

Albertan Oil, Vietnam Christmas: American Revivalism on the Canadian Prairies, 1962-1981

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On a warm day in late May 1967, world famous evangelist Billy Graham landed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Speaking with reporters at a press conference before the start of his 30 May to 2 June 1967 crusade, he joked and chatted with and took questions from the gathered reporters. It was a wide-ranging, friendly, easy-going affair carried by the rangy preacher from North Carolina. With the warm twang of his voice mixed with a disarming sense of humor, Graham charmed the audience even as reporters raised controversial topics.¹

Without question, he was America's favorite – if not the world's – evangelical minister of the gospel. Born in 1918 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Graham himself found salvation at a tent meeting where, in 1934 at age sixteen, he listened to a traveling preacher and received Christ. Over the next several years he lived in a community largely detached from urban modernists, subversive liberals, and social gospellers, a community that read the Bible with a premillennialist cosmology. After studying at Wheaton College and preaching for Youth for Christ in 1947, he set out as an evangelist on his own. He received his big break in Los Angeles in 1949; over the next eighteen years Graham became the pastor to American presidents, met with world leaders on a regular basis, and preached to packed stadiums, arenas, and tents the world over.²

In the 1960s, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) criss-crossed the Canadian west in a series of evangelistic revival crusades mixing Cold War politics and evangelical conversion. Graham and his

associates were heartily welcomed and brought to western Canada the piety of evangelicalism mixed with capitalist virtue and republican ideals. Following a tightly organized strategy, Graham and BGEA enjoyed much success on the prairies. They counted their success by the numbers who made decisions for Christ, but also in the overwhelmingly positive reception they enjoyed by churches, business, political leaders, and media alike. Furthermore, the southern evangelist's crusading in the Canadian west brought to the fore local political issues and religious debate.

In this context Graham was a most fitting personality, and he confirmed what the western provinces were feeling: they were the new west rising. There was some opposition in Winnipeg – mostly by Mennonites – over Graham's support of American soldiers in Vietnam. His handling of opposition, crusade strategy, and network building provide helpful clues to Graham's cultural hermeneutic. With his southern charm, disarming cultural commentary, and optimistic gospel message, Graham and his Association used the context of Cold War politics and apocalyptic dread to raise the profile of western Canada while calling people to evangelical conversion.

Vietnam Christmas and Winnipeg Spring

Six months prior to his descent into Winnipeg, Billy Graham took another much more stressful flight. It was Christmas 1966 and, at the invitation of General William Westmoreland, Graham spent several days meeting with and preaching to thousands of American soldiers before wrapping up his visit to South East Asia by joining Bob Hope on stage. Graham was not the only Christian entertainment brought in by Hope. Christian recording artist Anita Bryant, "the girl back home" representing a more "solid image than the glamour girls," also accompanied him. These spiritual meetings with the troops took place at airfields amongst whirring Huey helicopters and rumbling jets, in field hospitals, and on the Tonkin Gulf in Hangar Bay One aboard the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*. Though a seasoned world-traveler, Graham admitted being filled with fright on these flights as his plane took on high winds and storms, and nearly missed and on occasion nicked treetops. Graham had a first-hand look at what was becoming one of America's most vexing moral dilemmas: the war in Vietnam.³

Prior to his first sermon, Graham toured the 93rd field hospital and enjoyed Christmas carol singing with troops, as Cliff Barrows, George

Beverly Shea, and Chaplain (Colonel) Holland Hope read the Lukan Christmas story. Preaching before six thousand troops on a hot afternoon, he spoke about the peace of God that comes through Jesus Christ. He gave the troops the Bible verse John 3:16 and called them to peace and to the forgiveness of their sins. There was an invitation for them to make a decision for Christ: “One by one the hands stole up past bowed heads as hundreds of men engaged in the service of their country quietly became soldiers of God.” Some of the soldiers, bowed in prayer, placed their helmets over their gun barrels. Rising to their feet they sang “Joy to the World” while a choir of helicopters gathered in their midst. Over nine days this scene replayed itself several times.⁴

