

## **'The threat of crisis in the sermons of Billy Graham during the All Scotland Crusade in 1955'**

### **Abstract**

Billy Graham was a world-famous Christian evangelist in the twentieth century. He visited Scotland in 1955 and led a six-week campaign that included a series of events held at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow. Hundreds of thousands of people attended these rallies and many were converted. This paper will discuss how Billy Graham employed the danger of nuclear war during these meetings in his Gospel appeals. It will examine critically the sermons he preached in order to determine how he used this threat of crisis in order to generate spiritual anxiety and encourage people to be 'born again' during the All Scotland Crusade.

### **Key words**

Communism, conversion, crisis, hydrogen bombs, nuclear warfare, threat, world troubles

### **I**

Is God relevant in the problems you face in the world... Does God matter? Is God concerned? Does God have an answer?... Does God matter in our international affairs? Does God matter in the Formosa situation?... Does God matter? ... Does God matter when we find men on both sides of the Atlantic holding hydrogen bombs in their hands

and waving those bombs over the world? Is God interested?<sup>1</sup>

Does God matter? Is He concerned or interested in the affairs of the world? Is He relevant to the problems that confront humanity? Does He have an answer to the threat of nuclear warfare? These were some of the questions Billy Graham presented to his audience in the Kelvin Hall on 13 April during the All Scotland Crusade of 1955. The Formosa situation was concerned with a resolution passed by the US Senate and signed by the American President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, on 19 January 1955 that sought to halt the threat of an invasion of Taiwan by China. The decision gave him the power to use the Armed Forces of the United States to defend Formosa from a Chinese attack. This was a significant international event during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954–55 which also prompted a response from the Security Council of the United Nations. It is noteworthy that Graham used this international crisis, and the risk of nuclear warfare, in his sermon in Glasgow to arouse spiritual anxiety and create the desire for conversion within the lives of those who came to hear him preach.

In this paper, Graham's use of the threat of world crises in his efforts to arouse spiritual concern, create a sense of need, awaken the desire for a better life and induce people to be born again will be examined. His method of employing the danger and peril of critical situations arising on the world stage, including nuclear warfare, to persuade men, women and children to be converted will be investigated. The paper includes three sections. In the first part, the 1949–1954 Church of Scotland Commission on Communism will be explored in order to consider the historical and religious context that surrounded Graham's visit to Scotland. Secondly, the literature that has

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham, Billy. "Untitled", (Matthew 6:33), April 13, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 2.

considered how the evangelist handled the world's troubles in his preaching will be uncritically reviewed and presented. Lastly, Graham's twenty-four sermons, preached in the Kelvin Hall, will be scrutinized to test his rhetoric and assess how he used the threat of world crises in his Gospel appeals during the All Scotland Crusade in 1955.

#### SPECIAL COMMISSION ON COMMUNISM

In May 1949, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a Special Commission on Communism. It lasted five years and produced four reports that ran to almost 75,000 words. They provide a unique insight into how the largest church in Scotland, whose membership represented 37.6% of the adult population at the time, viewed communism in the early 1950s, just before the arrival of Billy Graham.<sup>2</sup> McFarland and Johnston's article on the Special Commission reaches three broad conclusions. In the first instance, they say the Commission highlighted the limits of clerical anti-communism within the Church of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the broad consensus that acknowledged the threat that communism presented against the church, the general response across the Kirk was not typically McCarthyite. Indeed, the challenges presented by communism to the church were accepted by many as a judgement upon the Kirk's lack of a social and political imagination. George MacLeod and his Iona disciples were already critical of the church's public theology and its poor response to pressing civil issues of the day. Communism was accepted as a fault-finding foe that exposed the failure of the church to rise to the challenge of responding to the problems that confronted communities across Scotland in the

---

<sup>2</sup> E. W. McFarland and R. J. Johnston, 'The Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Communism, 1949–1954: Tackling 'Christianity's Most Serious Competitor', *Contemporary British History*, 2009, 23:3, 337–361 at 337–338.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

post-war era. Thus, there was not a wholesale criticism or rejection of communism among ministers when Graham arrived in Glasgow.

