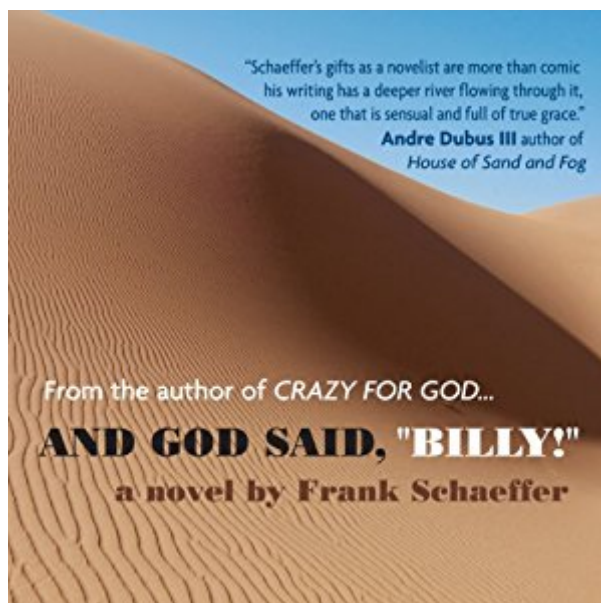


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And God Said, Billy!: A Novel



Synopsis

And God Said 'Billy!' is a darkly comic coming-of-age story written by the master story teller that House of Sand and Fog author Andre Dubus III hailed as the funniest American writer since Mark Twain. The story is set in the 1980s and is about Billy, a young fundamentalist Christian who feels called to go to Hollywood to make "God's movie." But everything goes off the rails when he accepts a job to direct a soft-porn slasher/exploitation film in apartheid-era South Africa. He makes this "It's a deal not a movie" picture even though he has to bust the US entertainment industry's anti-apartheid sanctions in hopes his "worldly movie" will be "used by God" as a "stepping stone" to making his own divinely sanctioned "End Times" picture. Billy loses his fundamentalist faith, his film career, his family and more.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The uncompromising faith of a particular band of evangelicals, their child-like obedience to authority and their absolute certainty that God's will is for them to be wealthy and successful are ingeniously rendered by an author who has been there/done that. Frank Schaeffer, who grew up among such people, shows the danger their naiveté poses--to themselves. Billy, happily married and the father of a three year old daughter, is a true believer. Music Director of a small evangelical church, Billy thinks that God ordains everything that happens in his life. He passes out "in the spirit" in a church service and has a vision of Hollywood. Upon awakening, he relates the experience to Pastor Jim who says that God wants Billy to make a movie. About God. Billy, knowing no one in Hollywood

and nothing about movie-making, forsakes his wife and daughter and--with the financial support of the church--moves across the continent to Tinseltown. After a while, God (allegedly) tells Pastor Jim to stop sending money. Then God tells Pastor Jim that Billy may not return home until the movie is done. Billy, Pastor Jim and others in *God Said "Billy!"* use scripture to justify what they want to do and when scripture doesn't suit them, they conveniently hear the Voice of God telling them to ignore this verse or that one. (Yes, God has a Voice--many of them. Billy's favorite is God's NASCAR-announcer Voice.) God gives Billy verbal permission to do the extra-Biblical things he needs in order to survive--such as stealing purses to pay his rent; and finding ways--after all this time away from his wife--to assuage his carnal desires. Year after lonely year, Billy toils in Hollywood unable to get his foot in the door. Hollywood crushes him, but he refuses to admit it, seeing success in every failure, and the Hand of God in everything that happens. Billy finally gets involved in a movie project, but it's not a Godly one. On the surface, this novel is a casual, humorous read for everyone. For some, like myself, it's a poignant reminder of our evangelical pasts. (I believe Schaeffer accurately describes every personality type I've known in the "movement.") For the reader interested in the advent of evangelicals as a political force, this book shows how leaders can manipulate a credulous flock. Imagining how this novel came to be, I can almost hear God--in his NASCAR voice--saying, "Frank! I want you to write a novel about a church Music Director sent to Hollywood to make a movie about Me!" And Frank Schaeffer says, "God, I'm a serious writer about the confluence of religion and politics in America!" And God says, "Frank, claim your victory in advance! Claim the humorous satire of Mark Twain! Claim the snappy rhetoric and plotting of Elmore Leonard! Claim these things, Frank, and you will write a successful novel!" And Frank wrote *God Said "Billy!"*

