The Man Behind The Message

Away from the world's best-known evangelist

From the glass towers of Manhattan to native villages in Nigeria, people of all ages and every walk of life come to hear Billy Graham. For more than 30 years he and his team have preached face-to-face to nearly 100 million people, with hundreds of millions more receiving his message through television, radio and films. 1,100,000 attended the closing session of his Seoul, Korea, Crusade, one of the largest gatherings of its kind in the history of Christianity. Why do they come? Who is this man?

Growing up on his father's dairy farm during the Great Depression, Billy Graham had no inkling that he would become the world's best-known evangelist. His parents were deeply committed Christians, but "Billy Frank" was not particularly religious and was thinking of becoming a professional baseball player. Then, at age 16, he took the step he now asks other people around the world to take: he accepted Christ as Lord of his life. A few years later while attending Bible College he sensed the call to preach. It was perhaps the most difficult decision of Billy's life for it meant being willing to go anywhere for God at any time. Then, too, he had reservations about some aspects of evangelism, particularly an emphasis on emotion and the prevailing view fostered by the film Elmer Gantry that some evangelists were in the ministry for financial gain. But after much prayer he said yes, and the most widely publicized evangelistic ministry of our time was born.

Graham Invited To Speak in Moscow Church, Conference

Billy Graham has just accepted an invitation to proclaim the Gospel and to address a conference of religious leaders in Moscow in early May, 1982. Prior to his Moscow trip he will be speaking on the same topic on university campuses across New England.

He has been invited by Patriarch Pimen of Moscow to attend a worship service on May 9 at an Orthodox Cathedral in Moscow and to proclaim the Gospel to the congregation during the morning liturgy while extending fraternal greetings.

At the evening service Dr. Graham will be preaching at the Moscow Baptist Church, which has 5,500 members.

On Tuesday, May 11, Billy Graham will address a conference convened by Patriarch Pimen. International religious leaders representing many major religions will be there; it is not just a conference of Christian leaders. Dr. Graham will be attending the conference as an observer. He will be speaking from the Bible on the Christian's understanding of peace in a nuclear age.

The official title of the conference is "World Conference: Religious Workers for Saving the Sacred gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe."

In a recent news release Dr. Graham said, "It is my sincere prayer that this visit will make at least a small contribution to better understanding and the prevailing view in the United States, the United Nations, and other countries of the world. We trade with each other, we have cultural exchanges, and we have continued political negotiations in spite of our differences. I think it is now time that we move into a spiritual dimension as well. My purpose in going to the Soviet Union is spiritual, and it is not my intention to become involved in political or ideological issues."

Sciences but he was then, as he is now, an avid reader and enthusiastic learner, and he added academic background to his Biblical knowledge by enrolling at prestigious Wheaton College in Illinois. Wheaton gave him more than an education; it was there that Billy fell in love — at first sight, he says — with a beautiful fellow student, Ruth McCue Bell, daughter of a missionary surgeon in China. Ruth had many other admirers but there was something special about the tall, serious young preacher from North Carolina, and in 1941 they were married. After graduating from college, Billy joined "Youth for Christ," an organization designed to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to youth and young people who have recognized in Billy's message the answer to their own deepest and often unexpressed needs. His ministry and influence have been recognized by a broad spectrum of the religious community. The American Jewish Committee honored Billy with its first Inter-religious Award. Many of the public meetings during his tour of Poland were hosted by Roman Catholic churches and cathedrals. The Most Reverend Robert Bunge, 10th Archbishop of Canterbury, invited Billy to his enthronement at Canterbury Cathedral in express appreciation of Billy's impact on his life and ministry. The Gallup Poll finds Billy Graham year after year among the top ten of the world's most admired men. He has preached in crusades on every continent and in almost every major country on earth. At an age when most men begin gearing down for retirement, this man presses vigorously ahead in a work that takes him hundreds of thousands of grueling miles around the globe each year.

Billy Graham goes "home" to a small town in the mountains of North Carolina where he and his wife live. At home, the Grahams attend the local Presbyterian church where Mrs. Graham is a member. Billy is an ordained Baptist minister but he frequently attends churches of other denominations in his travels. The Grahams, who are often away, still find time to be active in their hometown affairs; they have many local friends, and everybody knows them.

Billy and Ruth Graham are parents of five children and grandparents of fifteen. Muhammad Ali, a recent visitor, best describes Billy's life away from the limelight: "I thought he'd live on a thousand acres of land, but [with Billy driving] we drove up to this house made with the world's best-known evangelist