

Billy Graham Protestant Evangelist

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[This booklet is a reprint of four articles which appeared in The Advocate, Melbourne, (November 20 and 27, 1958 and February 12 and 19, 1959.) Though somewhat dated, this pamphlet should be a rich source of interest historically, and for the light it throws on the Catholic attitude to "revivalists" in general.]

INTRODUCTION

WHEN we come to study a Protestant "revivalist" such as Billy Graham we find ourselves in a strange world, so some preliminary explanations are called for.

First of all, we are not dealing with the Church established by Christ our Lord, so we find ourselves exploring a world where there is no definite teaching authority, no Sacrifice, and few Sacraments. Further, Protestantism has no single visible head and it possesses no positive principle of unity. The "rule of faith" for every one of the hundreds of Protestant denominations is the Bible - as each denomination interprets it. Justification, according to common Protestant ideas, is by "faith" alone. This "faith" is a combination of belief, trust, and confidence.

Preaching within such a framework, the "revivalist" endeavours to produce a response from members of his audience. Generally this is understood as an emotional experience, occurring on a day and at an hour that the person in question could name. This is called "conversion." The "convert" is regarded as "saved" - from that day and hour.

Part 1: Graham's Life and Work - an Evaluation

EARLY LIFE

William Franklin Graham was born on 7 November 1918, in the Southern United States, in the town of Charlotte in the State of North Carolina, which borders on the Atlantic. His father was a Methodist who had experienced "conversion" in his youth. The mother, nee Morrow Coffey, was a Presbyterian and had never undergone an emotional "conversion."

The father owned a dairy-farm, and Billy had to help with the milking of the cows before school and sometimes with the ploughing after school. This was not good for examination results. Nevertheless Billy graduated in 1936.

Encouraged by Babe Ruth, Billy Graham dreamed of one day being a great baseball player, but that same summer (1936) there arrived in Charlotte a "revivalist" who faced the world with the name of Mordecai Ham. This fire-and-brimstone preacher was to change the course of young Graham's life.

FLORIDA BIBLE INSTITUTE

Having nothing else to do one night, Billy Graham went to the "revival" tent. The size of the crowd amazed him, but "Brother Ham" did not impress him so much. Several nights later he attended with

a young friend named Grady Wilson. Together these two made their "decision for Christ." They are still close friends, and Grady is "associate evangelist" to Graham.

In 1937 Graham entered the Florida Bible Institute, where Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist preachers did all the teaching. During this period he composed sermons and tried himself out as a preacher from a stump-pulpit beside an uncritical, if unresponsive, swamp. After one such rehearsal he felt "called" to be a preacher.

The Dean of the Bible Institute taught that a preacher must know his subject, believe his message, and deliver it with conviction. He thought that a preacher should produce results if he were really preaching the Word of God. The results he looked for were "conversions" - "seeing sinners saved by grace." Graham took these lessons to heart and he has always made a practice of inviting members of his audience to declare that they accept Jesus as their Saviour.

BAPTIST "REVIVALS"

Soon the Dean began to find real pulpits for Graham in country churches and trailer camps. Finally, he committed his own pulpit in Tampa church to Graham for six weeks. When the Dean returned from his holiday he found "the boy preacher from North Carolina" producing "a miniature revival."

In Charlotte young Graham attended his parents' church, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, an offshoot of the Southern Presbyterian Church, but some of his early "revivals", conducted while still a student at the Bible Institute, were in Southern Baptist churches. Now, these Baptists held that Baptism must be given by immersion, and during one of Graham's "revivals" in Florida a rumour spread that he had not been baptized by immersion. The "revival" was in danger and Graham faced the awkward situation. He admitted from the pulpit that he had never been immersed and he promised to remedy this at the end of the "crusade." At the end of the "revival" Billy Graham was immersed in a nearby lake, along with his "converts." According to his biographer, he described the ceremony as "a glorious experience". Perhaps, to him, it was, but it was also an expedient for saving his "crusade" and, apparently, he had already been baptized as a Presbyterian. This son, then, of a Methodist father and a Presbyterian mother had now become a Baptist. He was certainly well prepared for an inter-denominational ministry!

COLLEGE MARRIAGE

In 1940 Graham graduated from the Bible School. Later that year he was ordained by the St. John's Baptist Association of North Florida, but he decided that further education was desirable before embarking on the ministry. Accordingly, he enrolled at Wheaton College, near Chicago. This College was not only inter-denominational but also co-educational.