Chaplain B. C. Fairchild escorted Graham throughout the whirlwind week as he was taken to mess halls, field and naval hospitals, schools, and a soccer field. He preached from truck trailer platforms and an aircraft carrier. There was a candle light service with soldiers holding candles in cups as they stood in thick mud. He met with Vietnamese pastors and missionaries. The services included singing groups, such as the 100-member choir the Choraliers at Cam Ranh Bay, and the Sky Trooper Chorus at Hammond Air Base. It was a special Christmas season for Graham and the service men as he visited, preached, signed autographs, and sang carols. On Christmas day, Graham breakfasted with his Methodist and Southern Baptist escort chaplains, held a service at III MAF Amphitheater, visited the U.S. Naval Hospital in Da Nang, and then went to the *Kitty Hawk* where he spent the night.⁵

While the audiences in Winnipeg would be in relative comfort at the Winnipeg Arena and Winnipeg Stadium on warm days and evenings, those soldiers in Vietnam listened to the North Carolinian in a variety of conditions that were hot, rainy, soggy, steamy, and muddy. At times many attending came in fresh from the battlefield of an increasingly controversial war. As planning for the Winnipeg crusade went along its path of polished clockwork-like precision, reverberations of discord came from some churches. Most vocal on the matter of Vietnam were Mennonites, and the world’s largest concentration of that pacifist denomination lived in Winnipeg. Days before he met the cameras and reporters in Manitoba’s capital city, his team suggested they alert Graham that the Christmas trip to Vietnam and his encouraging words to the American soldiers were disquieting in Manitoba’s capital city.⁶

Over the course of that May press conference, Graham was “delighted to be in Manitoba” and confessed a desire to play some golf

while visiting. Yet war hung over the proceedings.⁷ He agreed to take questions, but not ones of a political nature. When the issue of his trip to Vietnam arose, he explained his purpose of ministering to both the troops and Vietnamese people, and that when he returned stateside he left Vietnam with more questions than when he arrived. Vietnam, he said, was a mixture of war and peace, where soldiers and tourists were present, though not in the same places.⁸

Graham was perplexed by the realities of Vietnam and admitted that he did not know how it could end. However, he counseled the Winnipeg media that everyone can pray for peace, for war is caused by “lust and the rebellion in the human heart.”⁹ Furthermore, Christ taught that wars and rumors of wars were signs of the end times. This mixed with our advances in science and technology – which could bring paradise to earth – signaled a flawed human nature corrupted by lust, hate, and prejudice.¹⁰

There in Winnipeg’s palatial Hotel Fort Garry, Graham continued to hold court with local print, television, and radio media. He explained that when history ends with Christ’s return, then the utopia people have dreamed of for centuries will be realized and tranquility will reign; there is total world peace coming, but God will bring it about, not us. When asked if he was an optimist for the future, he mused that as a Christian he was an optimist and not a pessimist as were existential writers Jean-Paul Sartre or Albert Camus. In fact, he argued, the current turmoil could end for people can turn to God and with that would come peace. In the situation at hand, he discerned that the United Nations could even help in the work towards peace.¹¹

The remainder of the press conference covered segregation, ecumenicalism, and his growing friendship with Catholics and concern that Protestants ignored Mary simply out of anti-Catholic prejudice. Though he avoided questions on abortion, as it was a “hot button” issue in his home state, he was a proponent of birth control – not an uncontroversial subject in mid-1960s North America.¹²

