



AKKLESIA

THE ULTIMATE GOSPEL

AKKLESIASTICAL
UNDOGMATIC
IRRELIGIOUS

JER 31:

TO THE REMNANT OF THE SWORD: THE ONES WHO ESCAPED THE JUDGMENTS OF THE CHURCH

A QUICK WORD ON BILLY GRAHAM

TO EVANGELICALS

IVSAN OTETS
TRANSLATED BY DIANITSA OTETS

THE PEOPLE WHICH WERE LEFT OF THE SWORD FOUND GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS;
EVEN ISRAEL, WHEN I WENT TO CAUSE HIM TO REST.
JER 31²

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THE ULTIMATE GOSPEL

[NOVISSIMUM EVANGELIUM]

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Thank you in advance

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ON BILLY GRAHAM

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

AT ITS WORST

I

THERE IS SOME FORM OF PROTESTANTISM, in Europe and on other continents, utterly addicted to and spellbound by the American evangelical preaching. This is a seriously worrying attitude. It is strangely reminiscent of the propaganda used to describe WWII historical facts. Indeed, we are taught from childhood that America, like a saviour, has rid Europe of Nazism. We know however that just like France, Italy or Great-Britain, the total American casualties came to about half a million men. Next to those, Russia lost more than **20 MILLIONS** of her people, thousands of kilometers away from the much-hyped Normandy landing that History focusses on. Whereas millions of Slavic men and women were being sacrificed in a kind of incognito, not to say of contempt on the part of the average European for whom victory could only be celebrated on an American tune, the Russian people were nevertheless taking down Hitler on their own, thus paving the way for his permanent defeat in Europe.

But propaganda worked splendidly. Awestruck Europe turned to the west and praised America the hero. Since then Europe has been opening to the American way of life, her mouth wide open in bliss, feeding on all America's messages

and welcoming her messengers on the red carpet. Nowadays the same blindness is working on the mindset of some form of Christianity, like a shadow. Christians turn to the west as if over there exclusively Christianity possessed the secrets of the evangelical victory. As if God had endowed the *made in US* ecclesias with a spiritual power capable of defeating humankind's enemies. Christianity from across the Atlantic is considered a model of excellence, naively and almost with idolatry. Is it not the first one to reach the ultimate goal of that messianism we pretend to be perfectly faithful to Christ? Meaning - Christendom must **REIGN** politically!

In his documentary *With God on our Side*, David Van Taylor tells us about the Richard Nixon election. The freshly elected President is standing before the excited audience and the usual clique of journalists. By his side on the podium, a smile topped with falcon's eyes, is standing Billy Graham. The religious preacher is given the microphone and immediately delivers in Old Testament tones, «O God, we consecrate Richard Milhous Nixon to the Presidency of these United States [...] We pray this humbly in the name of the Prince of Peace who shed His blood on the Cross that men might have eternal life. Amen.» At that moment, Nixon was experiencing an ecstasy unlike any other. Just imagine! he was no less than being directly enthroned by God Himself through the mouth of one his most prestigious evangelists. At that moment in time, both were convinced to be on a divine mission - they would lead the most powerful Nation in the world to once again **SAVE** it from a devouring invader.

The old Roman Pope of Old Europe was then being flooded, together with his *urbi et orbi*, his «to the city and to the world». As for Pope of Protestantism Billy Graham, there he is, raising the *urbi et orbi* up to the level of divine hopes. It is true that the anointing has changed hands. Nevertheless, Billy Graham is the worthy son of the Bishop of Rome for,

much the same as him, Graham's aim was to reign politically and he spoke with bombast *to the city and to the world*. However the American preacher, a much more pragmatic man, easily outdid his father. Leaving the old liturgical outfit, he dressed in a suit cut by the best tailors, studied modern economy and the workings of Mammon, to eventually make his way into the very exclusive circle of political dark powers. He then shook hands on a regular basis with *exousia*, with «powers» - there, at the top step of their glories. What about Christ? He did the exact opposite as he disowned all authorities and publicly mocked them (cf. col 2¹⁵). Christ threw their crowns to the ground, shouting *to the world and to the city*: «My kingdom is not of this world [...], now is my kingdom not from hence» (cf. jn 18³⁶). Without doubt, **CHRIST WASN'T ON THE PLATFORM** with Billy Graham et Richard Nixon; he was absent from such a place. One day, the American preacher will need to account for the way he took possession of the name of the son of God in order to build his human fantasies and, on top of this, for having led into them so many gullible crowds that listened to him.