At Wheaton Graham met a young lady named Ruth Bell. Daughter of Presbyterian medical missionaries to China, she received her early education in Korea. Her great dream was to go to forbidden Tibet as a Christian missionary, but World War II brought her to the United States and Wheaton College, where she majored in Theology. Graham majored in Anthropology and in 1943 he received what we call a B.A. degree. In August of that year he married Ruth Bell. He had found not only a wife but also an invaluable help-mate in his "evangelistic" activities. Hence the saying: "Half Billy is Ruth."

TURNING POINT OF CAREER

For a year or so Mr. Graham was pastor of a Baptist church in Western Springs, Illinois, but he was hardly the man to settle down in a pastor's job. He felt his "call" was to be an "evangelist" and he was restless to be on the move. Early in 1945 he toured the United States on behalf of the "Youth For Christ" movement. On the same mission he made four trips to England. This gave him overseas experience. Back in the United States he conducted "revival" meetings much like those of many other American "evangelists."

The great turning-point in Graham's career came in 1949 with the "Christ For Greater Los Angeles Crusade." This was scheduled to run for three weeks. It ran for eight weeks. Billy Graham addressed about three hundred and fifty thousand people, of whom about two thousand seven hundred made their "decisions for Christ." What lifted Billy Graham into this "big-time evangelism"?

Near the end of the scheduled three weeks Graham wondered whether the "revival" should be extended. In his doubt he asked the Lord for a sign - "some visible, unmistakable evidence. . . . that continuing was His will" (High, Billy Graham, p. 147).

On what was to have been the last night of the "revival" Billy Graham arrived at the "crusade" tent and found waiting for him "the largest contingent of reporters, feature writers, and newspaper photographers he had ever faced." The explanation? William Randolph Hearst had sent a telegram to the editors of the Hearst Press: "Puff Graham." No one, I think, ever regarded Hearst as an angel from Heaven, but Billy Graham had his "sign" from the Lord - "visible, unmistakable evidence." He extended the "revival", and by the end of the "crusade" he had attained national fame.

Billy Graham had always felt uncomfortable about taking money for preaching the Gospel. To avoid any suggestion that he was preaching for what he could get out of it, he established the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Inc., in 1950. This Association is financed by the offerings of many admirers of Billy Graham and his activities. It pays Graham a fixed annual salary which is equivalent to about £3500 in our [1958 Australian] money. Allowing for the very high cost of living in the United States, this is scarcely an income on which an American citizen with a wife and several children could grow rich.

Mr. Graham himself is a tall, rather thin man, of athletic build. Blond, blue-eyed, alert, well-groomed, he still looks young at forty. His personal and family life are not only beyond reproach but are deeply religious. Dr. Graham is a man who reads his Bible assiduously and prays constantly in private and without embarrassment in public.

The best account, so far as I am aware, of Dr. Graham and his activities is the book by Stanley High: Billy Graham. The Personal Story of the Man, His Message, and His Mission. This was published by The World's Work last year (275 pp., 21/- sterling. [1957])

This is my main source for the above biographical information.

UNCRITICAL EMOTION

Mr. High has been a senior editor of the Reader's Digest since 1952, and on assignment from this periodical he covered a number of Dr. Graham's "crusades." Dr. Graham's paper and the records of his organization were put at Mr. High's disposal when he was preparing this book. Few references are given, but we must take the information and contents as reliable. This does not mean that we are committed to Mr. High's interpretations of the facts or of Dr. Graham's message and what Mr. High prefers to call his "mission."

Mr. High is a reporter and he does his job well and is perfectly sincere. Nevertheless, the principles by which he judges are not always valid and he seems to be swept along on a wave of uncritical emotion. He does not seem to see that what matters is the real nature of a thing, not some superficial resemblance. For example, St. Paul's experience on the Damascus Road was of a completely different nature from the experience of "conversion" which warmed the heart of Billy Graham when he was seventeen.

Mr. High is aware that there are Catholics in the world, but he seems quite innocent of a knowledge of the Catholic Church and of its vital activities, so far-reaching, in the world today. Further, his book has the "uplift" character of so many articles in the Reader's Digest. Billy Graham fills a wide screen and he is a wonderful success.

DR. GRAHAM'S SERMONS

God in the Garden, by Curtis Mitchell, is "the official story" of Billy Graham's "crusade" in 1957 (The World's Work, 195 pp., 16/- sterling).

The meetings ran from 15 May to 1 September. A total of nearly two million people attended the meetings. The book is a detailed, factual account of this particular series of meetings and gives a good idea of all that is involved in a Graham "crusade." It may be regarded as an account of a typical "crusade" - the preparation, the method, propaganda, the counsellors and choir, and the "team" of close co-operators.

Dr. Graham has published two books of sermons. Peace With God (The World's Work, 207 pp., 10/6 sterling.) is in its ninth impression and has appeared also as a paperbound Cedar Book at 3/6 sterling. The second book is The Secret of Happiness (same publisher and price).