Notwithstanding the limits of clerical anti-communism, the second main issue for the members of the Commission was the difference between the Christian and communist interpretation of life and humanity. Consequently, they believed they had a responsibility to contribute to the building of a new Scotland, with a modern, theologically informed 'Christian sociology'.<sup>4</sup> At this time, Scotland was one of the largest districts of the Communist Party in Great Britain, with around 6,000 members in 305 branches. Indeed, the number of factory branches in Scotland of the Communist Party grew from thirty-three in 1949 to 144 in 1954.<sup>5</sup> Some within the Kirk read the rise of communism as an indictment against the church for its failure to respond to the economic and social injustices felt by many in Scotland during the early twentieth century. Certainly, the increasing popularity of the communist cause in Scotland caused the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation committee to feel anxious.<sup>6</sup> The Kirk recognized the challenge of communism, and the task that it faced, to respond creatively to this threat. Their reaction was developed along two lines. Theologically, it recognized that a deeper understanding of the Gospel and a greater appreciation of the meaning of being church was required, while sociologically it acknowledged a need to play a more active role in social and political criticism within Scotland.<sup>7</sup> Towards these ends, the Industrial Chaplains movement was launched in 1942, with over 300 chaplains appointed to serve in communities and factories across Scotland. The Church of Scotland's industrial

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 349.

outreach activities demonstrated perhaps the most tangible impact of the Commission.<sup>8</sup> However, more work needed to be done by the Kirk to combat the perceived threat presented by communism in the years following the Second World War. Nevertheless, this response by the Church of Scotland demonstrated that although it recognized the dangers of communism, it refused to castigate this political philosophy as an evil enemy that needed to be destroyed.

Nonetheless, and thirdly, the Commission's recognised the enormous challenge communism presented to the global church.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it acknowledged how it had become, in the twentieth-century, 'Christianity's most serious competitor', identified as an alternative religion across the world.<sup>10</sup> The global influence and power of communism was viewed very seriously. McFarland and Johnston comment, 'The result of its initial investigations convinced the Commission that the Church faced a threat as dramatic as at any time in its 2000 year history – the only comparable event being the rise of Islam in the seventh century.'<sup>11</sup> There was a real concern that communism would arrest the hearts and minds of the Scottish skilled working class as Calvinism had done several centuries previously.<sup>12</sup> The Church of Scotland was becoming anxious that communism might replace Christianity in the lives of the people it sought to serve.

In this respect, at least, the Church of Scotland and Billy Graham were of

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>10</sup> *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1949–52.* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and T. and A. Constable). Communism Commission (1952), 607.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 607.

<sup>12</sup> McFarland and Johnston, 'The Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Communism, 1949–1954', 341.

a similar mind. Both recognized the threat that the rise of popular communism presented to the church around the world. However, their responses to this danger were very different. McFarland and Johnston judge that the All Scotland Crusade 'carried a powerful anti-communist message.'<sup>13</sup> Graham saw the danger as a battle between good and evil, between God and the devil, and he presented personal salvation as an antidote for communism. The Kirk looked at the same situation but recognized something different. It saw communism as a charge against its own failure to respond, with the Gospel, to the economic, political and social challenges that the twentieth century had presented to Scotland. It suggested church-wide repentance as a response to communism. Indeed, the Commission declined the opportunity to 'make the refutation of Marxism and the defence of "Christian civilization" the centrepiece of its enterprise.'<sup>14</sup> Rather, it sought to respond apologetically, creatively, and positively to demonstrate the relevance of the church and Christian ethics to the great social and political matters of the day. Accordingly, and despite their consensus over the threat created by communism, there were significant areas of disagreement between the official policy of the Church of Scotland and Billy Graham in respect of their responses to the challenge it presented to the church in the early 1950s.

## GRAHAM AND GLOBAL CRISES

Turning towards the academic conversation that has considered how Graham used the threat of global crises in his preaching, several scholars have noticed how he regularly presented critical world situations at the start of his sermons. It was his habit to discuss international concerns near the beginning of his

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 354.