In the face of such a corruption of the Gospel, the word of Chesterton springs to my mind - «The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad» The political domination of Christianity is merely the tragic and pathetic mix of Judaism and the Gospel. It is Peter stammering in awe at the transfiguration and talking nonsense, «let us make three tabernacles ; one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elias» (mark 9⁵). It is that old fearful move of an immature Christianity that wants to sew Faith and Law together. That is to say to make God a tangible reality, to blend the Christ with a theocracy coming from the Law, to force him, as did the pharisees and the crowd, to accept a political enthronement. Happily enough, the Nazarene preferred the cross and the incognito of the resurrection. **CHRIST DOES NOT WANT TO RULE** over men ! He wants to change their nature so dee-

ply, so thoroughly that every-One rule over their own reality, that they be king or queen of their own kingdom - that they be neither with God nor Master. The Christ offers himself as Father, and he is himself the Father who is self-sacrificing for his sons, but never is his final goal to give himself as an Almighty God to sons who could only get near him on their knees. He has in view their full freedom. He wants to take them from the position of a creature subjected to its Creator to that of the dignity of a son wearing their Father's nature. This is a radically different thing. It is an authentic break from the Torah theology with its social morality. It is a divorce without return from that fervour the Old Testament has to be politically interpreted and to rule over men.

II

But has not Billy Graham preached the Gospel? some might ask. Has he not led numerous persons to Christ? Let us not be so positive. It is an easy thing to generate intellectual or moral conversions, which are typical of political conversions after all. You use the power of suggestion on someone to form convictions in their mind with the captivating lever of a talented speaker and his campaign manager, an expert in propaganda. You want to learn manipulate these or those values and mechanisms that work on the human psychology, so that you acquire on the person enough power to make them take the ballot paper you want to see them use. This is how we can exert such an authority on our neighbour and make them believe they chose it freely. In fact, there is no choice on neither sides. Here only lies a moral and intellectual manipulation that is **IN NO POSSIBLE WAY SPIRITUAL!**

As a matter of fact, it is easy to see a conversion of the conscience to a given pattern of Good & Evil thought and to **CONFUSE** it with the spiritual birth, that is precisely outside all good & evil patterns. Indeed, the Spirit works altogether

differently. He literally comes and tears down the person, he drives them mad. He precisely makes it impossible for the moral or intellectual quibble to stand any longer so that it no longer offers a way out for that person, who cannot have but one hope - the hope of a completely free, miraculous and unreasonable intervention of God. All this occurring in an intimate and personal one-on-one meeting between man and heaven. The Spirit's intervention is beyond good and beyond evil. Beyond any reason, any logics, any theology and any justice. The Spirit has to do with the Justice of the Kingdom of heavens which no eye has seen, no intelligence has grasped, no feeling has experienced. This *counter-Torah* justice which makes a man be born of God cannot be comprehended in any human way. We need an all-gracious action on the part of Christ so that suddenly would open for man this «all-new» he had never imagined before, this 'all-new' he now can only embrace and make his through Faith alone.

But what do preachers with their Billy Graham principles do? They equip themselves with some human charisma that they crown with some wise men morality, then they shape the humanist personality within the excellence of a well-suited theological training. Finally they wrap it in a carefully elaborated esthetic universe. In the end, the whole thing is neatly inserted in a show for the crowds where the media effect surrounding people works to convince them they are living an extraordinary moment. Proud of their work, these preachers thus suppose they can reach the same goals than those of the Spirit - even though the Spirit **IS ABSENT**! The imitation of the Spirit is so well done that it is enough to exalt an audience member. Alas, an audience member is often very easily exalted. He believes in it. And from there on he embarks in a conversion that he thinks is a spiritual one, when it is only intellectual or sensual, and unfortunately largely human.

Such is the religious process, such its power, such its seduction. Catholicism's archaic liturgy and the old Protestant rigorism have cleverly transformed into evangelical Masses. Since then, people say that these modern religious theatres from the west are carrying off the spiritual victory of the Gospel. But nothing could be further from the truth. The real victory is taking place behind that story, in real History. It is taking place in another land and thousands of *spiritual* kilometers away from that media hype of the divine. Victory is gained by those inspired individuals whose faith weighs one thousand times more in heaven's eyes, but who are nonetheless being sacrificed under the media pressure of the «triumphant» ecclesia, far from podiums, platforms and applause. In that precise place where the Spirit dwells, far from gatherings and street audiences. In the simplicity of a meeting with one's neighbour, in the intimacy that a man or a woman may have with God - in the secret of their room. In the **INCOGNITO**, as Kierkegaard liked to say: «As soon as a crowd forms, God becomes invisible. And this all-powerful crowd may go and hammer at his door, it will not go any further, because God only exists for the individual. That is His sovereignty.»