Mennonite concern with Graham and Vietnam linked together his 1965 crusade in Houston with his 1966 trip to Vietnam. At Houston it appeared that Graham criticized the peace movement, specifically a recent march on Washington, while speaking words of encouragement to President Lyndon B. Johnson. A conversation began, at times heated, in the pages of *The Canadian Mennonite*, as writers took Graham to task for not only failing to criticize Johnson at the Houston rally, but extending support to the beleaguered commander-in-chief. Frank H. Epp even took

upon himself the voice of Jesus in a rhetorical flourish to condemn Graham's mass evangelism, insinuating a direct connection between American militarism and evangelism. Others came to Graham's defense, labeling the portrayal of the Texas crusade as not only biased, but dishonest in how comments were lifted out of context and then projected as an unabashed embrace of militarism and not the simple "we will pray for you Mr. President" that it was.¹³

Yet the focus of Mennonite displeasure at Graham came from *The Canadian Mennonite* editorial board. In a series of articles in 1966 and 1967 Graham was excoriated for his emphasis on soul saving at the expense of social justice issues, and – especially as the newspaper editorial board saw it – his lack of public criticism of American foreign policy.¹⁴

As the Winnipeg crusade drew near, the tone of Mennonite letters and editorial comments in denominational publications intensified. Both criticism and defence of Graham increased through 1966 and 1967. Harold Jantz, editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, came to his defence, seeing the evangelist as an unfair victim of extremists from the "Sword of the Lord" camp of fundamentalists on the right and United Church liberals on the left. For the most part, however, Mennonite editors and writers were leery of Graham. Most strident among the Mennonite Brethren was John H. Redekop. He saw Graham as a pawn in President Johnson's "blood-stained" foreign policy by giving his talks in Vietnam and offering encouragement to American soldiers.¹⁵ These concerns went beyond denominational leaders and editors, including some in the laity. As one Mennonite layperson wrote:

I am happy to some extent for the coming crusade . . . However there are some major issues I do not agree with and that is the question on war. From what I have read and learned they are not making less communists [sic] in Viet Nam but are making more. This past Christmas when the Graham team went to Viet Nam they condoned the war all the way, and complimented the soldiers for the marvelous work they were doing there . . . will we as Christians in Canada and U.S.A. support, war and bloodshed or the commission of Christ to love our enemies.¹⁶

However, not all Mennonites were opposed; in fact, at the congregational level, and amongst many pastors, the crusade was welcomed. One such individual, Wilhelm Janzen, even wrote a tract and sent a copy to Graham, entitled "Christians Ought to Fight." He discussed the Cold War

tension and the spread of communism as portents of great evil in the world against which Christians must fight – for their faith, putting on the “armour of God” and not being afraid of being thought of as “mentally ill.” Their war was against the Devil:

Everywhere in the world is trouble. Communism, which is an anti-Christian movement, stirs up revolutions wherever it can, and turns free countries like Cuba to Communism. Red China seemingly does not want peace in Vietnam but wants war with the U.S. Also wrong teachings and anti-Christian movements make their headways in the free world. Even theologists [*sic*] turn away from Christ and say God has died. Others call historical chapters in the Bible tall stories. Other people replace God by science, and nations sink ever deeper into sin.¹⁷

Members of Graham’s team in Winnipeg discussed in particular an article in *The Canadian Mennonite*, “Our Crisis of Obedience,” of 15 February 1966. The situation was described this way:

The *Canadian Mennonite* is a publication of the Mennonite General Conference, which is extremely pacifist. It is a minority group in Winnipeg but one which I must confess has been very vociferous . . . I feel certain . . . that the question of Viet Nam and particularly Mr. Graham’s recent visit there is going to be a subject for criticism and is very apt to come up in the press conference . . . I thought you might want to brief him [Billy Graham] on this, because Winnipeg is the largest center for Mennonites in North America. However, may I say that we have the majority of Mennonite support.¹⁸

