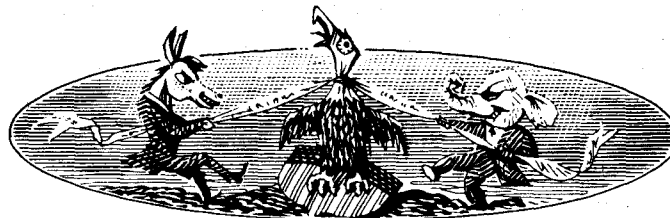


# CAPITOL IDEAS



## BILLY BEE

by Tom Bethell

By the mid 1970s, Billy Graham began to hear the murmuring of innumerable bees. "Be a better Billy," the Hive would drone in his ear. At that time Watergate weighed heavily on Billy's mind. Maybe it was true after all, as they had always said of him, that he was too respectful of the powers that be, too close to Nixon . . . Hm . . . This doubt weakened Billy—made him vulnerable to the Hive, and the worker bees knew it. They spent their days endlessly pollinating public opinion, and some of them—scout bees—kept an eye on Billy Graham. With a little concerted effort, the Hive knew that there was a chance it could assimilate Billy into . . . the cause—the goal on behalf of which the elements of the Hive instinctively labor.

"Billy," the Hive would hum, "you've been too close to Johnson, too close to Nixon. He was discredited, you know—crimes in high places. You may have been a little tainted with the same brush, Billy. Remember the unindicted co-conspirators? But we won't say another word about it. Just get on the side of history. Grow a little. Open up to new ideas. Help us build a new society, a society of justice and peace. Stop trying to impose your old views, legislate morality, turn the clock back. You can't fight reality, can you Billy? So don't fight us . . ."

Yes, Billy thought, it was time to grow. He had heard somehow (on the grapevine) that they might let him lead a crusade to the Soviet Union. Perhaps this could be his biggest and most important ever. He could preach to the Russians at last. Not that there was any more need to overcome Communism. That was dead, wasn't it? 'Fifties talk. No one believed in it anymore. The ideology was defunct, moribund, because it couldn't adapt

to change. So he wouldn't have to say anything about Communism. No more Cold War rhetoric (in fact, it might even be McCarthyism to mention it).

So now Billy Graham had grown. He was open to new ideas (and willing to discard old ones). Yes, he would be happy to meet with Mr. Brezhnev if the need or opportunity arose. Yes, he would go to a Moscow peace conference. No, he wouldn't listen if the Reagan Administration told him not to go. A peace conference? Did someone say peace? Billy was for it and opposed to nuclear weapons in every shape or form. Hadn't the United States and the Soviet Union been aligned once before against a common enemy? Well, now they were again—against the nuclear threat.

Billy's only regret was that he hadn't learned these things sooner. "Frankly I wish I'd read more and spoken less," he said to a *Parade* magazine reporter in 1981. "I've come to understand that there are no

simplistic answers to the exceedingly complicated questions we face as a country—and as a planet."

Wasn't that a honey? Billy had learned to speak Hivetalk. Or so it seemed. And if he was speaking the right lingo, he must be thinking the right thoughts. Sure it should have been "complex" problems, not "complicated," but what a small gaffe for one who had journeyed so far in such a short period. Bill Moyers, a former preacher from the South who had likewise "made passage" to the kingdom of rich liberals in the East, must have been mighty proud of the old unregenerate anti-Communist Billy. My, how that Billah had transcended and metamorphosed and regenerated and pupated—in a word, grown.

"[Graham] often speaks of a personal 'pilgrimage' that has led him to regard the ending of the arms race as 'my number one social concern,'" wrote Kenneth Briggs of the *New York Times*. He added (almost superfluously): "Others believe Mr.

Graham has adopted the right approach by raising the subject of arms control in a way that prompts others to think for themselves."

There. The dunce's cap had been ceremoniously removed from Billy's head. Billy was not only thinking more. He was prompting others to think, too.

Bruce Morton, busy bee at CBS, soon picked up the Billy-signals and came chiming across the airwaves with a nice little congratulatory send-off for the Moscow-bound preacher. Same message, same language. "So he is speaking on this college tour," Brucie-bee concluded, "and next month as an observer at a Soviet-sponsored peace conference where he expects to deliver the same message. The heart of Graham's message remains traditional evangelism, a call to salvation through Christ. But he is now . . . [wait for it] . . . thinking and speaking out strongly about disarmament and urging the thousands who come to see him to think about it too."



Billy had made the interior journey. Now he would have to make the geographical one. Could he really deliver the same message from the precarious but all-important Moscow platform, and so make us think even more than we were already thinking? The Hive was abuzz with excitement and apprehension, waiting to see what the next few days would bring.

He flew to Moscow and right away met for over three hours with Georgi Arbatov, one of the top Soviet propagandists (sometimes seen on CBS and heard on the Voice of America). Graham emerged from the Arbatov meeting and said to the assembled reporters: "I have met a very wonderful official here."

Ouch. Careful there, Billy. All you had to say was ". . . problems that face us all . . ." Not "very wonderful official." Gauche. Obviously this wrong-knife-and-fork-Southern Baptist Billy didn't really know his

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bees and clues after all and he would have to be watched carefully. The spirit was willing, but the tongue was weak.

Then he went to Moscow's only Baptist Church and reminded the congregation of KGB agents and party officials to "obey the authorities," in accordance with the Epistle to the Romans. The officials sat stolidly in their pews, heeding the advice. On then to the peace conference. This was followed by a meeting with Boris Ponomarev, who was recently described in the *Washington Post* as "the Politburo member responsible for the world communist movement." (One had thought this was composed of "indigenous" parts, with no overall responsibility in Moscow, but we defer to the *Post*'s Don Oberdorfer on this issue.) Graham was more discreet about Boris than he had been about Georgi. But at the subsequent press conference he blew the whole trip in a few moments of careless talk.

