

## Billy Graham

Christian evangelists of the modern era have used television and radio to full advantage, none more so than the Reverend Billy Graham. He has become a household name due to his media work and tours. Born in 1918 in North Carolina, he joined the Southern Baptist Church in 1934, becoming a minister five years later.

The evangelist method of conducting revival meetings where members of the assembly are invited to bare witness to their commitment to the Christian beliefs have proved very popular. Billy Graham has had particular success with this as a result of his personal charm and skill as a gospel preacher. He has toured throughout America, Europe and Australia, and has sometimes visited countries that other evangelists avoided. During the Cold War era, he preached in the Soviet bloc, North Korea and in South Africa during the apartheid regime. His appearance there was on condition that audiences were racially integrated.

The gospel is all about getting the message across and Billy Graham has helped that to happen when he formed his Evangelistic Association. This funded an internationally broadcast radio program, televised revival meetings, a magazine and a web site.

Controversy and contradiction has sometimes surrounded the Reverend and he has had to defend some of his comments and actions. He has made statements, interpreted as anti-Jewish for which he apologized, alongside a defense of Israel. His stand against communism went as far as supporting the Vietnam War, including the bombing campaign. This right wing position has been constant through his friendships with various Presidents, both Democratic and Republican. He has counseled Presidents in difficult times, including George Bush senior and junior.

In recent years, poor health has impacted on the normal, busy schedule. Billy Graham makes less personal appearances due to his long standing Parkinson's disease, recently diagnosed prostate cancer and other medical problems. His son Franklin, who has followed his father's footsteps into evangelism, is carrying on his work, preaching and helping to run his various projects. Part of the work involves the supervision of the new Billy Graham Library, which is due to be finished in 2007. This will host exhibitions and show films. The Training Center, which is in the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Reverend's home state, runs bible studies and seminars and can be hired by groups as a weekend retreat. The baton has been passed from father to son and the same message continues.