Billy Graham:

I'm sorry [11:00] that I have not read (inaudible) book. Yes. Yes, I know, but I mean, I have not read the book, to my embarrassment, I've read only reviews. And I have not been to Argentina in 20 years. I have been invited to go back for a crusade. I don't know whether time will allow me to go there, because we have so many invitations from so many parts of the world, but I would most certainly speak to it in Argentina.

Brian:

(inaudible) that might help you decide to (inaudible).

(laughter)

Billy Graham:

All right, well I'll do that.

M3:

I think it is relevant to make the point that in the 1970s, when Dr. Graham became concerned about some manifestations of anti-Semitism, especially after '73, the war, I don't remember the exact date of the film, but I remember we had talked about it, Dr. Graham commissioned [12:00] the preparation of a film called *The Hiding Place*, that was the story of the life of Corrie ten Boom, an evangelical Christian who risked her life and that of her family to save Jews in Holland. It had an evangelical motif,

but I remember you telling me at the time, when you shared the script with me, your people did, that your purpose was to use that film as an instruction to how Christians should behave when anti-Semitism kind of raises its head. And my experience has been, with evangelical Christians, the film messages very seriously.

F1:

Dr. Graham, how are you as far as time is concerned?

Billy Graham:

Another 10 minutes, maybe.

F1:

OK.

Norman:

I'm Norman [Killis?], from (inaudible) Rhode Island, Dr. Graham. And one of the things that I would like you to address yourself to is, we have become concerned at the political aspirations, or the political involvement, of some of the evangelical groups that (inaudible). And the kind of [13:00] vote Christian attitude that they support. I'd like to hear, obviously from what you have said, this is not (inaudible). I'd like to have --

hear your comment on these movements that are out to vote Christian, and one issue -- organization that really on a political front, to my mind, rather than a religious one.

Billy Graham:

Well, there are some of them that have social positions that I would accept. But some of them who would say vote Christian, it would remind me, if I were going to a hospital, and I were going to be operated on, I want the man to operate on me who is the best expert in that field that I can possibly find, whether he's Christian, or atheist, or whatever he is. And I would say that I do not believe in voting for a man just because he's a Christian, because he may not have the ability, or he may not [14:00] be qualified for that office. I want to vote for the man that I think is qualified to hold the office. That would be my position.

M4:

(inaudible) rabbi (inaudible) before related -- so some of the talk, that you voted Christian, (inaudible) if a man voted against the Panama Canal (inaudible). Because that's a Christian's position.

Billy Graham:

Oh no, that's ridiculous.

M3:

That was taken by someone (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

Billy Graham:

Yes, I know. I agree with you that some people that go so far as that, that's a -- that would turn me off very quickly to have someone say that that's a Christian position. There is -- I think that -- you feel like the Archbishop of Canterbury when the Suez Canal invasion took place, you remember in Israel, and France, and England. And Eisenhower was putting some pressure at that time, because he was in an election, right or wrong. And the Archbishop of Canterbury, then Lord Fisher, now Lord Fisher, who [15:00] said that equally devout Christians could be on either side of the question. That's a political question, it seems to me that it has no Christian bearing whatsoever one way or the other.

M3:

I don't find the text of the New Testament saying anything about the Panama Canal.

Billy Graham:

No. (laughter)

F1:

Naomi?

Naomi Banks:

Yes. I'm Naomi Banks. I'm on the board of the (inaudible). You were very clear about your love and commitment to the state of Israel. And you say this comes from two sources. A biblical background, and reading of the position of Israel and the Jews, and a sense of justice in the modern-day world. Have you related those two influences to the very difficult questions that the government of Israel is now facing on -- as to the solution of the problems of the West Bank, and secondly, have people asked you about your stance on that issue? [16:00] And what did you respond with?

Billy Graham:

No, I have not been asked any question in a press conference or otherwise, on that position. And I must say that I almost hope I'm not asked, because I don't know the answer to it. It's a very complicated question to me. That land, to me, will someday belong to Israel. From my theological point of view, in

believing the prophecies. But whether this is the moment, and this is the method, I would have to say I don't know.

Mary Chandler:

Dr. Graham, I'm Mary Chandler of Worcester, Massachusetts. I wonder whether you could perhaps share with us your objectives and expectations for your forthcoming New England crusade?

Billy Graham:

Well, you know, some of the spiritual awakenings of America's past have started here. [17:00] Certainly one of them was the greatest anti-slavery movement, which began in New England, of which the school that I went to is a recipient of that, because we were founded as an anti-slavery school. And the first graduating class of our college was Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother. And that was out in the Midwest. And that's how far they got, and Dr. Blanchard, who founded the school, worked very closely with Charles Finney, who in turn worked very closely with the Beechers and the others here in New England. He got his inspiration from here. And so, I think that there is a feeling among the evangelical people, both Catholic and Protestant, of which there are now Catholic evangelical, too, in the broadest sense I'm speaking of, that New England is having a spiritual [18:00] renewal of some sort. I'm not sure that anyone can put

it in a framework, or even express it properly. I may be able to say more after I finish touring New England. And I may hold different views, but there are those that believe that New England is on the verge of a spiritual renewal, and I think one of the -- someone told me that one of the slogans here is a new New England, or a -- what is it, New England renewal, or something to that effect, both in business, and every other way, sociologically and so forth.

M3:

You can make it in Massachusetts. (laughter)

Billy Graham:

Yeah, something like that. I think it's new New England. And so, that would be one of the objectives, would be that this would become -- you know, you can't go to a city, like we're going let's say to Providence, or Springfield, one day, and do anything. [19:00] What can we do in one day? Except be a focal point for many months of preparation, and many months of follow-up. That's all we can do. And it will become a talking point in that town perhaps, for a brief time, and then whether it has lasting effects or not, it may have lasting effects that it will have in certain individuals, and individual families, or individual churches who put a lot into it. But I used to go to a

city and stay 6 and 8 and 10, like New York, 16 weeks at Madison Square Garden, every night. And you can -- I don't say we touched New York, but we touched some people around Madison Square Garden, I'll bet. (laughter) Man, did they need touching. And they needed touching.

F1:

Well, if there's one more question, we'll have that. If not -- OK, George.

George:

I would just like to say that Dr. Graham may consider himself an evangelical Christian, but I consider [20:00] him a very good Jew.

Billy Graham:

Oh thank you, that's a great honor. (applause)

M3:

I want to say a closing word of very deep personal appreciation to you Billy for taking time out of your heavy schedule to share with us this afternoon. I think it's very clear that all the things I tried to say earlier about your friendship, as manifested over so many years, based on such profound faith and

biblical conviction, was certainly experienced here by all of us today. I think it's appropriate to close the session today by offering a classic traditional Hebrew prayer. Jews are called upon in the -- out of the depths of -- the wells of our tradition, that when a Jew encounters [21:00] a great human being who is not Jewish, Christian or other, to recite this very simple, but very profound blessing for us, which I think is altogether the appropriate way to close our meeting with you today. *Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha'olam [shena tan methok mato le basa don?]*. "Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given of his spirit and of his wisdom to this great person of flesh and blood." God bless you, Billy.

Billy Graham:

Thank you. (applause)

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