

Triumph of Tolerance

Leaving his hotel in Lima Peru, one day last week, the Rev. Billy Graham was buttonholed by a Catholic clergyman. "We priest could not go to hear you," the man said almost apologetically, "but I want you to know that we who heard you on the radio were impressed by what you said — and what you said were words of God."

In overwhelmingly Catholic Latin America, this was a warm gesture indeed. Moreover, it was fairly typical of the surprisingly amiable reception encountered by the evangelist during his four-week crusade through Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile.

The U.S. State Department had been nervous about Dr. Graham's plan to preach in Bogota, Colombia, where Catholic-Protestant relations are particularly touchy. "As it turned out," reported the evangelist, "there was nothing, not one jeer. Not one stone was thrown. There was nothing but warm welcome everywhere. All of it was far beyond anything we had anticipated." The reason for this Dr. Graham guessed, was Pope John's "tolerance and understanding of other religious groups" and also President Kennedy's Latin-American visit, which

"brought a lot of goodwill and made it easy for me."

Obviously, Dr. Graham was intentionally overlooking one sour incident in Colombia. There, the mayor of Barranquilla barred him from using the municipal stadium on the ground that his advance worker had broken a law allowing only Catholics to proselyte in public. Unswerved by this obstacle, the evangelist shifted the meeting to the grounds of a Presbyterian school and drew a whooping crowd of 19,000 for two meetings. Later a leading Catholic citizen apologized for the mayor's ruling, and a group of Protestant clergy presented Dr. Graham with a set of cuff links and an emerald-studded tie clasp. "There is a strong and dynamic Protestantism in South-America with great courage, faith and boldness in the face of many difficulties," said Billy.

In Quito, Galo Plaza, former President of Ecuador, summed up much of Latin America's reaction to the evangelist when he declared that his preaching — attended by some 400,000 people — transcended religious barriers. "Dr. Graham's campaign," he said, "is benefiting all — Catholics, Protestants, and non-Christians."

—*Newsweek* Feb. 26 1962