addresses in order to present the large-scale problems that confronted humanity. Grant Wacker has remarked how ‘After a couple of warm-up jokes, Graham invariably rehearsed a laundry list of statistics and anecdotes about the dire state of the world.’<sup>15</sup> He liked to speak about ominous threats that appeared on the world’s stage. Indeed, Thomas G. Long has observed how Graham’s sermons typically followed a four-part pattern. He began by discussing ‘The Grave Crisis in our Time’, before moving on to consider ‘The Restless and Captive Soul.’ After this, and only when he had successfully created spiritual anxiety and the desire for a new, better life among his listeners, he would declare ‘God’s Response and Invitation’ and then end his sermons with a ‘Get up out of your seat and come to Christ’ altar call.<sup>16</sup> Hence, Graham, invariably, began his sermons with ‘a presentation of the present moment as one of extraordinary crisis.’<sup>17</sup> In 1951, he was warning his audiences, ‘Everyone seems to agree that a terrible catastrophe lies just ahead.... The worst that is in man is now manifesting itself.’<sup>18</sup> By 1957, he was declaring, ‘Many students of world affairs believe that the world is plunging madly toward a third World War.’<sup>19</sup> According to Long, the grave crises, which Graham spoke about at the start of his sermons, changed from decade to decade, but for sixty years, according to the evangelist, the world found itself perpetually on the precipice of ruin and disaster.<sup>20</sup>

Within this narrative of impending trouble, Graham presented the grave threat of communism towards the democracies of the world repeatedly during

---

<sup>15</sup> Grant Wacker, ‘Billy Graham’s America’, *Church History*, 78.3 (2009), 489–511 at 502-03.

<sup>16</sup> Michael G. Long (ed.), *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America’s Greatest Evangelist* (Louisville, KY, 2008), 6–9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Billy Graham, ‘Whither Bound?’ in *America’s Hour of Decision* (Wheaton, IL, 1951), 139.

<sup>19</sup> Billy Graham, ‘The Signs of the Times’, a sermon on *The Hour of Decision* (Minneapolis, 1957), n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Long (ed.), *The Legacy of Billy Graham*, 7.

his early crusades in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Wacker comments, 'Graham placed this theological message in a context of domestic and international threats, especially lawlessness at home and communism abroad.'<sup>21</sup> David Aikman describes how he warned the people of Los Angeles in 1949 that their city was third in the US target list of soviet nuclear attacks, after New York and Chicago.<sup>22</sup> 'Do you know', Graham roared, 'that the fifth Columnists, called Communists, are more rampant in Los Angeles than any other city in America?'<sup>23</sup> The evangelist regularly presented communism as an anti-God religion. He railed,

Communism has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible and against all religion. Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life – communism is a religion that is inspired, directed and motivated by the devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in simple, binary terms, Graham portrayed Christianity as good and communism as bad. Christianity was God's religion. Communism was the devil's religion. Communism was threatening to take over the world. There was a battle going on. Americans needed to defend their freedom and their way of life and defeat the evil of the 'Reds' by choosing God and being converted. In this manner, he used the apparent threat of communism to make people apprehensive and afraid.

---

<sup>21</sup> Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 13.

<sup>22</sup> David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (Nashville, TN, 2007), 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>24</sup> William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story: A Prophet with Honour* (London, 1992), 115.



During the 1949 Los Angeles crusade, Graham unashamedly aroused concern among the crowds that flocked to hear him with the threat of communism. Within four weeks of the start of the campaign, at Semipalatinsk on 29 August, Russia tested its first nuclear device called RDS-1 or 'First Lightning', while on 1 October, during the first week of the campaign, the communist People's Republic of China was officially proclaimed.<sup>25</sup> Addressing this situation of global concern in his sermons, Graham located the Gospel within the midst of these world-changing events and proved himself to be in touch with international affairs. He described his visits to post-war Europe and spoke about the fear of destruction that had enveloped the continent. He went on to represent the threat of communism upon America as a judgment of God that was about to fall upon the nation.<sup>26</sup> According to William Martin, he railed continuously against communism in his early days.<sup>27</sup> This became an important feature of his early ministry. He read and responded to the events of the world in a particular manner and used them in his crusades to arouse anxiety, for his evangelistic purposes.<sup>28</sup>

Martin also noticed how Graham interpreted trouble in the world within his premillennial and Dispensationalist understanding of situations as they arose. Thus, he believed that the two World Wars, the spread of communism across Europe, the advance of Islam in Africa, the creation of the nation state of Israel, and the increasing threat of Nuclear War demonstrated that the end of the present dispensation was near, and that Jesus Christ would soon return to the earth.<sup>29</sup> In 1961, in response to the anticipated threats that communism

---

<sup>25</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Martin, *The Billy Graham Story*, 115.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 28, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Martin, *The Billy Graham Story*, 77.

posed in Europe, the Congo and southeast Asia, Graham cited the scientist James Orr, who had cautioned, 'The whole race is crumbling to destruction.'<sup>30</sup> Consequently, people had a limited time to be reconciled to God. He also spoke frequently, in the 1950s, about the risk of nuclear warfare, and this served to create a heightened sense of seriousness in his Gospel appeals. Time was short. Today was the day of salvation. There was no moment to delay. This aroused a heightened sense of concern and urgency within his audiences. The evangelist used the threat of crisis to create fear and exhort people to be converted.