The handling of pacifist protest in Winnipeg was achieved not only by advance warning given to Graham, but also by limiting the conversation itself. Graham’s point man in Winnipeg, Harry Williams of Atlanta, Georgia, met with a group of Mennonites from the Charleswood Mennonite Church and they agreed to disagree. In their letter to Williams the Charleswood congregation described their concern with Graham’s Vietnam position:

recent statements by Brother Graham pertaining to certain military actions in the Far East that have greatly distressed us. We fail to see

how he can preach a gospel of love without recognizing what the fuller implications of this love are for our individual lives and for nation . . . We . . . plead with Brother Graham that his preaching should give expression to the need for reconciliation among men and nations.¹⁹

The editorials in the Mennonite press were not kind to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). They described the BGEA's response to Mennonite concerns as perturbed, inferring Williams's inner thoughts: how dare such a small group of Christians take on the large evangelist machine? Williams, in fact, informed them that there would always be differences among denominations and Christians on doctrine and theology; what was going on here was a crusade to win people to the Lord and many of the new converts might even find their way to a Mennonite church when the revival meetings ended.

That meeting was enough for Williams. When *The Canadian Mennonite* editorial board requested a meeting to discuss Graham's "outright support of the Vietnam War" he politely declined, pointing out the irony: "We are continually grateful for the support and involvement of the Mennonite Churches as evidence by their appointment of official representatives for the Crusade Executive Committee."²⁰ Further requests for meetings were denied and, ultimately, the evangelism team was correct, as many Mennonites volunteered, supported, and advertised for the crusade. When the time came for Graham to field the issue at his press conference that spring day in May, he took the baton from the well-oiled revival machine of the BGEA advance team in Winnipeg – which effectively kept concerned Mennonites at arms length after initially offering to listen to their issues – and the media savvy of a seasoned performer won over both the media and his audience.

Calgary 1966

The road to Winnipeg to observe Canada's Centennial with revival fire was long in the making. Up until then Graham's only appearance north of the 49th parallel was a 1955 crusade in Toronto. However, in the five years before Winnipeg he had a close associate, Leighton Ford, give many crusades throughout Canada with several in the western provinces. Ford criss-crossed through cities of all sizes from Brandon, Manitoba, to Victoria, British Columbia, through Swift Current, Calgary, Abbotsford, Prince George, and many more. Just prior to Winnipeg he was in Calgary.

Ford, born in Toronto, considered to be Billy Graham's "No. 1 assistant," was educated at Wheaton College and Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia and joined the BGEA in 1955. His ties to Graham ran deeper than most: he married Billy's youngest sister Jean while they both studied at Wheaton, later making their home in Charlotte, North Carolina.²¹ Over the course of the crusade, as Ford delivered his earnest message in a folksy manner, he took in his audience with deep, clear, and piercing eyes and an oration skill known for its vivid imagery.

As planning for the Centennial crusade in Winnipeg began, Leighton Ford's crusade in Calgary was held. With their headquarters in the Petro-Chemical Building and the evangelistic meetings held at the Calgary Stampede Corral, Ford held forth from 18 September to 2 October 1966. As Ford's fortnight arrived upwards of ten-thousand volunteer "prayer warriors" fanned out through the city with promotional materials, took a five-week course from which crusade counselors would be selected, and held prayer meetings in churches, factories, and homes.²² Crusade leaders planned to "mobilize the crusade manpower of the various churches to achieve this objective. With these resources, a penetration can be made into every 'world' of the area . . . the social structure, the labor structure, the professional structure, and the institutional and industrial complex."²³

Taking the BGEA into the Canadian prairies was significant as the so-called "New West" was emerging. With a growing resource-based economy, especially in oil, Alberta was on the rise with an openly evangelical premier, Ernest Manning, with his own religious radio program. "For many years the Leighton Ford Team has looked forward to Crusades on the Prairies. It is fitting that the City of Calgary, situated as it is in the hub of a prosperous oil, wheat and cattle area, should be the location for this important evangelical thrust." Calgary offered more than growing prosperity and sympathetic political and business leaders, it "offer[ed] fine possibilities for penetrating several neighboring cities and scores of communities with the message of the Gospel. With its strategic location on the Prairies, this key city has excellent highways leading into it from every part of Southern Alberta."²⁴ Already, in early 1947, there was a rush of excitement in Leduc, Alberta, south of Edmonton as oil and fire soared into the sky. Imperial Oil struck black gold at Leduc #1.²⁵ Through a confluence of events in the United States and Canada, American investment in Albertan oil production skyrocketed. Among the reasons was a recent decision by the Texas Railroad Commission to lower the level of allowable production of the West Texas oil fields so companies

heavily invested there looked elsewhere for investment and extraction opportunities – and Alberta needed both.²⁶