III

In his book *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Jacques Ellul talks about **ABANDONMENT**. Abandonment is God's silence, it is His absence. «It is my belief, Ellul explains, that we have entered upon the age of abandonment, that God has turned away from us and is leaving us to our fate. Of course I am convinced that he has not turned away from all, or rather, I think that he may be present in the life of an individual person. He still may be the one who speaks in man's heart. But it is from our history, our societies, our cultures, our sciences, our politics that God is absent. He is keeping quiet and has shut himself up in his silence and his night.» (77). Then he further adds about religion, «It is collectively that we expe-

rience God's silence and his absence : it is the body of Christians, the churches, people in the aggregate who find themselves abandoned. And the personal experience of a few ones does not change anything about it.» (127).

Therefore, in the third part of the second chapter entitled «Signs of Abandonment in the Church», Ellul writes more precisely about what he calls «dryness». *Dryness*, for him, is «the lack of outreach in witnessing, the lack of transmission of the Christian message» (140-147). The principles of evangelization of Billy Graham and the like take root in that dryness. Little by little, Jacques Ellul comes to the specific example of the American evangelist.

This *dryness*, he explains, is a combination of the religious spirit and «the great effort on the part of Christian intellectuals to make the message audible, comprehensible and acceptable on a purely natural level». Jacques Ellul then condemns the *exegesis of progressive annihilation and of dissection of the texts*. «The more we dissect a text, the less will it be accessible to a fundamental understanding. The more one improves his formal knowledge of the text, the more its basic significance vanishes.» He goes on explaining, «It is true that, with God absent, the only thing left for us to do in our real spiritual poverty, is to keep peeling the layers from the textual envelope. We can rest assured, however, that that will lead nowhere. Its only effect will be to confirm our sterility and to make it more obvious. It is not a matter of jumping to the opposite conclusion and saying: "Let us not perform any more exegesis. Let us regress to a naïve and fundamentalist reading" [...] it becomes harmful when we pretend to get out of the impasse by means of exegesis, and to do without the Holy Spirit while going after the same result.»

«The hermeneutic enterprise probes tirelessly and ever more deeply into the mystery of the possible communication and recovery of meaning. It makes one's head spin. It is the

exact equivalent, in reverse, of ancient metaphysics. Strictly, it is a matter of putting oneself in the place of God's decision. It is a matter of making Scripture alive and meaningful without God's making it alive and meaningful. It is a matter of effecting the transition from Scripture to word, or of making language into the word, by putting together highly sophisticated human means in order to economize on the use of the Holy Spirit. Hermeneutics is the business of interpreting revelation without revelation. [...] Consequently, God is forbidden to speak. God does not need to speak in this matter, it's up to ourselves to make him speak. We need to substitute our hermeneutics of the word for his word.»

As he eventually refers to the specific case, Ellul declares the following, «Billy Graham's propaganda methods are the exact equivalent, at his level, of the hermeneutic philosophy in that they use every last means to obtain results which the Holy Spirit is no longer giving. One can obtain conversions by propaganda thereby economizing on the action of God, just as hermeneutics can obtain a meaning.» [without it being God's meaning].

The first edition of *Hope in Time of Abandonment* dates back from 1972! Jacques Ellul, the man from Bordeaux, published nearly 60 works whose contents reflects the best wine in the world that is to be found in his home place. However, Christendom will prefer to quench their thirst with sweet drinks served by preachers from across the Atlantic. Let no one wonder today. The Church has sacrificed an inspired man who was standing at her gates. She carries within herself intellectual, emotional and moral converts, the result of those sham preachers motivated by Billy Graham style propagandas. That is to say the Church is overflowing with men and women whose spiritual birth, if it ever happened, now reveals individuals suffering with every sort of spiritual psychiatric affection. **MUST WE CRY OVER HER?** For the time

being, let her drink from divine abandonment, from God's silence and his absence. In that place, Ellul said, «there is a huge thrust towards faith, for it is that misery of a man crying out to an empty heaven which can call God to life.»

ivan otets