The purpose of the evangelist now becomes clear. By reminding people of the alarming state of international relations, he sought to demonstrate there was trouble in the world, and to arouse concern in the lives of those who heard him preach. Heather Murray Elkins has said, 'Graham intentionally created for his audiences a sense of being in real danger.'<sup>31</sup> He wanted them to become anxious about their perilous situation. His aim, in telling the story of the world's troubles and of its imminent doom, was to incite a response of apprehension. Martin has commented, 'He observed that revival is more likely to occur in a time when people feel unable to cope with the problems they face, and he used a variety of techniques to make his audiences believe their lives were filled with such problems.'<sup>32</sup> It would be fair, then, to say that Graham was alarmist in his preaching.<sup>33</sup> He spoke about nuclear war and communism, and described 'a world filled with terror and threat' in order to emphasise the troubles of the world.<sup>34</sup> According to Martin, 'Graham's basic mode of preaching in these early

---

<sup>30</sup> Billy Graham, *Prepare for the Storm* (Minneapolis, MN, 1961), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Long (ed.), *The Legacy of Billy Graham*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Martin, *The Billy Graham*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> Grant Wacker, *One Soul At A Time: The Story of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2019), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Martin, *The Billy Graham Story*, 161.

years was assault.’<sup>35</sup> He sought to provoke anxiety and fear. He was unashamed and unembarrassed to admit how he employed fear to press people towards conversion.<sup>36</sup>

Graham’s ultimate aim, according to Michael S. Hamilton, in speaking about the world’s troubles and arousing concern, was to present his audiences with their sense of need, and then awaken within them the desire for a changed, new life.<sup>37</sup> Thus, having created this worried tension, he invited his audience to receive the answer to their uncertainty and unease. They needed someone who could save them from their troubles, and that person, he would tell them, was Jesus. The peace and hope they sought, the evangelist proclaimed, could be found in the Gospel. Jesus Christ would fulfil their desire for a new beginning and a better life. The salvation of the world could be discovered in the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ, His Son. As Wacker observed, ‘Things were broken, but God offered a solution.’<sup>38</sup> Despite the gloomy predictions that marked the beginning of his sermons, Graham’s messages were ultimately ‘essentially benefit-orientated.’<sup>39</sup> In his gospel, he presented the love and power of God as the means to transform people’s lives, and the life of the world. Notwithstanding the narrative of world destruction and death that characterized the start of his sermons, the evangelist always offered a positive end to the story of humanity for those who chose to repent and believe.

This was classic trouble and grace Gospel preaching as described by Paul

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>36</sup> Martin, *The Billy Graham Story*, 580.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Finsteun, Anne Blue Wills, Grant Wacker (eds), *Billy Graham: American Pilgrim* (Oxford, 2017), 44-45.

<sup>38</sup> Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Greene, ‘The Billy Graham Global Mission Sermons: The Power of Belief’, *Vox Evangelica*, 26 (1996), 53

Wilson, the Canadian homiletician.<sup>40</sup> Graham created a sense of anxiety among his listeners by describing the disorder that existed in the world, which arose from humanity's sin. He told his audience that they shared a grave problem that threatened their well-being and their eternal destinies. There was trouble in the world, and there were problems in their lives. They were in a difficult situation and needed help. Then he provided them with a solution for their difficulties. He gave them an answer for their troubles and problems. The love of God, revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ, and manifest in His death on the Cross at Calvary, where He paid the price of humanity's sin, provided the opportunity for a new experience of life. Through repentance, and by faith in Jesus Christ, people could overcome their sin, conquer the evil in the world and defeat the final enemy of death. The Gospel story, according to Graham, always began with a grim description of a troubled world and of broken lives. This was his narrative of impending doom and disaster. It is significant that scholars have noticed how he told this catastrophic world story and used the threat of crisis throughout his ministry order to arouse anxiety and concern among his audiences and persuade them to be 'born again'.