Enter into this story the president of Sun Oil, J. Howard Pew. Caught in the shifts in Texas he looked north to Alberta and, by the mid-1960s, he was heavily involved in Albertan oil production, especially early oil sands development. Upon the oil discoveries in Leduc in 1947 and Redwater in 1948, Alberta was attracting people filling thousands of new jobs; Calgary and Edmonton expanded quickly with thousands of new arrivals both from within and without the province, and prosperity followed.²⁷

Alberta slowed oil sands development with the oil discoveries at Leduc and Redwater, not wanting to short-circuit these conventional oil fields. However, as consumption in North America rose dramatically throughout the 1950s, by the 1960s Manning was ready to move on the oil sands. This strategy was to ensure oil sand development well into the 2000s, and it was made possible by an “unspoken compromise between Sun Oil and the Province of Alberta,” something Pew had his eye on already during the Second World War.²⁸

As premier, Ernest Manning was well aware that oil was Alberta’s “golden goose” and wanted its management to adhere to two broad principles: the primacy of private enterprise and government presence to ensure the sands did not dislocate conventional fields. Unlike the history of oil in places like Texas and California, Alberta’s petro-economy was not to be handed over to wildcatters. So why would Sun Oil, coming from the Texan context of wildcatters and rapid boom/bust cycles, be interested in Manning’s placid Alberta? On one hand, oil sands provided a challenge that appealed to Pew’s ambition, and, on the other, like Manning, he was a conservative evangelical Christian. Moreover, Pew was a fan of Manning’s radio ministry, even describing one of his sermons as the best he ever heard. The conservative Baptist premier and conservative Presbyterian oilman found common cause in the gift of oil and the gospel of evangelical Christianity. Over the years the two developed a close friendship; their wives summered together in Jasper, and their religious beliefs, political philosophies, and business orientations easily meshed.²⁹

People in Alberta also enjoyed the prosperity oil brought (though their economy was already strong thanks to agriculture by 1945), and in a *Time* article from 1952, after Manning won the provincial election, “an Alberta farmwife” explained, “God gave us Premier Manning, and neither the Liberals, the CCF [Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation] nor the

devil can take him away from us.”³⁰ While many would not have understood Manning’s victory in such terms, during the 1950s *Time* ran several articles on the Alberta oil boom and idiosyncratic premier who ran a weekly radio ministry as a lay preacher. Conservative politics, evangelical religion, and economic prosperity all seemed to coalesce naturally in post-war wildrose country.

Pew and Graham were connected, just as Manning and Graham had a connection, and Manning and Pew had a friendship that was both business and religious in nature. Pew funded evangelical missions out of his oil wealth and collaborated with Graham and others to start the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Latin America. Politically he was engaged with the conservative wing of the Republican Party and supported Barry Goldwater in the 1964 primaries against rival oilman and liberal republican Nelson Rockefeller. Pew was described as “profoundly distrustful of everything to the left of Barry Goldwater.”³¹ Graham enjoyed the confluence of oil wealth and evangelical support in the American Bible belt, even receiving a \$50,000 donation from the liberal Protestant Rockefellers for the 1957 crusade in New York. Such support for Graham by the Rockefellers was quiet, but even if there was much sunlight between their theologies, Graham was of use to moderate liberal Protestants and business leaders. As Reinhold Niebuhr described his craft, Graham represented the “tradition of America’s frontier evangelical piety,” and like the Billy Sundays and Dwight Moodys before him, Graham helped populate churches after leaving town.³² Clearly, the future lay here where oil, evangelicalism and American business and revivalism intersected. In western Canada, American frontier piety found a comfortable home.