As a Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College graduate I have lived from *ÃfÂçÃ â ÑÃ Å* "within *ÃfÂçÃ â ÑÃ Å* the framework of personal involvement with the fundamentalist, evangelical and post evangelical experience. Like the author I have not lost faith but outgrown most of what it was taught without regret or diminution of my love for God. I have a good friend who is retired the Presbyterian Church USA who sees things much the same way. I lament that the old way of seeing things was never true because in his youth it was so comforting but like you and me he is a lover of what is, what is true and has of necessity moved beyond. He says that ministers who are moving beyond are constrained by congregants who would fire the minister who would dare have an *ÃfÂçÃ â ÑÃ Å* "authentic *ÃfÂçÃ â ÑÃ Å* message from God. He asks, what are such ministers to do? Resign, keep quiet, etc.? You write it so well, in *ÃfÂçÃ â ÑÃ Å* "Hello

Billy's comment is made that the Indian Muti shop owner does not believe in what he advises and sells any more than "all pastors" "so true. I call most pastors "Sunday Morning Atheists"---who deal with fantasy and would tremble in their robes if they believed that there really was a God, the kind of God they reference. And, if they preached that kind of God, that kind of God would be unworthy of worship or obedience. I tell those who would listen that I do NOT worship God because all worship is a kowtowing for manipulations in my favor as if I can get God to change its mind. Instead I readily express the gratitude that enlarges my heart. I admire the author's candor, bravado and willingness to tell his own story in opposition to any incredible received theology which in my opinion denigrates the very notion of God's character. In "Hello Billy" the author makes this point throughout. Frank is among the growing number who will risk much by telling their own understanding of things based on a first-hand relationship with God and Christian institutions. In "Hello Billy" contrary to some comments reviewed on this site I did decidedly not find the book at all humorous. If I had been an outsider, perhaps so, but as an insider who is empathetic to Billy's emerging painful understanding of the nature of God and things, I saw struggle, comic in its being pathetic, but not at all funny. Billy, in my opinion, lived out to the fullest, even to the point of banal trivialities (as so many do in real life as they imagine the petty and as you so well point out, often with immoral motive or consequence). That Billy would have a Bible verse for virtually anything Billy wanted to do is right on target and from my experience so realistic and not humorous to Billy or the millions of Billy's out there. These Billy's as you write are cheered on by national Christian characters mentioned in the book and so many more. I read "Hello Billy" with great interest and appreciation as a modern "Pilgrim's Progress" "painful, slow, and demanding hard work of from Billy in developing a revised meaning for his own life.. But, I was not sure early on the direction of the book and its intended readership. Also, I being no stranger to expletives of all sorts was somewhat "off-put" by their generous use and I do not for a moment think that your characters do not talk that way, but rather I am considering reader reaction. This is not at all a "moral" matter with me but a matter of maintaining reader attention and interest. The author's treatment of sexual hypocrisy is right to the point and an

important part of *“Hello Billy”* ---In my opinion, Christianity has never had a theology of sex except *“don’t* and so-called biblical view of marriage does not hold up even with a casual reading of scripture. In fact, the Bible’s very first commandment was the only commandment supported by *“instant gratification”* *“be fruitful and multiply* and then human kind is for the most part told *“don’t* *“Hello Billy”* in passing realistically touches upon this conundrum. Lou Tulga

I had read a few other books by Frank Schaeffer, so when I bought this one I sat down to read it with a different frame of mind. At first the book seemed to be all jumbled up to me not making any sense whatsoever. When I finally realized it was satire, then I was able to read with enjoyment. The book pokes fun of fundamentalist. The main character, Billy Graham, not the evangelists, thinks he’s on a quest for God to make a Christian movie one day, but before he gets to the task he encounters life. He deals with life by quoting scriptures to justify his behavior, and communicates with the various voices in his head, including God. His rationales are beyond belief. I found myself laughing at him, judging him or seeing today’s so called Christians in him. With the politics of USA being so polarized today I can imagine the "far right" acting justified with their unChristlike behavior towards others and falsely backing up these beliefs with the misuse of scripture. (I almost felt ashamed to be called a Christian seeing how the foolish souls operate in today’s society.) If one is part of the far right thinking, then this book will not be enjoyable to read...may feel offended and see it as blasphemy. Others may read it and say, "see...this is the reason I don’t want to believe" but yet there will probably be a people who will just read it as satire and then walk away thinking it’s a so-so to good book to read. I find myself in the last category. Will I recommend this book to others? I guess this will be determined by the audience asking the question. Not for young people just getting started in the faith, because it could confuse/or lead to atheism. Not for sceptics or judgemental Christians. Recommend only to those who have open minds and can appreciate good satire.

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