

Graham Says Nixon Deserves Prayers

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By EDWARD B. FISKE

The Rev. Billy Graham, the evangelist who is a close personal friend of President Nixon, said last night that the President deserved the prayers "even of those who feel betrayed and let down."

"I feel sorry for President Nixon and his family," he said in an interview. "I will always consider him a friend. His personal suffering must be almost unbearable."

Mr. Graham's comments were in keeping with the general reaction to Mr. Nixon's announcement of his resignation by religious leaders across the country, including several who, like the evangelist, have had a pastoral relationship with the President.

Graham Urges Unity

In remarks, Mr. Graham, who was reached at a New York hotel, expressed the hope that Americans would "put the tragedy of Watergate behind us once and for all." He urged them to "unite behind our new President" and "turn to God in a fresh way."

"As a nation, we have abandoned God and sought to run our own affairs without regard to His law," he said. "We are now reaping the bitter fruits of this. We need to turn to God in humble repentance and faith before a worse judgment befalls us. We must not assume our problems are now over. They will only be over when we turn to God and seek His will with all our hearts."

"I pray that from this whole painful affair may be reborn a new commitment to God and His law in our national life. If this happens, then the tragedy of Watergate might still make a positive contribution."

Mr. Graham said that he had not spoken to Mr. Nixon during the recent crisis but added, "I would like to go visit him next week as a friend."

The Rev. T. Eugene Coffin, pastor of the East Whittier Friends Church in East Whittier, Calif., where Mr. Nixon is a member, called him "one of America's great Presidents."

He said that the President was "the victim of the ques-

tionable though accepted practice in political circles of acting on the basis of political expediency," and emphasized that he and his congregation would stand by Mr. Nixon during this period of difficulty.

"I believe that he has done what he feels is the right thing for the country no matter what it costs him," he declared.

The Rev. John Huffman, the former pastor of the Key Biscayne Presbyterian Church, which Mr. Nixon frequently attended when he was at his home in Key Biscayne, Fla., termed the resignation "the very best thing for the nation."

Says He Lied

"Here is a case in which a law and order President has for over two years consistently lied to the American people," he said in an interview. "He lied to me personally. When I went to him with my concerns on Watergate personally over a year and a half ago, he told me he was doing everything within his power to get to the very heart of the matter."

Mr. Huffman, who is now pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, called yesterday's developments "a tragedy for the family and the man" but added: "Justice must be served. It's time for him to face not only political realities but moral ones."

Many religious leaders urged the country to respond to the change in leadership with renewed concern for morality in public life. The Right Rev. Paul Moore Jr., Episcopal Bishop of New York, for instance, declared: "We now have before us the greatest opportunity of our lifetime to complete the purification of our political process [and] to insist on complete integrity in public office."

Archbishop Iakovos, the Greek Orthodox Primate of North and South America, called the developments "a triumph for decency, democracy and truth" and said that they stood as a lesson that "moral principles and values have greater validity than all temporal powers and authorities."

In a joint statement, the chief administrative officers of the National Council of Churches, the Synagogue Council of America and the United States Catholic Conference called the announcement of Mr. Nixon's resignation "an awesome moment in the life of our nation" but also one that can be "a fresh beginning."

"Watergate is not what American political life is all about any more than Mylai was characteristic of United States foreign policy," they said. "Integrity, honesty, vision and a sense of high moral purpose—these are the marks of the American political tradition. These are characteristics Americans are seeking to regain again now."

The statement was signed by Claire Randall, general secretary of the church council, Rabbi Henry Siegman, executive vice president of the synagogue council, and the Most Rev. James S. Rausch, general secretary of the Catholic organization.

For Country's Good

Rabbi Seymour Siegel, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary who gave one of the prayers at the last Presidential inauguration and was a vigorous supporter of Mr. Nixon for re-election in 1972, said that the resignation was "required for the good of the country" and urged Americans to "rally around Gerald Ford and help him bind up the wounds of a troubled nation."

Several clergymen urged Americans to resist being judgmental. The Rev. Joseph S. Stephens, who as pastor of the San Clemente Presbyterian Church in California preached before Mr. Nixon on three occasions, said that yesterday's events should be taken as a reminder that all men are sinners.

"God has a tape recording of all that is going on," he said. "He has revealed to us that some day there is coming a judgment when all the secrets of men's hearts are revealed. These events should be a challenge to us to do what God wants us to do in the light of eternity."