#### GRAHAM IN SCOTLAND

Graham preached twenty-four sermons in the Kelvin Hall during the All Scotland Crusade between 22 March and 25 April 1955. A critical examination of his sermon scripts, provided by the Billy Graham Literary Foundation, affords the opportunity to explore his oratory and consider how he used the threat of world crises in his Gospel appeals during the All Scotland Crusade. It is interesting to note that Mark D. Chapman has observed how Graham refrained from using his 'earlier apocalyptic Cold War rhetoric' when he came to London in 1954, and

---

<sup>40</sup> Paul S. Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville, TN, 2007), 66.

‘focused far more on a vaguer and more general message of the evils of the world.’<sup>41</sup> It appears that the wild, ominous predictions of the world’s end, that featured in his earlier American crusades, had become a thing of the past when he arrived in Britain. Nevertheless, this analysis of his Glasgow sermons will reveal the extent to which he continued to speak about the risk of nuclear warfare. It will uncover his use of the threat of crisis to arouse anxiety and fear in the lives of his audience.

The first, of eight themes, that arose in this inquiry into Graham’s sermons, is concerned with the imaginary story he told about the Garden of Eden before the Fall on three occasions. According to his literal reading of the Christian Scriptures, the evangelist believed in a real Adam and Eve who lived in a real Garden of Eden which was located in modern day Iraq or Iran.<sup>42</sup> He habitually used the creative powers of his mind to recreate Bible stories and in this account he imagined a conversation between God, Adam and Eve about the future of humanity and of the world. On 1 April 1955, he said,

I can see man and God walking in the cool of the day in the beautiful Garden of Eden. God, Eve and Adam, discussing the future of the human race - - - the atomic power that was to come to bring a civilization in which there would be no wars, no strife, no economic problems, no social problems, no personal problems, and no death..<sup>43</sup>

He echoed this story eleven days later, on 12 April when he commented, ‘And I

---

<sup>41</sup> Long (ed.), *The Legacy of Billy Graham*, 126.

<sup>42</sup> William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story: A Prophet with Honour* (London: Huthison, 1992), 575.

<sup>43</sup> Graham, Billy. “The Sermon on the Mount”, (Matthew 5-7), April 1, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 5.

can see God and Adam walking in the cool of the day, and talking over the future of civilization, the great economic standards that there would be, the tremendous atomic power that would be used for man's benefit.'<sup>44</sup> On a third occasion, on 20 April, he rehearsed this narrative again.<sup>45</sup> In each word picture, it is noticeable that he saw God, Adam and Eve having this conversation 'in the cool of the day in the beautiful Garden of Eden.' It was a perfect moment and place to discuss 'the future of the human race' and consider the 'tremendous atomic power' and the positive economic effects it would bring to the world for the benefit of its people. This was a perfect earth, without problems and troubles. 'What a world it was to be!', the evangelist exclaimed.<sup>46</sup> Graham's purpose in telling this imaginary story of a beautiful planet, using atomic power to generate prosperity and wealth for humanity was to accentuate the dire state of the other world story he would go on to tell of a broken and troubled earth. God's original plans for everyone were good before Lucifer became Satan and tempted Adam and Eve to sin.

In the order of Graham's Gospel story, sin was the next theme to appear. In the following quotation from his sermons, it is apparent that the evangelist makes a direct connection between sin and the potential destruction of humanity by nuclear warfare. During a sermon at the Kelvin Hall, on 22 March, Graham said,

Now the Bible teaches that your soul is not physical, but it has a disease ... and the disease is called sin that depraves the human nature

---

<sup>44</sup> Graham, Billy. "Joshua", (Joshua 24:15-16), April 12, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 4.

<sup>45</sup> Graham, Billy. "Pride", (Isaiah 14:12-15), April 20, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 3.

<sup>46</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Sermon on the Mount", (Matthew 5-7), April 1, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 5.

