Cooperative Evangelism

Is Billy Graham Right or Wrong?

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

For years the evangelistic campaigns of Billy Graham have drawn worldwide attention. Repeatedly he has been named the "Man of the Year" in the area of religion. It has been said that Dr. Graham has preached to more people than any other man in history. His influence is significant:

> *As a stone cast into a pool produces concentric waves which ripple their way to the banks, so often the thoughts of one man influence a whole generation. It is no exaggeration to say that no man has more influence with evangelicals today than Billy Graham. He is immensely popular.* [Erroll Hulse, *Billy Graham—The Pastor's Dilemma,* p.34]

We all recognize Billy Graham as a gifted speaker. As he has proclaimed the Bible message of salvation, we cannot deny that many have come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and for this we thank the Lord. I can remember as a new believer being greatly encouraged listening to Billy Graham preach on a televised crusade. At that time my heart was warmed by his preaching and blessed by his ministry.

I take no delight, therefore, in being critical of the ministry of Dr. Billy Graham. From time to time people have questions

about Billy Graham and they have difficulty understanding why we do not attend his crusades and why we do not commend and support his type of evangelistic efforts.

Unsaved people in general see Billy Graham as the representative of Bible-believing Christianity. The evangelical world has esteemed him as its hero and champion. What he says and does, therefore, demands examination. "Prove all things [test all things by the Word of God] and hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Numbers of Bible-believing people have been discerning and honest enough to recognize serious problems involved in Billy Graham's ecumenical approach to evangelism. May we prayerfully and carefully consider these problems in the light of God's Word. This is a delicate and difficult subject. May the Lord help us as we proceed.

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1. Billy Graham's Early Years

Billy Graham was born in 1918. As a boy he had contact with the noted evangelist Billy Sunday. He attended Wheaton College where he majored in anthropology. In 1960 Billy Graham wrote, "I had no formal theological training. I had never been to Seminary" (Article in *The Christian Century*: "What Ten Years Have Taught Me"). He spent a short time in the Pastorate. He was one of the leading evangelists in the Youth For Christ organization back in the days when that organization was fundamental. In 1949 he became President of Northwestern Schools, but he soon left that school in order to give himself fully to evangelistic work.

2. Billy Graham's Original Position Regarding Cooperation

The issue of cooperation involves the following questions: Should the evangelist cooperate in evangelistic efforts with modernists (those who deny the fundamentals of the faith)? Should evangelistic crusades be sponsored by liberals, modernists and unbelievers? Should evangelicals call upon liberal churchmen to lead in prayer, head up committees and take part in counseling those making decisions? Should the evangelist befriend, encourage, assist and cooperate with religious leaders who are not sound in the faith and who deny the Christ of the Bible? Should we work together with those who disbelieve the Bible, mock the miracles of the Bible such as the virgin birth and the resurrection, deny the deity of Christ, and who count as foolishness His substitutionary death on the cross?

How would Billy Graham have answered these questions originally?

A. Billy Graham's Fundamentalist Background

Billy Graham was associated with Dr. W.B. Riley, a great defender of the faith and an ardent fundamentalist, the founder and president of Northwestern Schools. Billy Graham was personally chosen by Riley to be his successor to the presidency of Northwestern Schools. When Riley died, it was Graham who preached the funeral service.

Graham was on the Cooperating Board of the *Sword of the Lord*, a fundamental paper edited by Dr. John R. Rice. Graham's sermons appeared frequently in this paper.

Graham was honored by Bob Jones University with a doctor's degree, and he was a personal friend of Bob Jones Sr. and Bob Jones Jr.

These examples give strong evidence that Graham was originally part of the fundamentalist, separatist camp.

B. Billy Graham's Attitude Towards Modernists

In *Pilot*, the magazine of Northwestern Schools, April 1951, Dr. Graham lamented the appearance of an ad for a book by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick which had appeared in that paper and he wrote the following: "We do not condone nor have fellowship with any form of modernism."

In a letter to Dr. John R. Rice, dated May 10, 1952, Dr. Graham said: "Contrary to any rumors that are constantly floating about, we have never had a modernist on our Executive Committee, and we have never been sponsored by the Council of Churches in any city, except Shreveport and Greensboro, both small towns where the majority of the ministers are evangelical."

In a letter to Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., June 3, 1952, Graham said, "The modernists do not support us anywhere. We have never been sponsored by the Council of Churches in any cities except Greensboro and Shreveport."

