

# Hungary hears the word of Graham

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Susan Viets in Budapest

**B**ILLY Graham, now a household name in Hungary, preached to a crowd of 90,000 on Saturday evening.

This latest visit to Hungary — his fourth in 12 years — has shown Hungarians just how far-reaching the recent liberalisation of religious affairs is.

The advance publicity was widespread. In 1977, when Mr Graham first visited, preachers were not allowed to announce the event to their congregations. This time, cities, towns, and villages across Hungary were decorated with colour posters advertising free admission to the sermon as well as a 50 per cent reduction on train fares to the event.

Mr Graham was interviewed on television, he met church and state dignitaries, his sermon was broadcast live on radio and excerpts will appear on television. His best publicity coup, however, may have been to get his pic-

ture on the cover of last week's television guide.

Earlier this month the Hungarian Government abolished the state Office for Church Affairs, clearing the way after 40 years of church subordination, for separation of the Church from the State. The move was welcomed cautiously by religious leaders though some have expressed concern that a Church Policy Secretariat has been created.

At last week's central committee session, the Communists decided that atheism was no longer a prerequisite for party membership. So far the Christian Democrats is the only opposition group explicitly based on religion.

With opposition and party members facing a battle to rouse and win voters for the elections due next year, religion is bound to become important in campaigning.

Meanwhile, Mr Graham has dreams which stretch beyond Hungary's eastern border. His aides say he is now trying to organise a rally in Moscow.

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