I trust that it is perfectly clear that in recording the existence of the above four books I am not recommending them. The first two, being factual, might be read by those who really need to know the facts. The two books of Protestant sermons may be read only by Catholics who have due permission to read them.

I may take occasion to mention that the whole background to revivalism was described by the late Monsignor Knox in his book Enthusiasm (Oxford University Press, 1950, 622 pp.).

Let us turn now to some articles on our subject.

In the (American) Catholic Digest, October 1957, pages 116-122, a full answer was given to the question: "Why are Catholics advised not to hear Billy Graham?"

The writer first presents some of Dr. Graham's qualifications, praising especially his charity: "He turns away wrath gently, with a soft word. He never says mean things about Catholics." Further, "the things he preaches are morally good and frequently inspiring." Why, then, should Catholics not go to hear him?

Three reasons are given in reply:

1. Dr. Graham's "revival services are non-Catholic religious services."
2. Dr. Graham is preaching Christianity "without the authority which comes from Christ through the Apostles."
3. Although Dr. Graham preaches "some good, sound, fundamental Christian doctrines," he "does not preach all that Christ taught."

The writer then goes on to explain these reasons at length, bringing out the importance of judging such "evangelists" as Dr. Graham in the light of the fact that Christ our Lord established and guaranteed only one Church and its doctrine.

Dr. Graham has not escaped the notice of the editorial staff of *Christ to the World* (Lungotevere dei Vallati, 1, Rome). [This magazine, printed in the Vatican, is available in several languages and is a highly valuable and accessible tool for anyone interested in evangelization.] In Vol. I, No. 4, pages 103-113, Fr. John Mole gives many details about the Greater London Crusade and how it was organized. A brief account of Dr. Graham is followed by a description of his style of preaching, its characteristics, and its content. The right Catholic attitude is explained very clearly and sympathetically. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is explained with an inspiring warmth and charity. At the end, one of Dr. Graham's sermons is given in resume.

CRITICAL APPRAISAL

"What to Think of Billy Graham" is the title of an article in *America*, 4 May 1957, by Father Gustave Weigel, S.J. a student of modern Protestant theologies. This is perhaps the most competent evaluation of Dr. Graham and his "crusades" that I have seen, but, unfortunately, much of it would be lost on many people. Father Weigel is a learned and widely-read man and a deep thinker. His tribe is not great. Nevertheless, there is much in the article that is clearly and simply expressed.

Father Weigel sees three elements in Dr. Graham's popularity: "current interest in religion; the revival tradition; Graham's streamlining of the revival framework." The last two elements are explained at some length. Father Weigel pays generous tribute to Dr. Graham's sincerity: "The man himself is not eccentric in any way whatever. No one has ever questioned his seriousness and sincerity. Nor can he be accused of preaching the gospel for filthy lucre's sake."

Then Father Weigel raises the fundamental question of authority. What right has Dr. Graham to tell anyone what is Christian truth?

Mr. High, in the first books mentioned above, labours mightily in chapter two to explain how Dr. Graham "can be so sure." This is not such a difficult question. It is individual and personal, and the answer to it explains Dr. Graham's sincerity. But does Dr. Graham tell us with authority what the Bible means - what is the authentic and complete message of the inspired Scriptures? Certainly not. "Graham's sincerity is no guarantee of the accuracy of his understanding." What has he, then? "He says, in effect, that he has found his own life transformed by an act of trust in the message he has sincerely extracted from Bible-reading." This comes down to saying: "It is true because it worked for me."

Father Weigel's examination of the question is much more extensive than I have indicated. He tries to examine every aspect and to show exactly what is involved. There can be no satisfactory answer to Fr. Weigel's arguments.

FACTS AND DOCTRINE

The *Priest*, published by Our Sunday Visitor, Huntingdon, Indiana, U.S.A., ran three articles on Dr. Graham in 1957 (April, May, June issues). The author was Fr. John E. Kelly, Director of the Bureau of Information at the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Washington, D.C.

The first article, entitled "What is Billy Graham?", is largely informational on Dr. Graham's origin, "conversion," and growth to fame. Various reasons for his success are offered and stress is laid on the part played by organized preparation for a "crusade."

In the second article - "Billy Graham: His Friends and Enemies" - Father Kelly deals with Catholic and Protestant opinions on Dr. Graham. Catholic commentators are generally tolerant and even favourable to Dr. Graham, while, of course, warning their readers that no Catholic may attend a Graham meeting. [Since the ecumenical efforts of Vatican II, only a Catholic with permission from his bishop could attend Graham's non-Catholic 'revival' service.] Secular comment is also to a great extent favourable, but a good deal of adverse or hostile criticism comes from Protestant sources. The Protestant critics object to the highly organized methods of the Graham revivalist meetings and to the "old-fashioned" theology preached by Graham. Dr. Graham's stress on the reality of Hell and the Devil is not to their liberal or Modernistic taste. They also complain that he is out of the main stream of Protestantism and weakens denominational loyalty.