As with crusades Graham held before, organization was precise and the language martial. “Blitzes” into neighborhoods were coordinated, “penetration teams,” “penetrate the masses,” and even “deep penetration” was the rhetoric of evangelical advance as churches were asked to preach sermons linking the crusade to the ongoing evangelism of Calgary while they read his tract “Evangelism – The Church’s Task in a Changing World.” Pastors were encouraged to screen a Billy Graham film or filmstrip, take the witnessing classes – training and encouraging laity in witnessing – hold home prayer meetings, and have crusade literature available on Sundays for people to pick up.³³

From the start, Graham worked assiduously to avoid charges of Elmer Gantryism and publicly disclosed finances, donations, collection

plate offerings, and salaries. As with any large scale traveling show, event, or enterprise, precise organization was necessary for everything to come together, and there was earnestness in bringing benefit to local churches and neighborhoods without usurping the role of local leaders. Criticisms were part of the process and the BGEA handled them, at times briskly, in private and when possible as positives in public.

However, despite Alberta's emergence as a powerful and wealthy province, they would have to wait for the evangelist himself for another fifteen years.

Back to Winnipeg

For about a year the BGEA was preparing for the Centennial Crusade in Winnipeg. The organizers were a mixture of local businessmen, educators, and church representatives from dozens of denominations and parachurch organizations. Nothing was left to chance as the BGEA provided the planners with a fifty-one-page organization guide, a schedule setting out the publication of press releases, when to launch door-to-door visitation (with the city divided into zones and teams led by captain, lieutenants), and the release of promotional materials.³⁴

When the crusade began on 31 May 1967, like so many before, it opened with about ten minutes of choir singing followed by George Beverly Shea's famous voice. The worship leader, Cliff Barrows, made a few comments on Graham's latest book, *World Aflame*, about the end times. After more singing by Shea, the lean southern preacher took to the stage. As he crossed the stage to his pulpit there was for a week a spotlight on Winnipeg and Canada. American evangelicals turned their gaze northward; *Christianity Today* devoted an entire issue to Canadian Christianity on the occasion of the centennial and Graham's visit and found a mix of growing liberalism, secularism, and hope in an increasingly confident evangelicalism. Canada seemed ready for revival.³⁵

Standing there in front of thousands of Winnipeggers in Canada's fourth largest city, the nation's most important point of east-west communication, the center of western Canadian finance, and soon to be hosts of the Pan-American Games, Billy Graham worked off a well-worn script. After an opening prayer, Graham spoke to the crowd, making local references showing he not only read but also internalized the preparation materials provided for him. On this occasion, he observed the significance of Canada's centennial year. After remarking on the religious heritage of

both Canada and the United States, he flattered the audience on the fine weather and fine golfing. Graham mentioned there would be an optional offering and then he preached from the Old Testament announcing, "Armageddon is approaching." It was a deeply eschatological sermon, earnest in his exhortation that time was running out and that now was the time to turn to God, all in the context of a vibrant anti-communism as the Cold War served as a backdrop. Throughout the week, he wove together stories about world leaders, historical figures, popes, and presidents into a chiliastic tapestry of Armageddon. He spoke in a fiery, piercing way; his accent soothing and his cadence varied, which together kept the audience rapt. Then, as always, the choir sang, the altar call was given, and many came forward.³⁶

In that Cold War context, communism, Russia, and the atomic bomb formed a hideous trinity confirming that, as the 1960s progressed along a path of increasingly flaunted debauchery, immorality, and lawlessness, the end of days was near. As America stepped into its role as superpower, while Europe lay in ruins and the Soviet Union took its role as satanic agent set against the Kingdom of God as bringer of the apocalypse, America was the bulwark against a gathering evil, even in its moral decline. Thus, personal conversion saved one's soul and contributed to the security of nation and civilization.³⁷