... when you get infected men and women, with this soul disease called sin, together in what we call a society and put in their hands hydrogen bombs - - - then you have the possibility of race destruction.... And the basic problem in your life tonight, ladies and gentlemen, is this disease - - - sin.<sup>47</sup>

The threat of total annihilation, from hydrogen bombs, had arisen from people's sinfulness. This disease, that infected human souls, had corrupted their nature and made possible the destruction of the entire race. On another occasion, Graham warned, 'Science has created hydrogen bombs for us to destroy ourselves with.'<sup>48</sup> The threat was very real. He told his Glasgow audience,

Now there are many leaders who say that there is a possibility of World War III.... Must we rush headlong in every generation into wars and fights? And the next war! They talk about a war that could wipe out great areas of civilization..<sup>49</sup>

In his Gospel story, Graham proclaimed that sin and science presented humanity with the threat of a third World War and the 'possibility of race destruction.'<sup>50</sup> The future of life on earth was in peril. The effects of sin endangered the lives of everyone. With this foreboding warning, Graham sought to arouse anxiety and concern in the hearts and minds of his audience.

The evangelist sought to compound this sense of apprehension by telling

---

<sup>47</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda", (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 6.

<sup>48</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Coming Storm", (Luke 8:22-29), April 2, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 3.

<sup>49</sup> Graham, Billy. "Pride", (Isaiah 14:12-15), April 20, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 1.

<sup>50</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda", (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 6.

the people of Glasgow that the problems created by their sinfulness could not be solved by human intelligence. There were no mortal answers to the troubles that afflicted the world. He cited Britain's wartime Prime Minister to defend his claims. Graham said,

Sir Winston Churchill has said, 'our problems are quite beyond us', and when Sir Winston, one of our great world statesmen, admits to the world that our problems have got beyond us - - - we are questing and searching. And in your own life, you have no answer.<sup>51</sup>

The problems of the world were beyond humanity and there were no immediate answers because sin had caused spiritual blindness, so that people could not see and were left groping around in the darkness for a solution they could not find.

On 24 March, Graham said,

Your soul's eyes are blind ... you're blind tonight, and you are groping. that's the reason the world is groping for an answer to the peace tonight. That's the reason we're groping about this hydrogen bomb; that's the reason that you are groping about the problems in your life and the difficulties and sins – you are spiritually blind.<sup>52</sup>

Spiritual blindness, caused by sin, had left the human race groping around in the dark for answers to the grave questions that the nuclear age of the early 1950s had presented. People could find no explanations or resolutions to the troubles of the world. In this manner, Graham continued

---

<sup>51</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda", (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 9.

<sup>52</sup> Graham, Billy. "Untitled", (John 11), March 24, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 11.



to tell a bleak story of the problems that confronted humanity.

Graham's aim in recounting this dire narrative was to create spiritual anxiety and concern in his audience. He unashamedly sought to arouse disquiet with his threats of mass destruction and wanted people to feel apprehensive about their lives and the future of the world. This longer quotation, from a sermon delivered on 23 March 1955 illustrates the angst he was trying to build in the hearts and minds of his Glasgow congregation.

There are some of you here tonight who have come all wrought up.... And there's a longing, a questing, a searching, and a looking for something else in life. Then you pick up your newspapers and you read about this terrible fallout from the hydrogen bomb. And you read that three bombs dropped on Britain could destroy all life on this wonderful island. And sometimes you wake up in the middle of the night and you wonder where it will all end. We might as well face realities. There's no use burying our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. It's there, it's a distinct possibility unless the problems of the world are solved. And it bothers us once in a while, and we have no answer it seems.<sup>53</sup>

On this evening, early in the Crusade, Graham blatantly sought to incite fear in his audience by referencing a press article that had predicted how Britain could be completely obliterated by three hydrogen bombs. He played upon the public mood of agitation and the night-time worries that kept people awake. The problems of the world appeared intractable, while there were no human

---

<sup>53</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Moral Problem", (John 7:37-8:11), March 23, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 6.

answers to the threatened trouble that hung low over the earth. It was a time to be apprehensive about the future of life on earth.

Then, and only at this stage, having considered the threat of impending global crisis and the inability of people to respond to this immediate danger, Graham asked the important question. It was not whether Christianity was true, but if it mattered and was relevant to the real issues of life. Thus, on 13 April, he presented his audience with the questions that appeared in the quotation at the beginning of this article.<sup>54</sup> Does God matter? Is He concerned or interested in the affairs of the world? Is He relevant to the problems that confront humanity? Does He have an answer to the threat of nuclear warfare? To the relief of the gathered assembly in the Kelvin Hall, the evangelist answered his questions in the affirmative. God did matter and He was interested in international affairs. Most significantly, God had a response to the threat of nuclear war. He held an answer to the global problems that threatened to overwhelm humanity.