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS

"Billy Graham, Theologian," is the title of Father Kelly's third article. This makes it clear that Dr. Graham is not a good guide to Christian truth. He accepts many fundamental Christian doctrines, but there is no place in his theology for the Church, the living unity formed by Christ and His members, no place for a visible representative of Christ, there is no sacramental system, and, of course, no Sacrifice of the Mass. Dr. Graham's ideas do not include a living infallible teaching authority, and his tolerant attitude to the various Christian denominations suggests that no Church, as such, has exclusive claims to be Christ's way to God. What matters in Dr. Graham's view is the surrender of the individual soul to Christ.

Father Kelly also wrote a more detailed and specific article for the Homiletic and Pastoral Review, May 1957, [another highly recommended resource,] dealing with the errors and omissions in the Gospel as it is preached by Dr. Graham. The aim of this article is to show that, "for all Catholics who listen to him, Billy is a danger to the Faith" (p. 715).

Most Catholic commentators seem content to look at the good that Dr. Graham is doing to non-Catholics and they are satisfied with warning Catholics of their obligation not to take part in a Protestant religious service, but Father Kelly shows that Catholics who disobey the Church and attend a Graham "crusade" meeting or listen to his sermons on the radio or TV run a real danger to their Faith.

Part 2: A Danger to Catholics?

RECENT EVENTS

Recent events and statements make it necessary now to be very reserved with regard to our American visitor and his activities.

Press interviews with Billy Graham used to run something like this:-

"What is done with people who make decisions, Mr. Graham?"

"They are sent to the church of their choice."

"What if a person expresses interest in a Catholic church?"

"I have no objection if a person is referred to a Catholic church."

Such interviews seem to have been the basis for a statement in Time (6 May 1957) that when Catholics make a decision for Christ their "pledge cards are duly passed along to Catholic churches." This is not true, but the facts came out only later.

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION

To Catholic observers, then, of Dr. Graham's activities, there seemed to be no wish on his part to endanger the faith of Catholics, and, on the other hand, Dr. Graham was apparently doing much good among non-Catholics. Some Catholic priests, laymen and writers mistook Graham's non-controversial attitude and statements on the Catholic Church as favouring the Church, and they gave a rather unqualified approval of the "evangelist."

Strangely enough, the first people to grow uneasy were not Catholics but the editorial staff of The Converted Catholic, mainly ex-priests and ex-monks. Might not Billy Graham be unwittingly leading people into the Roman Catholic Church? This concern was expressed in the issue of June 1956. The October issue printed a letter written by the secretary-treasurer of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Mr. George Wilson. This letter concluded: "It may be interesting to know that some 1200 of the nearly 5000 converts in a single meeting in the Philippine Islands indicated they were Catholics. To the best of our ability these new-born babes in Christ were directed to a Protestant church where the Gospel was preached" (Information, 401 West 59th St., New York 19, N.Y., June 1957, p. 36).

Note that all those Catholics who attended the Billy Graham meeting were

(1) "to the best of our ability" directed to Protestant churches; (2) they were treated as converts to Christianity: "these new-born babes in Christ"; and (3) they were directed "to a Protestant church where the Gospel was preached" - as though it is not preached in the Catholic Church!

This statement of Mr. Wilson's, by itself alone, gave good reason for doubting that Catholics are in reliable hands when they enter the Billy Graham "enquiry tent" where the trained counsellors talk to those who come forward to make a "decision."

THE BARRIER OF SILENCE

The Bureau of Information of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (N.C.W.C.) in Washington then tried to obtain a statement from the Graham headquarters in Washington on what happens to Catholics. The Bureau could not break through the curtain of silence. Time, when questioned on the statement quoted above, replied to the Bureau: "Our report was the result of a misunderstanding and we extremely regret it" (Information Bulletin, N.C.W.C., Washington, July 1957, p. 12). No correction of the 6 May statement appeared in Time.

Finally, a Scripps-Howard staff writer, Andrew Tully, a non-Catholic, carried his questioning further than other reporters had done. On 29 May 1957, when the New York "crusade" was in progress, he reported from that city (Information Bulletin, same issue and page) :-

"Mr. Graham said that in most cases Catholics who walk up to 'make their decision' don't want to be referred to a Catholic church 'because they're afraid they'll get in trouble.'

"He said the church they're referred to 'depends on the executive committee. After all, this is a Protestant meeting, sponsored by Protestants.'