This is not to say that American evangelicals did not struggle with the issue of the Vietnam War, for a wide range of opinions testified to the diversity of evangelical thought and action in the 1960s. Graham himself admitted to increased confusion over the war. In the pages of *Christianity Today*, shortly after Graham's Christmas visit to the war zone, the conundrum of the conflict was explored in terms of not only the justness of the war, but also of the proper role of church officials in public debate. Editors at *Christianity Today* even pulled back from Graham's position and questioned American exceptionalism and the claims America might have to a starring role in the Bible. They also challenged what often passed for just war thinking among evangelicals, asking the question whether evangelicals reflexively considered all wars just instead of providing a thought-out critique of pacifism.³⁸

The Gift and Affliction of Oil

When the Edmonton crusade of 1980 and Calgary crusade of 1981 finally happened much was made of the already-strong friendship between

Manning and Graham. It was Manning who led the charge to have Graham perform crusades in Canada during the centennial year, with key stops in Alberta. Of course, that did not happen, but he did come to Winnipeg. In Edmonton and Calgary the promotional and media tropes were virtually identical: oil is blessing Alberta and oil is destroying Alberta. Though Manning's political career and the Social Credit party were a decade in the past, he was given a position of honour at the Edmonton crusade, where he introduced Graham one evening, as well as at a Chamber of Commerce lunch. The Cold War atomic imagery of Winnipeg was still present in early 1980s Alberta, but it took a back seat to oil wealth. Edmonton and Calgary, according to Billy Graham, crusade organizers, and Manning himself, were in the clutches of the dark side of prosperity's gift: debauchery, alcoholism, family breakdown, materialism, prostitution, suicide, and murder. These markers of a decaying society – for those concerned – were all high and climbing. As in Texas and California before, oil was bringing dissipation and social corruption to Alberta. Though the experiences were quite different, a Graham associate in Houston claimed that Calgary was like the Texas oil hotspot – rich, decadent, in trouble spiritually, and searching for answers in God. To read the news, Alberta was a frontier society in need of redemption, brought to its knees by sin.³⁹

Graham delivered his well-worn and well-received message among the many oil field workers highlighted in media reporting. Yet in the city papers were scores of ads from local companies, contractors, engineers, insurance, real estate, and Christian bookstores welcoming him. Significantly, no ads were placed from any of the majors in the oil economy. In fact, the only “controversy” in Calgary 1981 was how virtually no money from oil corporations funded the crusade – despite it being the richest crusade by donations in Graham's entire career until that point. It was explained that they supported charities of a religious nature – and Texaco Canada was not even approached.⁴⁰

Even as the more secular, urbane, moderate Premier Peter Lougheed kept his distance from the Graham crusades, evangelical frontier piety was on full display: the gifts of God may become our curses. The virtues of individualism and strength for tackling frontier-like challenges so amenable to evangelical Christianity were not absolute. The tension was there in Texas and California where wildcatting was common and later in Alberta where it was curbed; prosperity is difficult and the spirit of individualism and blessings of wealth need guidance. The question was,

from where should it come: the government or God?⁴¹

Conclusion

These happy times for American revivalism in Canada were made possible not only by a large church-going population eager to volunteer, but also through astute networks formed, often years in advance, with political and business leaders. For Canadian evangelicals it was significant that in observing Canada's centennial Billy Graham would make his second trip to Canada. However, instead of going to Ottawa, Montreal or Toronto, he came to Winnipeg, the gateway to the west. Thus when American media attention turned north at this time, it was to Winnipeg and, by extension, western Canada.