C. Billy Graham's Early Campaigns

Billy Graham's big break came late in the fall of 1949, at the Los Angeles crusade. The papers gave Graham enormous coverage. Overnight he became a national figure, due to the large publicity which he received. Ten years later Graham himself describes this significant crusade and the doors of opportunity

which it opened:

> *It was just 10 years ago that my evangelistic work came to the attention of the church as the result of a Los Angeles crusade. To me it was like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky. I was bewildered, challenged and humbled by the sudden avalanche of opportunities that deluged me...Telephone calls, telegrams and letters began to pour in from all over the world, inviting me and my associates to come for crusades or speaking engagements.* (from *The Christian Century*, 1960)

This Los Angeles crusade was sponsored solely by fundamentalists. As Dr. Bob Shuler wrote, "in his Los Angeles campaign, I personally saw and heard him turn down and politely decline the approval and cooperation of the Church Federation, which represented the Federal Council, now the National Council" [*The Methodist Challenge*, October 1957, p.3].

Graham refused to cooperate with modernists in his early evangelistic campaigns. His campaigns in Los Angeles, Hollywood and Fort Worth were sponsored solely by fundamentalists.

In 1955 he told Dr. John R. Rice in Scotland that "he had promised God he would never have on his committees, taking an active part in his campaigns, a man who denied the virgin birth of Christ, His Blood Atonement, or the verbal inspiration of the Bible" [*Sword of the Lord*, 6/9/63, p.5].

3. The Great Turning Point [The New York Crusade]

The New York Crusade as described by Robert Ferm, one of Graham's most ardent supporters:

> *The years since 1949 have been some of the most spectacular years of history...During this time Billy Graham and his team have campaigned in many of the major cities of America and in free countries around the world. The increasing effectiveness of the crusades reached a climax in the New York Crusade where more than 60,000 persons responded to the invitation, and an additional 30,000 wrote to tell of decisions they had been influenced to make by the television ministry.*

In 1954 Jack Wyrtzen, a noted New York youth leader, along with several other fundamentalists, issued an invitation to Billy Graham to come to New York sponsored by born-again believers. This invitation was rejected by Graham, on the grounds that not enough churches were represented. At about the same time, the Protestant Council of New York, which is predominantly liberal, invited Dr. Graham to New York under their auspices. After some delay the invitation from the Protestant Council was accepted. Thus the invitation from the liberal Council was accepted; the invitation from the fundamentalists rejected.

As a result, the crusade was held in 1957. Lawyer James Bennett, a longtime resident of New York City and strong Christian leader there for years, estimates that the General Crusade Committee in New York was composed of about 120 modernists

and unbelievers and about 20 fundamentalists, and the Executive Committee contained about 15 modernists and 5 fundamentalists.

Among those who served on the Crusade Committees were men such as...

! Dr. Henry Van Dusen, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, an extremely liberal Seminary.

! John A. Mackay, the former Princeton president and undoubtedly a liberal theologian.

! Dr. Ralph Sockman, well known Methodist Modernist.

! Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell who wrote in *Look Magazine* (March 23, 1954): "Presbyterians do not believe in the literal inerrancy of the Scriptures.... Most Presbyterians do not believe in a material (literal) heaven or hell." etc. etc.

According to *Christian Life* [Sept. 1957, p.25] the church that received the most decision cards of any New York Church was the Marble Collegiate Church, pastored by "positive thinking" Norman Vincent Peale (a man who did not preach the true gospel in his pulpit or in his writings). He received 373 decision cards. How terrible! Save the lost sheep and then send them to the wolves!

On April 3 Graham addressed the National Association of Evangelicals and said, "Our New York Campaign has been challenged by some extremists on two points. First as to sponsorship, I would like to make myself clear. I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the Gospel of Christ, if there are no strings attached to my message. I am sponsored by civic clubs, universities, ministerial associations and councils of churches all over the world. I intend to continue" [*Christian Beacon*, April 4, 1957].

4. Other Evidence of Change

In 1956 (a year prior to the New York campaign) there was already evidence of Graham's shift in position. When Graham came to Japan he demanded that both conservatives and modernistic pro-Shinto believers unite for the purpose of evangelism. Kagawa, a noted Japanese liberal and opponent of Bible truth, appeared on the platform with Graham. Liberal churchmen also appeared on the platform and participated in the Crusade in Graham's meetings in England.

