

President Questioned By Graham

By Marjorie Hyer

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Evangelist Billy Graham says many of President Nixon's judgments in connection with the Watergate scandal "have been very poor" and that he ought to admit them.

Graham stopped short of placing any blame on the President for the scandal, but said he told Mr. Nixon last weekend that "when you have made a mistake, it's far better to admit it."

"Until there is more proof to the contrary, I have confidence in the President's integrity," Graham said in an interview for the evangelical publication *Christianity Today*. "But some of his judgments have been wrong and I just don't agree with them."

Among the President's mistakes, the evangelist said, have been in letting himself become isolated from the public and "in the selection of certain people" as his advisers.

Graham also voiced surprise over the handling of the President's finances. He said he was surprised at the small amount Mr. Nixon reported giving to charities in relation to his total income, and he said he thought the use of federal funds for some of the improvements at Mr. Nixon's San Clemente and Key Biscayne estates set a poor example.

But here, too, Graham suggested that the fault may have been "in that his finances and contributions were left to other people."

"He had some very bad advice," the evangelist said in the interview for the magazine's forthcoming issue. "The General Accounting Office says too casual an attitude prevailed. Apparently that was right. It seems to me some of these expenses ought to have been called personal."

A long-time friend of the President, Graham interrupted one of his crusades in Europe last weekend, at the President's special request, for services at the White House, where Graham preached a sermon on repentance.

Picking up the same theme in the interview, Graham said,

"I've had to admit errors in judgment, and I found Christian people more than generous in understanding my faults. It's better to show humility and it's better to say 'I'm wrong' or 'I'm sorry' when you've made a mistake."

Graham said he could make no excuse for the Watergate scandal. "The actual break-in was a criminal act," he said, "and some other things that surround Watergate, too, were not only unethical, but criminal. I condemn it and I deplore it. It has hurt America."

The evangelist emphasized that he does not know the full story about Watergate and that he could not make a fair judgment on it "except to say that someone had committed perjury."

He also said that "mistakes and blunders have been made" and that he felt sure "if Mr. Nixon could redo many things, he would."

"That's the reason that I feel that if there's any way he can get his credibility back—which may not be possible—he now would make a stronger, better President," Graham said.