Graham's response to the troubles of the world were found in Jesus Christ, God's Son. The evangelist held a high Christology. He believed that Christ was the agent of creation and the sovereign Lord who held everything together in the world. In one sermon, he proclaimed, 'The Scripture says that Jesus holds all things together, and if it were not for the cohesive, holding, sticking power of Christ, the whole universe would blow into a thousand bits.'<sup>55</sup> Jesus, Graham contended, was the power that defended and guarded the world from nuclear warfare. On 25 March 1955, he proclaimed,

---

<sup>54</sup> Graham, Billy. "Untitled", (Matthew 6:33), April 13, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 2.

<sup>55</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Ten Commandments", (Exodus 20), March 28, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 5.

It is Christ who flung those stars into space that we can see tonight for the first time since I've been here ... it is Christ who created the elements that the chemists discover and use so effectively.... And then the Scripture says that by the power of His Word, He holds all things together....

Did you know that this world would blow apart were it not for the cohesive power of Christ? And I am also convinced that when wicked and evil men seek to destroy civilisation by the horrible bombs they've built, the cohesive and restraining power of Christ will restrain them, so that we will not be destroyed as a human race....

It's a comforting thing to go to bed at night and to know that all these atoms that the scientists are splitting are held together by the Christ of this Bible.<sup>56</sup>

Here, Graham presented Jesus Christ to his audience as the only restraining power who was able to keep under control the 'evil men' and their 'horrible bombs' that sought to destroy humanity. It was only the power of Christ that could hold everything together, including the atoms which scientists split in their building of bombs. Jesus Christ, the evangelist boldly declared, was the answer to the world's troubles.

As a result of his power and control of world affairs, that would prevent nuclear warfare, Christ, according to Graham, offered the human race protection and safety. He held the solution to the problem that confronted people around the

---

<sup>56</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Woman at the Well", (John 4), March 25, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 3.

globe. 'Jesus has the answer', the evangelist asserted. 'He can give you peace and assurance and security. He can give you something for you to hold on to, He can give you something that will give you the innermost satisfaction that your soul is longing for tonight.'<sup>57</sup> The previous evening, he claimed, 'Tonight. Jesus Christ can give you something to believe in, to hold on to - - - security in your soul.'<sup>58</sup> These were significant claims. Graham announced that Jesus could provide 'peace and assurance and security.' The evangelist presented Christ as someone people could trust and embrace, as someone who would take care of them. Jesus, Graham said, would bring the deepest comfort and most intimate peace of mind they could ever long for. This was the good news he was pleased to declare to his anxious and fear-filled audience.

However, to receive this protection and peace, people needed, finally, to 'turn to Jesus.' This invitation marked the climax of Graham's Gospel sermons. This was the moment of the altar call when he invited men, women, and children to stand up and come quietly and reverently and stand in front of the platform and asked them to confess their sins and surrender their lives to God.<sup>59</sup> In one of his sermons, he addressed this appeal directly to the leaders of the world. On 2 April 1955, he said,

I would to God today that our world leaders would turn to Him and say, "Master, Master, we perish. We turn to you." Oh, we've turned everywhere in this world of ours; we've turned to our own ingenuity, and we've turned to science; and where has science brought us? Science has created hydrogen bombs for us to destroy ourselves with.

---

<sup>57</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Moral Problem", (John 7:37-8:11), March 23, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 6.

<sup>58</sup> Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda", (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

And I want to ask you, how many of our world leaders have turned to Jesus in the midst of the storm and said, “Master, we perish, help us”? Very few. I want to tell you, we’re never going to have world peace until we come to the Master, who is the Prince of Peace.<sup>60</sup>

The evangelist challenged world leaders to turn to Jesus, rather than to anyone or anything else, and seek his salvation. Here, Graham suggested that world peace depended upon the personal decisions of the people in his audience to respond to his altar call. He laid a great burden of responsibility upon the shoulders of his gathered congregation. The future peace and unity of the world, he insisted, depended on men, women and children coming to the front of the Kelvin Hall and participating in a conversion prayer. ‘The storm is raging in the world today’, Graham went on, ‘and we have hydrogen bombs in our hands ready to unleash upon an unsuspecting world. And we’ve turned to everywhere but to the right place.’<sup>61</sup> He continued,