"Pressed, he said, as far as he was concerned, if a Catholic asked to be referred to a Catholic church, he would do so. He said, 'After all, I have no quarrel with the Catholic Church. Christians are not limited to any church. The only question is: Are you committed to Christ?' "

CAT OUT OF BAG

The most significant remark here is that the Church to which people are referred "depends on the executive committee." Billy Graham is a salaried employee of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and his job is to preach. He does that, as a Protestant, in meetings sponsored by Protestants. Personally, he has nothing against the Church, but his aim is to induce an act of self-surrender to Christ on the part of individual persons. What happens afterwards "depends on the executive committee."

Once the cat was out of the bag, the Billy Graham team apparently decided that they could speak out. In a report carried by Associated Press and The New York Times, 9 June 1957, the Rev. Dr. Theodore Taylor, head of the "crusade's" counsellor service, said that Catholics are sent to Protestant churches. If a person insists on a Catholic church, his card is placed in an inactive file. He said further: "When they make a decision at the meeting, knowing it is a Protestant endeavour, they expect the follow-up from the Protestant group." Dr. Taylor also claimed that a "significant number" of Catholics were making "decisions for Christ." A letter from the Bureau of Information, asking what a "significant number" was, received no answer.

However, in a United Press story of June 20 a spokesman for the Graham "crusade" said that "speaking very, very conservatively, at least one person in every twenty 'enquirers' has been a Catholic." At that time 20,046 people had made decisions, and more than 1000 of these, the spokesman claimed, were Catholics. He also said that more than half of these Catholics indicated that they wished to join some Protestant denomination. The remainder "for the most part have simply said that making decisions for Christ will help them become better Catholics." The spokesman insisted that no pressure is brought to bear on Catholics when they come forward: "We do not want to guide anyone towards any special denomination, nor do we approve of leading anyone away from his own church. Our object is instilling and renewing faith in Jesus Christ." He continued:

"Our counsellors are instructed never to pressure anyone. Catholics are asked whether they want a follow-up. If they do, later they get letters from Billy, and a Protestant minister calls on them" (Information Bulletin, same issue, p. 13).

A WARNING BELL

Even before Mr. Graham made his admission to Andrew Tully in New York, some idea of what was going on could have been gathered from The Southern Presbyterian Journal, May 8, 1957. This carried an article entitled: "Now It Can Be Told." The article was signed by Dr. L. Nelson Bell, and apparently it was evoked by Father John E. Kelly's article in The Homiletic and Pastoral Review, in which Father Kelly made it very clear that Catholics might not attend Graham meetings. "From Boston to New Orleans," Dr. Bell said, "at home and abroad, thousands of Catholics have been converted in Mr. Graham's campaigns." He also claimed that "in one campaign a known total of over six hundred Catholics were converted."

Dr. Bell is in a position to know the facts: he is Billy Graham's father-in-law.

So it goes on.

What happens to these "converted" Catholics? Probably, most of them were not practising Catholics and they just drift again. On May 15, 1958, Billy Graham held a rally in Madison Square Garden to mark the anniversary of the beginning of his New York "crusade" in 1957. During that "crusade" about sixty thousand people made "decisions for Christ." Of these only six thousand attended the commemorative meeting - ten per cent.

WHAT ARE WE TO THINK?

The question naturally arises: Is the praise, so universal, of Dr. Graham's sincerity justified? Certainly, it is hard to understand how Mr. Graham could say that he had no objection to Catholics being referred to a Catholic church when he must have known that, at best, their cards would be placed in an inactive file. If his "crusades" are Protestant meetings, sponsored by Protestants, as he said to Andrew Tully on May 29 (quoted above), why did he earlier in the month specifically invite Catholics to the Garden, saying that his Gospel message is good for everybody? (Information Bulletin, same issue, p. 10).

However, we cannot judge a man's motives, but what I do have doubts about is Mr. Graham's intelligence. I mean, I think Mr. Graham simply does not understand what is involved. He wants to do good, to bring men nearer to Christ. Deliberately he tries to follow the no-controversy line adopted by an earlier American "evangelist", Dwight Moody. We see this attitude manifested in Graham's response to criticism. When, for example, Archbishop Rufino J. Santos warned his flock in Manila not to attend a Graham rally, Graham said: "I respect the archbishop's convictions." Again, in England the (Anglican) Archbishop-elect of York accused Dr. Graham of preaching the "grossest doctrines." Graham answered: "I have the highest personal regard for the archbishop" (The Priest, May 1957, p. 362).

MR. GRAHAM'S ATTITUDE

How Mr. Graham could have "the highest personal regard" for a man he could not have known, is hard to understand. Such statements are intelligible only on the no-controversy-at-any-cost basis.