First of all, he tactlessly criticized "the false notion that there is no religious freedom in this country . . . Saturday night I went to three Orthodox churches that were jammed to capacity. You wouldn't get that in Charlotte, North Carolina."

Graham just couldn't leave well

enough alone, embarrassingly repeating the errors of George Bernard Shaw and the Webbs, and with even less excuse after fifty years. "The meals I have had are among the finest I have ever eaten," he said. "In the United States you have to be a millionaire to have caviar, but I have had caviar with almost every meal."

Bad Billy! Now the Hive was in a sullen rage. The usual news media dynamic of denial and confrontation (normally so helpful to the Hive) went ahead as expected, with unreliaables like Dusko Doder of the *Washington Post* and Serge Schmemmann of the *New York Times* getting ample space to take issue with the hapless preacher's defense of the Soviet Union. Doder teased about the cost of caviar to the average Soviet citizen, and Schmemmann even had a big spread on a subject the *Times* has skirted like a colony of lepers: the persecution of Christianity in the Soviet Union. Normally such taboo topics were kept out of sight by calling them "not newsworthy," but now Billy the Bad had put them near the top of the news agenda.

Colman McCarthy of the *Washington Post* was sitting in the Hive quivering with indignation—and

sharpening his quill and his sting. Billy had come near the Hive, but he had shown that he could not read or transmit correct signals. Nothing could be more dangerous. As a result everything had become stirred up in the wrong way. Good-writer Colman McCarthy, one of the more ferocious guard-bees of the Hive, would deliver the sting.

Colman McCarthy had spent five years inside another kind of cell—in a Trappist monastery in central Georgia. But . . . somehow it hadn't quite worked out. He left before taking vows. And so he came out into the world again—with a sharp sting in his tail. Such a background of course made him a perfect candidate for the Hive—the community of apostates.

McCarthy's antennae, unlike Graham's, were in perfect working order. Did he have to be *told* who needed stinging and when? Did he need *instructions from Moscow*? Of course he didn't! He was indigenous, autonomous, and independent—like all the other bees in the Hive. To get his "instructions" he needed only to pick up the newspaper or turn on the TV (where as it happened Billy Graham was catching more flak from David Brinkley's guests on ABC).

So Colman McCarthy came zipping out of the Hive and quilled a sharp

column entitled "The Duping of Billy Graham." Billy had been "snookered by the Soviets," McCarthy wrote—but it wasn't the Soviets, the dupers, who irritated him. Far from it. It was Billy Graham. But it wasn't Billy's gullibility that bothered him either. It was the far graver sin of indiscretion.

"Any easing of the American phobia of things Russian, Marxist or Soviet is welcome," buzzed Colman the Guardian Bee. "But Graham wasn't content with this modest contribution. He had to *blab indiscriminately* about religious freedom, obedience to the state, and the caviar" [emphasis added].

Billy, meaning nothing but good, had embarrassed the Hive. There would have to be a prolonged period in a re-education camp before they would let him near its portals again. Meanwhile Colman McCarthy had firmly thrust the dunce's cap back on Billy's head—a plain language warning to any stray bees who might still be tuned in to the likes of Bruce Morton and Kenneth Briggs. "In Moscow, as everywhere else," Colman McCarthy concluded, "the pattern of Graham's career was on display: talking too much and thinking too little."

And that put Billy Graham back to square one. □

## EDITORIAL



### STOCKPILING FOR PEACE

Another month passes, and still no nuclear war reported. Some of the antinuke brethren must have been amazed by the news. Others are surely greatly relieved. But for those who actually evangelize for the antinuke crusade the passage of yet another month free of nuclear war merely heightens their tensions and convinces them that when the war of their dreams finally breaks out it will be even more devastating than anticipated.

For the most part, we are dealing with a very curious *mentalité* when we come across the antinuke cru-

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sader. What does one make of those who address an issue of the utmost importance, complexity, and danger as though the rest of the world did not exist? After all, peace depends not only upon America but also on some other countries, countries over which the peace marchers have no influence. The paradigmatic peace marcher seems almost to pride himself on his simplicity and his aloofness from the rest of the world.

When informed that an American disarmament or freeze is at best irrelevant to world peace so long as people like Papa Brezhnev have their nukes, the peace marcher's response is some cacophonous indulgence along the lines of "I don't care." It takes a rather voluminous egotist to pro-

pound an American nuclear defense policy as though the rest of the world did not matter. Nonetheless, egotism appears to be the major component in this spring's movement. Tom Wolfe's *Me-maniac* has entered politics; the smoke of the smoke-filled room is replaced by the fumes of herbal tea. The peace demonstrator's goal is to strike the seemingly pose, much like those Pecksniffs who flaunt bumper stickers proclaiming "Caution, I brake for small animals."

The latter manifestation of self-righteousness merely amuses. The former could be dangerous. After all, in nuclear terms American defense policy has been a success. For almost four decades there has been no nuclear war. Deterrence has worked,

which apparently just worries our demonstrators all the more.

How do they explain the passage of another month free of nuclear holocaust, some 1,925 weeks since Nagasaki? Was it their huge peace procession in New York City? Doubtless many believe that the procession was a powerful blow for peace, but then there are also Americanoes who believe that a horse hair kept in a jar or a dirty sock worn around the neck will prevent illness and plague. Actually, American power is what saves us from nuclear holocaust. Were we without the power, who can say with confidence that some future domestic instability within the Soviet

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.