

# IRISH CENTRAL SMEARS BILLY GRAHAM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an Irish Central article on Rev. Billy Graham:

As I have pointed out before, Niall O'Dowd of Irish Central is a proud Irishman and an irresponsible critic of the Catholic Church, one who takes delight in Church scandals, real and contrived. So to read a piece by him complaining about the alleged anti-Catholicism of Rev. Billy Graham is enough to make me reach for the vomit bag.

"Billy Graham Tried to Stop JFK Becoming President Because He Was Catholic." That is the title of O'Dowd's article. The evidence he marshals does not support such an incendiary charge.

It is one thing to say that many Protestant leaders were uncomfortable with the thought of a Catholic president. That much is true. But to say that they conspired to stop John F. Kennedy from becoming president is quite another.

There is an axiom that true scholars follow (that would certainly not include O'Dowd): the more serious the charge, especially when made against prominent public figures, the more serious the evidence must be. Otherwise, one looks like the fool Christopher Hitchens was when he tried to besmirch Mother Teresa.

O'Dowd's case rests on a meeting of about 25 Protestant American leaders, held in Montreux, Switzerland in August 1960, that was convened by Graham. He quotes from a note by the wife of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Ruth, about what happened. "They were unanimous in feeling that the Protestants in America must be aroused in some way, or the solid block of Catholic voting, plus money, will take this election."

What O'Dowd leaves out is what happened next. A few weeks later, on September 7, Peale, a popular author, convened a meeting of Protestant leaders—it was a one-day conference in Washington—to discuss the “philosophical” implications of having a Catholic president.

O'Dowd says that Graham was the “prime mover” of the event. Really? Then why wasn't he there? This doesn't matter to O'Dowd, who takes the occasion to indict Graham as an anti-Catholic. That's the whole of his “evidence.”

In contrast to O'Dowd's dishonest account, consider what liberal Catholic *New York Times* reporter Peter Steinfels said about this Peale-Graham story in 1992.

“Long before their Montreux meeting,” writes Steinfels, “both Mr. Graham and Dr. Peale had been giving low-level support to their friend Mr. Nixon. But this is not a story of political manipulation of religious issues, in the fashion of today's political handlers. *Nor is it a case of lurid anti-Catholicism.*” (My italics.)

Steinfels continues his fair-minded assessment. “Mr. Graham and Dr. Peale are simply respectable religious leaders whose vision of the United States inextricably merged Protestant Christianity, moral revival and anti-Communist leadership in the cold war. *They had—and have—anti-Catholic counterparts among liberals* who simply assume that secularism, free thought and scientific progress are an indissoluble whole.” (My emphasis.)

Today, of course, it is liberals, not Protestants, who are the most notorious anti-Catholics.

After Kennedy was elected, Graham said that Kennedy's victory “had proved there was not as much religious prejudice as many had feared, and probably had reduced forever the importance of the religious issue in American elections.” Not the kind of thing we would expect from a Catholic basher.

O'Dowd hates Graham not because the gifted orator was anti-Catholic—he was not—but because he was a conservative Christian who rallied the masses.

In 1999, Graham contacted me about an article that accused him of being anti-Catholic. He was incensed. He had a right to be. After researching the story, I concluded it was a malicious smear. Just like what O'Dowd is doing now.

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