This attitude means that there are questions Mr. Graham would rather not face.

However, in order to be quite fair to Mr. Graham we should also remember that he was brought up in an entirely Protestant environment and that he has no understanding of the real nature of the Church that Christ Our Lord founded. Indeed, he can say: "The New Testament teaches that while there is actually only one church there can be any number of local churches formed into various denominations and societies or councils. These local churches and denominational groups may be divided along national and theological lines, or according to the temperament of their members" (Peace With God, 9th impression, p. 161). It is extremely hard to understand how anyone could seriously make such a statement. No description of the Church could be further from the teaching of the New Testament.

CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence, then, we seem justified in coming to the following conclusions:-

(1) No one, Catholic or non-Catholic, is ever referred to the Catholic Church by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

(2) Catholics who make a "decision for Christ" but wish to remain Catholics are simply disregarded, except as numbers in the grand total of "converts." On this point the attitude of the Graham Association is an improvement on the methods of many non-Catholic groups.

(3) Catholics who ask for a "follow-up" are brought under Protestant influence.

(4) The number of Catholics who do this would seem to be, as a rule, about five to six per cent of those who make "decisions."

(5) Dr. Graham's sincerity must be understood in the light of what he is: a Protestant minister, following a no-controversy line, preaching his own understanding of the New Testament under the auspices of an entirely Protestant organization.

(6) The activities of the Graham Association are directed to Protestants, but "the doors of the crusade are open to all who may wish to attend," according to Graham's publicity director, Jerry Beavan, in a statement released in New York last year [1957] and approved by Graham (Information Bulletin, same issue, p. 2).

This open door is not for Catholics. Any Catholic who does attend, treats with contempt the law of the Church on this matter. From what I have said above it should also be perfectly clear that a Catholic who attends a Graham meeting or listens to Graham on the radio or TV runs a very real danger to his faith. The responsibility is his.

Part 3: Defects in Theology

WHAT HAPPENS AT A "REVIVAL"

What happens at a Graham "revival" meeting? Well, it is basically a Protestant religious service on a big scale - a sermon, music, hymns, and prayer. However, the Graham meetings add something: the invitation to accept Christ our Lord as Saviour and to give a public sign of pledging one's life to Him. The assistance of trained counsellors and the whole "follow-up" system, by which the Graham Association and a local Protestant minister keep in touch with "converts", is also extra, and these play a big part in the effect that Mr. Graham produces through his meetings. TV and radio also extend his influence to a much wider audience than he can address face to face.

It has been noted many times that an effect of a Graham "crusade" is to put religion on the front page of the local papers. Religion also becomes a common topic of conversation in the city during the "crusade."

What are the benefits of a Graham "crusade"? Many answers have been given to this question, some far from favourable. The body of Protestant opinion favours Graham's activities, and most seem to regard him as doing a helpful and inspiring work. There is evidence that much of his work lasts and even that it bears fruit long after he has gone. That is, people who did not respond at the time do so later, perhaps through the influence of one of his "converts", and Bible-study and prayer groups come into being.

Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr have brought about a revival of Protestant theology. Mr. Graham is trying to bring about a Protestant revival among pastors and people. It is not easy to pass any definite judgements on his activities, but some reflections are timely on what Mr. High calls, in the sub-title of his book, Billy Graham's "message, and his mission."

It is not easy to pass judgement on Dr. Graham, because so many different elements are involved - the man himself, his methods, his "message", the results of his "crusades", and so forth.

Whether he is a great preacher or not is disputed. Some of his best friends say he is not, while some of his critics say he is. The fact remains that he gets his audiences and holds them. This ability seems to me to be due to several factors.

CONTACT WITH AUDIENCE

First of all, Billy Graham picks a subject and keeps to it. So far as the matter will allow, he avoids theological terms. When he has to use them, he explains them and he illustrates what he has to say. I should think that the ordinary person listening to Billy Graham would easily understand almost everything that he says. In other words, he takes care to reach the minds of his audience and to interest them.

Further, Graham speaks directly to his audience. He does not lecture them or debate questions with them. Rather, he preaches to them. He speaks directly to people, tells them they have problems and offers to solve them. Thus he reaches their hearts.

Moreover, Billy Graham speaks with great conviction. Perhaps his conviction is his most powerful asset. His friends say that he "speaks with authority", just as Our Lord did (Matt. 7:29). Authority, of course, is something different from conviction - it is the right to teach. Conviction springs from being satisfied that you are speaking the truth, but, of itself, conviction does not prove any man right, nor does it confer on anyone authority of any kind.

