

The Rev. Billy Graham is No Phil Berrigan!
By: William Hughes
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Father Phil Berrigan

" Phil Berrigan took the Gospel...personally! " - Martin Sheen

The Rev. Billy Graham, now 87 years old and once a crony of the disgraced President, Richard M. Nixon, was in town recently doing his evangelical thing. He rallied the faithful at Camden Yards, located near Harborplace, over a three day period.

Graham' call, according to his PR flacks, brought crowds estimated at 83,000 to the baseball facility, including about 3,200, who made the big decision to "dedicate their lives to Christ." (1) Camden Yards sits near a site, that once housed a pub owned by the father of George Herman "Babe" Ruth, the home-run hitting legend, New York Yankee great, and native Baltimorean. (2)

Rev. Graham has been doing his preaching gig for over 60 years. He has reportedly spoken to "more than 210 million people in 185 countries and territories." (1) My question is this: To what end? Rev. Graham has made no impression on me at all. None. While the late Phil Berrigan, an ex-Josephite priest, who lived for many years in Baltimore, and died there, on Dec. 6, 2002, has. (3) Why was I influenced so profoundly by Berrigan? Because he, unlike the timid Rev. Graham, dared to speak the truth to power! He took on the nation's War Party, whether it was headed by Richard Nixon, LBJ, that union-bashing Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, or Bush 1 or Bush 2. Berrigan courageously acted out his Biblical duties. He spent 11 of his 79 years in prison protesting the excesses of America's militarism, nuclear weapons' proliferation, and its War and Death Machine. What was Rev. Graham doing all of that time? Well, he was busy, "praying" with presidents, and traveling around the globe "talking" about the Gospel!

Berrigan, a WW II U.S. Army veteran, a 2nd Lieutenant in the infantry, saw protests "as prophetic acts," based on the Biblical injunction of beating swords into plowshares. (4) Rev. Graham, who brought his type of religious crusades to Baltimore before, in 1949 and 1981, on the other hand, has been in league with the warmongers. He comforted, cozied up to, and covered for them. And, as a result, Rev. Graham regularly got his invitations to the White House, along with photo ops, too, on the lawn or in the Oval office, with whomever was the president at that moment. All of it was very nice, indeed. Rev. Graham was giving these presidents' warmongering policies his imprimatur, while the gutsy Berrigan was doing hard time in a federal prison hole for saying "no" to them.

Also, Rev. Graham never heard a shot fired in anger during his long career. Berrigan did! He learned about the horrors of war at Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge, and in the trenches of Western Europe, and not from watching any Steven Spielberg movie. He also stood against the war in Vietnam and mentored a new generation of antiwar activists,

while also opposing the oppression of the poor in Central and South America, Apartheid in South Africa, the crime of British colonialism in the north of Ireland and the brutal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people. (5)

Back, in May, 1968, Berrigan railed against the mousey leaders in the Christian churches, and synagogues, too, in the U.S. He, and eight others, were arrested in Catonsville, Baltimore County, for protesting the Vietnam War by burning 378 "1-A" draft card records. (6) On that auspicious occasion, he declared: "We confront the Catholic Church, other Christian bodies and the synagogues of America with their silence and cowardice in the face of our country's crimes. We are convinced that the religious bureaucracy in this country is racist, is an accomplice in this war and is hostile to the poor." (4) Rev. Graham didn't listen then to that antiwar message. Will he listen, now?

I hope no one thinks I'm just picking on the Protestants here? I'm not! I'm also married to one, whose grandfather was a Lutheran minister. I believe the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in this country, particularly most of the RC Bishops, are just as bad as Rev. Graham, or worse. They are in bed with the Bush-Cheney Gang. Hardly a word against the Iraqi War has come out of their mouths. To date, that conflict has cost the taxpayers \$295.5 billion (\$10 billion a month) and the lives of 2,545 of U.S. military personnel. God only knows how many Iraqis have been slaughtered in this Neocon-inspired disaster, which was based on a pack of rotten lies. (7) Some estimate the Iraqi dead at over 300,000. (8)

Oh sure, the Bishops and the RC Church have a policy paper saying that they are against the Iraqi conflict, but I believe that is only for show. On Aug. 3, 2004, at a Knights of Columbus-sponsored convention, held in Dallas, Texas, the Bishops did everything but endorse George W. Bush, Jr. for his presidential reelection bid. (9) I suspect, but I can't prove, that in return for their "implicit" support, the White House gave them two seats on the Supreme Court, Judge John Roberts and Judge Samuel Alito. Meanwhile, the Bishops continue to insist to the world that they are pro-life. I don't buy that one either. I think that they are only pro-fetus. If they were truly pro-Life, they would stand against this terrible Iraqi War, the arms race and Israel's monstrous treatment of the Palestinians. They would also advocate for life-affirming stem cell research, instead of keeping their heads buried in a totally irrelevant, and outdated, theology script, written probably by some female-hating, socially warped, 16th century monk.

Getting back to Rev. Graham. His ministry has been about bringing "Jesus" (pbuh), to people and "peace" into their hearts, and giving them "a new start" in their lives. (1) I think that is all for the good and he deserves praise for that effort. Somehow though, it hasn't been nearly enough. Where are the voices of the Evangelicals, including his, against the Iraqi War? (10) I believe that if you truly "know" God, (use your own name here for the deity), then you would be incapable of supporting an illegal and immoral war, bombing Fallujah back into the Stone Age, repeatedly lobbing artillery shells into a refugee camp in Occupied Palestine, or cutting off the head of an innocent hostage, like Nick Berg. "Knowing God" brings with it a spirituality that embraces the oneness of humankind. This important principle is found in all of the great religions. It only needs to

be taught by their so-called "leaders." Berrigan's life, as a Christian warrior for peace and justice, was an exemplary lesson of that kind of higher spirituality.

Finally, even as Berrigan was slowing dying from cancer, his voice rang out for a better America and a saner world. In his last public appearance, at an event sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee, (AFSC), a Quaker group, on March 19, 2002, in Baltimore, he warned against the dangers of nuclear weapons, the emerging threats towards our civil liberties, and the spread of toxic depleted uranium. Berrigan, a quintessential man of conscience, and the Antiwar Movement's dissenter emeritus, also said, prophetically, referring to the insidious evil that is the Bush-Cheney Gang: "The times are ominous." (11) He was buried in a coffin made of plain wood. (3) Berrigan's undaunted spirit, however, was covered in God's glory.

Notes:

1. "Baltimore Hears Graham's Call," Baltimore Sun, 07/10/06, by Matthew Brown.
2. "The Life and Times of Babe Ruth" by Leigh Montville.
3. <http://homepage.mac.com/bhughes2/iMovieTheater74.html>
4. <http://www.why-war.com/news/2002/12/07/philipbe.html>
5. <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article13952.htm>
6. <http://www.jonahhouse.org/catonsville9.htm>
7. <http://www.afterdowningstreet.org/>
8. http://www.irishantiwar.org/news/item.tcl?scope=public&news_item_id=102238
9. <http://baltimore.indymedia.org/newswire/display/10734/index.php>
10. <http://www.counterpunch.org/boston07122006.html>
11. <http://homepage.mac.com/bhughes2/iMovieTheater22.html>

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William Hughes is the author of "Saying 'No' to the War Party" (IUniverse, Inc.). He can be reached at liahughes@comcast.net

<http://baltimore.indymedia.org/newswire/display/13121/index.php>