And I tell you tonight that if Britain and America and the nations of the world would say, as Sir Winston has said, “Our problems have gotten beyond us. We can’t solve them, the storms are too great - - - the little boats are about to overturn. We’re about to destroy ourselves, we’ve come to thy Cross. Save us”, He would save us.<sup>62</sup>

Let the storms rage, let the bombs fall, let trouble come. When I know Jesus Christ, I have peace in my soul ... before you leave the Kelvin Hall

---

<sup>60</sup> Graham, Billy. “The Coming Storm”, (Luke 8:22-29), April 2, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, page 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

tonight, you too can know the same peace.<sup>63</sup>

With the use of this dramatic language, using the metaphor of little boats caught in a great storm, Graham implored his audience to come to the Cross and ask Jesus to save them. He offered them the assurance that coming to Christ in repentance and faith would bring them to a safe harbour of tranquility and security. This was the good news of the Billy Graham gospel, the promise of peace in uncertain times in a troubled world.

Perhaps of greatest significance, it is noted that Graham maintained a relative silence on nuclear warfare during the second part of the All Scotland Crusade. During the first nine services at the Kelvin Hall, between 22 March and 4 April, Graham described the threats presented by hydrogen bombs on eight occasions, a rate of 89%. There was only sermon during this period, on 31 March, when he made no specific comment about the communist threat of using nuclear weapons. However, during the remaining fifteen sermons the evangelist preached in Glasgow, and until 25 April, he mentioned the risk of nuclear warfare on only a further three occasions, a rate of only 20%. The reasons for the change are not clear. There is a suspicion, however, that given their different reactions to the Cold War and the threat of communism, the Church of Scotland may have invited Graham to tone his rhetoric down and speak less often about the fears aroused by the threat of hydrogen bombs during the Crusade. The Kirk was decidedly less hostile towards communism than Graham, and it is not impossible to consider that they advised Graham against exploiting the anxieties that surrounded nuclear warfare for his evangelistic purposes. Alternatively, it is also possible that one of the evangelist's aides encouraged Graham to amend

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4.

his crises hyperbole. In any case, the significant reduction in references to the threat of nuclear warfare in Graham's sermons during the All Scotland Crusade is a marked change that suggests the evangelist was able to adapt to his surroundings and amend his addresses to suit the prevailing mood of the place and time where he ministered.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to analyse the rhetoric employed by Billy Graham during the 1955 All Scotland Crusade in order to judge the extent to which he used the threat of crisis in his sermons to create spiritual anxiety and persuade people to be converted, and in particular the threat of communism, the Cold War, and in particular the use of nuclear weapons. In the first section, a review of the Church of Scotland Commission on Communism revealed the historical and religious context that welcomed the evangelist when he arrived in Glasgow. The Kirk and Graham recognized the threat communism presented to the church, but they responded to this danger in different ways. The American saw communism as a work of the devil that needed to be destroyed, while the Church of Scotland recognized the political philosophy as a fault-finding foe that exposed the weakness of its political and social witness. The review of the scholarly literature showed how Graham invariably told a story of world crisis and impending disaster at the start of his sermons with the purpose of arousing anxiety and concern in the hearts and minds of his audience, before inviting them to accept the offer of a new and different, more peace-filled life through believing in Jesus Christ. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, these stories of world troubles centred around nuclear warfare. Lastly, the twenty-four sermons the evangelist preached in the Kelvin Hall were critically examined in light of his reference to the risk of nuclear weapons. This disclosed how Graham unashamedly sought to

awaken spiritual apprehension in the hearts and minds of his audience through his repeated references to the threat of hydrogen bombs in Scotland in 1955. Personal salvation and turning to Jesus, he proclaimed, was the only way this danger could be averted and peace could be restored. It was classic trouble and grace, Evangelical preaching. Nevertheless, Graham was an alarmist, scaremongering preacher who, on occasions, blatantly employed the threat of crisis in his rhetoric to create anxiety, emotional distress and fear among those who heard him preach in his efforts to persuade them to be 'born again'.

Permission was granted to use quotations from Billy Graham's All Scotland Crusade sermons by the Billy Graham Literary Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© Billy Graham Literary Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.