SPIRITUAL HUNGER

Stanley High wrote his biography of Billy Graham in order to tell the story of the man, but I think he achieved something that he did not intend. His book brings out in a striking way the spiritual poverty of Protestantism - I might almost say its spiritual destitution. The severed branches have lost the vital sap of life and are slowly dying. Four hundred years ago and more the "Reformed Churches" abandoned almost all the means of sanctification that Our Lord committed to His Church. For a long time a sense of religion and a deep faith in the Bible kept a certain amount of life in the separated groups, but today millions upon millions of people are starving spiritually, and their ministers lack the means of satisfying their hunger.

This is not just an impression that I have formed from reading the book. The fact is made very clear. First, Mr. High himself quotes without question the assertion of an article in the Christian Century: ". . . something close to spiritual famine exists among large sections of our population" (p. 143). Later he refers to evidence which, he says, "seems to me to bear out Billy Graham's contention that today's most nearly universal ill is spiritual hunger" (p. 217). On the next page Mr. High asserts that "this spiritual hunger which Billy Graham finds wherever he goes reaches, also, into the churches and includes, there, not only church members, but often the clergy." On page 189 Mr. High quotes Ruth Graham as writing during a Graham "crusade" on the Continent: "There is such hunger here in Germany." At the end of his Far Eastern tour Billy Graham wrote in his diary that spiritual hunger "is the greatest common denominator among all people" (High, p. 197).

CONVERSION

At the end of the "All-Scotland Crusade" in 1955 this young American "evangelist" was able to address a gathering of one thousand ministers "representing every segment of Scottish

Protestantism - from Episcopalians and the Church of Scotland to so-called 'splinter groups' - the largest gathering of its kind assembled in Scotland" (High, p. 220). If we recall the one-time stampeding fervour of Scottish Calvinism, this meeting is surely one of the most remarkable spectacles of all time!

Billy Graham asks people to come forward and accept Christ as their Saviour - to profess their belief that He has forgiven their sins and that they are now "saved." Certainly, he does ask for a whole-hearted surrender to Christ, but, still, it is only that more or less emotional act of trust that he demands. We cannot possibly be satisfied with anything like this, especially as it is founded on the fundamental Reformation heresy of justification by faith alone and the "revivalist" heresy of being then and there "saved" by "conversion."

HIS THEOLOGY

Mr. Graham is convinced that what he says is true. Is he right? If we take some of the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity individually - the Unity and Trinity of God, the Incarnation, the Redemptive Death and Resurrection of Christ - it may be said that Mr. Graham's views are generally correct. If we look rather at the terms of reference, so to say, which form the assumptions, tacit or explicit, of his "message", we must condemn the over-all picture. For example, it is true that Our Lord died to save us. It is not true that He wanted to save us in Billy Graham's way. Again, it is true that Our Lord founded a Church. It is not true that He founded the kind of Church Mr. Graham describes in *Peace With God* (p. 161) and calls "the Church" in all his sermons. The Church of Christ and Billy Graham's "Church" have as little in common as a cathedral has with a heap of loose stones.

Further, Mr. Graham's theological position is that of the Reformation. In *Peace With God* he assures us that the Bible "has no need for special interpretation" (p. 19). In the next sermon he asks: "Has God designated any one person here on earth to speak with final authority about Him?" (p. 23). He answers "No" to this question and goes on to speak of the various ways in which men have sought to know God. He then asks: "By which of these self-appointed authorities are we to be guided?" (p. 24). He answers that in the Bible "we have the correct answer" (*Peace* p.24).

AUTHORITY

The Bible, Mr. Graham, is a collection of written documents. You and millions of others take your theology from these documents and you do not agree among yourselves. The Bible cannot raise its voice in protest. You would say, of course, that you are not one of those "self-appointed authorities" to whom you refer. Your authority is, you claim, the Bible.

But the Bible gives no authority to anyone. You, therefore, are, in fact, a self-appointed authority on what the Bible teaches and you make some bad mistakes. Two examples will be enough to prove this.

First, there is Mr. Graham's teaching on how to become Christians. It is a comparatively simple matter, according to him.

"Conversion" does it, he says. He describes this "conversion" as "conscious acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour" (*Peace*, p. 94). Three elements are involved in being converted: "repentance, faith and regeneration" (p. 100). On page 115 this faith is described as "utter confidence." The following page reveals that faith involves knowledge. How much? Mr. Graham replies: "Just to know that you are a sinner and that Christ died for you is enough knowledge." Yet on page 131 Mr. Graham quotes

Hebrews 9:6, which says: "He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

The result of "conversion" is interesting: "You are a child of the King. There is a new sparkle in your eye. There is a spring in your step. There is a smile on your face. Even your friends notice the change that has taken place in your life. You have now been born again" (p. 127). Better still: having been "saved" you now have a through-ticket to Heaven: "The moment a Christian dies, he goes immediately into the presence of Christ" (p. 68).

