

# Religious Americans 'Not

By Marjorie Hyer

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"They're not mad. They're not bitter. They're not violent. They don't want to blow up something.

"They're just hurt."

That's the effect the White House transcript have had on millions of God-fearing Americans—who up until a fortnight ago had cherished Richard Nixon in their pantheon of moral mentors.

For many, Richard Nixon had stood on a pedestal only a little lower than Billy Graham.

"He's been a symbol. A Quaker. You think of a people who are godly. Pious. The contrast is something that hurts the heart."

When the Rev. Dr. W. A. Criswell talks about it, his voice is hushed, like a man newly bereaved. The clergyman, pastor of the nation's largest Baptist church First Baptist in Dallas—and a past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, had supported Mr. Nixon and worked for his re-election.

Now, the country is in a "time of grief and despair . . . Everybody feels this way," he said. "It is not just me."

The Dallas pastor is one of the most respected figures among the 40 million or so conservative, "Bible-believing," evangelical Protestants in this country who have been among Mr. Nixon's strongest supporters.

Dr. Criswell is far from

alone in voicing disappointment now.

The leading voice of evangelical Protestantism in America is the Washington-based fortnightly, Christianity Today.

The lead editorial in the magazine's current issue says of Mr. Nixon: ". . . The transcripts show him to be a person who has failed gravely to live up to the moral demands of our Judeo-Christian heritage. We do not expect perfection, but we rightly expect our leaders, and especially our President, to practice a higher level of morality than the tapes reveal."

The magazine declares: "There can be no doubt that a large percentage of those who voted for Richard Nixon in November, 1972, no longer have confidence in him and that his capacity to execute the functions of his office has been considerably reduced."

Among evangelical Protestants, Eternity magazine is almost as influential as Christianity Today.

Executive editor William J. Peterson a Nixon backer in 1972, said Philadelphia, Mr. Nixon's support among evangelicals has fallen drastically. He said the release of the transcripts "confirmed the fears we had on the whole thing. The evangelical community is shocked to get into the back room and find out how hypocritical everything was."



EDWARD V. HILL  
... appears unmoved

It was the "hypocrisy of it that jolted people," he said. "Nixon was put before the public as a religious man, so circumspect."

The profane language on the tapes "is just a surface thing," he said.

"There is much more concern for the deeper issues—the way he handles people, his lack of concern for the long term. . ."

The most revered leader of the evangelical Protestants is Billy Graham. The evangelist has been a frequent guest in the White House and in 1970 President Nixon made a personal appearance at a Graham crusade in Knoxville, the heart of the Bible Belt.

Reached recently at his Montreat, N.C., retreat, Dr.

Graham said he was "unpleasantly surprised in some areas" as he read the transcripts, but added that he had not finished and wanted to do so before commenting in detail.

Until then, he said, he will stand on what he told the Associated Press shortly after the transcripts were released: "I think from knowing him (President Nixon), if he's the same man I used to know, I think he will put what's best for the country above everything else. I think he will look at it from the long view, the historical view, and do what he thinks best to protect the presidency and the country."

Dr. Graham broke sharply with tradition when he announced that he supported Mr. Nixon in 1972. Unlike the more liberal wing of Protestantism, conservative evangelical churchmen traditionally shy away from taking official stands on secular issues.

Another break with that tradition came when the Rev. Dr. Harold J. Ockenga, pastor of Boston's historical Park Street Church and president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, used his considerable influence to mobilize support for the President among evangelical leaders.

Dr. Ockenga told a 1972 luncheon whose guest list read like a Who's Who of theological conservatism in America that he backed Mr.



# Mad' at Nixon, 'Just Hurt'

Nixon "because of the high moral integrity displayed in his public, personal and family life."

Last week, Dr. Ockenga said that while he had read only a few excerpts from the transcripts, he was "disappointed in the moral tone."

Dr. Ockenga declined to comment in detail until he has read the transcripts more fully, but he criticized the President for his failure to release the subpoenaed tapes of White House conversations—the logical strategy, he said, "if the man is innocent."

A reporter's survey of nearly a score of evangelical Protestant leaders disclosed only one who appeared unmoved by the transcripts—though a number of others declined to comment because they had not read them.

The Rev. E. V. Hill, pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles and one of the few black clergymen invited to preach at the White House, professed no interest in the transcripts issue because the whole controversy over Watergate "took up too much time . . ."

"If this nation would devote one-tenth of the time they've given to Watergate to finding housing and jobs and equal opportunity for people, we would have overcome 10 years ago," Mr. Hill complained.

In the black community,



**BILLY GRAHAM**  
... "unpleasantly surprised"

he said, "We don't care about Southgate or Watergate or whatever. All that's on the other side of the tracks from us."

Another black pastor, the Rev. James L. Richard of Oakland, Calif., had a different view.

"I feel that no man is any higher than the laws of the state . . . I feel that one who is the head of the government should set the standard for this country and give the youth something to live up to."

Noting that he had worked for Mr. Nixon's election, Mr. Richard said he now believed that "If he doesn't resign, the people of the United States ought to put him out."

The Rev. Dr. Lester Har-

nish, pastor of the prestigious Third Baptist Church in St. Louis and a former president of the American Baptist Convention is another Nixon supporter who was disillusioned by the transcripts.

"My first reaction was astonishment at the lack of moral sensitivity they showed. I've had a very high regard for the President. I've been in the White House and met him . . ."

"Now I am struck by the utter void of moral sensitivity, the lack of commitment to the spiritual welfare of America . . ."

"There is no evidence that he is anything other than a political animal. There is no shock or indignation at what is being done to the affairs of the nation. It is political thinking at the lowest level," Dr. Harnish said.

"I sincerely feel President Nixon should resign," he said.

Even though he said he saw no grounds for impeachment in the transcripts, "America is at such a low ebb, at such a black moment in history. He should resign for the good of the country," Dr. Harnish said.

The 12 million-member Southern Baptist Convention is the nation's largest Protestant body and the bulwark of evangelical Protestantism.

When the convention holds its annual meeting in Dallas next month, the messengers, as the delegates are

called, will be asked to vote on a resolution on integrity in government that, among other things, urges church members to pray "that we may be delivered from the current malignancy of deceit and distrust and discord."

The Rev. Dr. Foy Valentine, head of the church's Christian Life Commission, said he expected the resolution to pass.

"I find just utter moral outrage at this sorry state of affairs," he said of the situation reflected in the transcripts. "It's made worse by the hypocrisy."

The hypocrisy theme—and concomitant feelings of betrayal—ran through the comments of many churchmen.

As if to underline the point, the Christianity Today editorial unearthed a statement made by Mr. Nixon during his 1960 television debates with John F. Kennedy.

Said the editorial: "What he said then about 'dignity and decency, and frankly, good language' in the conduct of the presidency makes ironic reading now:

" 'And I only hope that should I win this election, that I could [see] to it that whenever any mother or father talks to his child, he can look at the man in the White House and say: 'Well, there is a man who maintains the kind of standards personally that I would want my child to follow.' "