If revivals are akin to entertaining set pieces setting fire to peoples' hearts, melting them to the gospel, the churches and denominations are the structures maintaining the glowing embers, creating efficacious heat for society. As in other burned-over areas in North America in times past, folks in the pews in western Canada found their way to the tents as their leaders looked on with concern. Perhaps part of the benefit for established churches of the traveling preacher are all the extra meetings called, responses written and questions asked of those who live on where the tent poles once stood, reminded that there are many Christianities out there and at home. As business, western growth, and engaged evangelicals came together to host Graham, the future faced west to Alberta. Graham would return in the early 1980s to oil rich Calgary where oilmen would host and a former radio preacher premier would hold the honorary chair of a Graham crusade.

In the 1960s Canadian evangelicals celebrated their faith and understood it in the context of liberal western democratic values as the real prospect of a nuclear apocalypse draped over the Cold War lingered about the crusade. However, it was not just Billy Graham, though his celebrity and folksy preaching and clear integrity played no small part in his reception. The simple gospel message of Graham and the BGEA was eagerly embraced when associate evangelists, such as Leighton Ford, hit the sawdust trails of western Canada.

Along the way over the prairie pathways of the preachers, Graham, Ford, and others brought a mix of evangelical optimism, revival fire, and affirmation not only in their faith, but also in their politics and society. Down to the grassroots of crusade planning were networks not only of

political and business leaders, but also of hundreds of regular folks volunteering time and sweat. The lists of organizations and churches involved show that these were among the most truly ecumenical transdenominational enterprises at the time. So significant was the appearance of Graham and his associate evangelists that liberal Protestants, hard-right fundamentalists, and pacifist Mennonites needed to respond. Despite enjoying the opportunities petro-wealth created for Alberta, and for the revivalist ministry itself, Graham did not refrain from recasting it as problematic. It was a happy gift, but, though some evangelicals saw it coming from God to an evangelically led province, Graham did not bite.

Whether the issue was the nature of the mass revival campaign, a warming of relations with Catholics, or visiting Vietnam and supporting his own president, the BGEA simply could not enter a city and leave unnoticed – even local Christian divisions needed airing. The responses from the BGEA were organized and systematic. Little worried the revival campaign leaders, planners, and preachers even as they took time to understand, somewhat, local church issues. The pending arrival of Billy Graham and his team meant not only countless hours of preparation and training for supporters, but also many hours spent in church basements for detractors wondering how best to proceed.

While denominations by necessity concern themselves with their own theological and doctrinal distinctiveness – peace for Mennonites, ecumenicalism for the fundamentalists – that is not the case for mass evangelism. The revival experience is focused on the individual; people often come out of concern for their own lives, problems, and situations. By necessity, revivalists often work with ecumenical groups of local churches – Billy Graham would not come to a city unless the major denominations were on board and issued an invitation – in an irenic spirit emphasizing commonalities, typically the personal decision of conversion. That was a key to Graham's evangelistic enterprise, not theological precision or doctrinal debate. It was a curious mix: the soothing warm optimistic apocalypse, the hard reality of politics and war, and the affirmation of a locale – even when critical of its prosperity – all brought together for a week.

As Martin Marty observed in the 1970s, in the post-war climate of “settling down” and “soothing anxieties” Graham was part of a general religious trend in America guided by two impulses: interdenominational/ecumenical activities and denominational institutional restora-

tion/construction. Graham's popularity was a mixture of personal traits, political context, and astute positioning within the internal tensions of the broader Christian church and larger culture. He brought with him not only plain-folk southern American theology mixed with the idealism of republican democracy, but also the most friendly accounting of the coming Armageddon, popularizing a flexible pre-millennialism ascendant in evangelicalism while criticizing the affluent comforts and failures of his western audiences. This, combined with a post-war centrism in relation to the larger Christian community, helped to maintain his influence. Therefore, when he encountered the protests of pacifists, liberal Protestants and hard-right fundamentalists, Graham enjoyed the sun in the broad middle, populated more by individuals than denominations.⁴²

Endnotes

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