WHAT OF BAPTISM?

It is all very thrilling and it can all be achieved without Baptism. Mr. Graham's book of sermons was written to give the man in the street "a clear understanding of a new way of life that was presented by an unknown Galilean two thousand years ago" (p. vii). This same unknown Galilean said very clearly and very definitely: "Of a truth I tell you: Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5). On page 120 Mr. Graham's text is verse 3 of this chapter of St. John's Gospel, and on page 122 he quotes verse 7 of the same chapter. Both these verses mention re-birth but say nothing about water. The only reference in the whole book to Baptism is an incidental one in a quotation on page 168, where Baptism is listed among the purposes for which, in Mr. Graham's opinion, Our Lord founded the Church.

Why this phobia with regard to the waters of Baptism? After all, Mr. Graham found it "a glorious experience" to be immersed (High, p. 82). Perhaps the Preface to Mr. Graham's book of sermons provides us with a clue to his reserve. There he says: "I have tried to avoid those controversial subjects that have so often divided great segments of the Christian Church from each other" (Peace p. vii). There are no "segments" in the Christian Church and the necessity of Baptism is beyond question: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Apparently, then, some of the Protestant Churches would not welcome an outright statement on the necessity of Baptism. Mr. Graham's silence is strange and it also passes over something that is clearly taught in the Bible, Mr. Graham's chosen authority.

THE CHURCH

Next, let us turn to Mr. Graham's teaching on the Church itself. Here we find the greatest confusion. First, Mr. Graham presents what is, basically, the Reformation idea of the Church. Then he begins to explain what this means. Finally, he clothes this explanation in the language of the New Testament. The reader is thus led on gently to the conclusion that what Mr. Graham calls "the Church" - the vast collection of differing Protestant churches - is the same thing as the Church of the New Testament. Mr. Graham may think so, but he is as completely mistaken as anyone could be. However, he is aware that he is dealing with a delicate subject and he tries to meet the difficulty.

"SUPERFICIAL" DIVISIONS

According to Mr. Graham, "the New Testament teaches that even though there may be many cleavages and divisions within the structure of the church, yet we have only 'one Lord'" (Peace p. 161). Nowhere does the New Testament teach, suggest, or imply that there "may be many cleavages and divisions within the structure of the church." Mr. Graham would allow these supposed divisions in the Church to take place "along national and theological lines, or according to the temperament of their members" (Peace p. 161). This, he claims, is the teaching of the New Testament. "If the blind lead the blind . . .!"

However, Mr. Graham assures us that there is only "apparent lack of unity." The divisions are really only "superficial." The conflicts between Christian Churches come from "slightly varying interpretations" of the New Testament (p. 161). He even goes so far as to assure us that "the underlying beliefs of the various denominations" are "basically and historically . . . almost identical" (p. 162). To reassure us completely Mr. Graham has recourse to an illustration: "In the army, one commanding general issues orders to the many groups under his jurisdiction. His various subordinates may interpret his orders in slightly different ways, but his orders still remain the basis for their conduct." Suppose we apply this to the Church of Mr. Graham's dreams. Some Christians say Baptism is necessary, some that it is not necessary. Some Christians must have bishops, others will have them on no account. Are these various groups only interpreting Christ's orders in "slightly different ways"? If so, then God help our sanity!

Much more could be said about Mr. Graham's failure to present Christ's plan for the salvation of men in its fullness and reality. I trust I have said enough to show that salvation does not come out of Reformation theology, however carefully it may be vested in New Testament language.

In his biography of Billy Graham Mr. High indulges in a little creative imagining on page 236. Referring to Mr. Graham's results in England, he sees the "converts" as a leaven which may be "a leaven potent enough - when the reckoning is all in - to leaven the whole lump." Much of England was once Protestant. It will never be so again.

Mr. Graham also loses touch with historic reality and its lessons when he speaks of what he calls "the church" as "a living, vibrant organism that draws its power from within itself" (Peace, p. 160). This is the New Testament doctrine about the Church. The Catholic Church is such an organism. No other is. Mr. Graham may instil a little new life into the disintegrating body of Protestantism. He cannot give it a new soul - the Spirit that Christ our Lord guaranteed for ever to His Body, which is the Church.

I do not wish to be unkind to Mr. Graham. He is obviously trying to do good for souls - according to what he can glean from the Scriptures in the light of Protestant principles; but I have a feeling that he has fallen for the temptation to sell his wares under the most popular label in the Western world today: "Peace of mind." Nevertheless, he has influenced many lives to develop along Christian lines. May the scales one day fall from his eyes and give him a vision of the full Christian reality which is in the Catholic Church alone.