In 1955 (two years prior to the New York campaign) during Billy Graham's Scotland crusade an interviewer asked him to define the fundamentalist label he had been plastered with. Billy objected. "I don't call myself a fundamentalist," he said. To Graham there seemed to be an aura of bigotry and narrowness associated with the term "fundamentalist" which he certainly hoped was not true of himself. "I prefer to call myself a "constructionist," Billy said, explaining he was seeking to rebuild the church (March 1956, *Christian Life*).

Another key crusade was that of San Francisco. Graham had refused two invitations to come to California under fundamental sponsorship (one by the *Christ-for-San Francisco Committee* which included about 100 fundamental churches and one by *the United Evangelistic Churches of Oakland*). However the liberal council of the Bay Area invited Graham to hold a campaign and this invitation was accepted. On September 26, 1957, 65 fundamental ministers of the San Francisco area issued a proclamation in which it was stated that these fundamental men would cooperate with the Graham Crusade if all participating churches and ministers were required to subscribe to the following

minimal doctrinal statement:

- The full inspiration of the Bible.
- The virgin birth of Christ.
- The vicarious blood atonement of a sinless Christ on the cross.
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- Salvation by the grace of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Graham refused to make belief in these doctrines a prerequisite for participation in the crusade. As a result the General Crusade Committee for the San Francisco Crusade was dominated from the start by men who were advocates of liberal theology. Amongst others in support of the crusade was Bishop James A. Pike, Episcopalian Bishop of the diocese of California. Pike was asked to lead in prayer before the crowds. Pike considered the Garden of Eden and the Virgin Birth to be mere myths.

It was around this same time that Graham separated from John R. Rice and *The Sword of the Lord*. Rice asked Graham if he could conscientiously sign the doctrinal statement which appeared on the front page of every issue of his paper. The statement reads as follows: "An Independent Christian Weekly, Standing for the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible, the Deity of Christ, His Blood Atonement, Salvation by Faith, New Testament Soul-Winning, and the Premillennial Return of Christ. Opposes Modernism, Worldliness, and Formalism." In reply Graham stated that he did not believe he could sign the doctrinal statement as carried by the paper, and requested that his name be dropped from the Cooperating Board.

Billy Graham's separation from fundamentalism is also evidenced by the fact that he helped to launch the magazine *Christianity Today*, a magazine that generally opposes

fundamentalism and promotes the new evangelical philosophy. Graham told a ministerial friend that he gave $10,000 to start the magazine, and that he influenced others to give largely. The magazine has consistently featured his campaigns and has promoted his philosophy of coexistence with modernism and neo-orthodoxy.

Graham himself admits that his concept of the church has become less narrow: "A fourth change is to be seen in the fact that during the past ten years my concept of the church has taken on greater dimension. Ten years ago my concept of the church tended to be narrow and provincial, but after a decade of intimate contact with Christians the world over I am now aware that the family of God contains people of various ethnological, cultural, class and denominational differences" [*The Christian Century*, Feb. 17, 1960, "What Ten Years Have Taught Me"].

In the Los Angeles crusade of 1963, Bishop Gerald Kennedy of the Methodist Church was chairman of the General Crusade Committee. He was also on the executive committee. Kennedy wrote a book entitled *God's Good News* in which he eloquently denies the deity of Christ. Need we say more?

In the crusade held in Montevideo a man by the name of Castro was called upon by Dr. Graham to lead in prayer. Graham referred to him as "my great friend Castro." This man believes that the God of the Buddhist is the same as our God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Especially significant was what took place at the Boston Crusade in 1964. During that crusade Graham paid a visit to Cardinal Cushing, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston. The meeting was requested by Dr. Graham. This was the first time Graham had met with a Roman Catholic Cardinal. During

the conversation the Cardinal said, "Well, I'm a Catholic, but I'm for you. No Catholic can listen to you without becoming a better Catholic. You preach Catholic as well as Protestant doctrine." Dr. Graham said that his preaching was much closer to the theology of the Roman Catholic Church than it was to some of the farther-out Protestants. This kind of fellowship with Catholics would continue throughout the rest of his ministry.

5. Graham's Amazing Defense of His Ministry.

In 1958 there appeared a book written by Robert 0. Ferm, entitled, *Cooperative Evangelism--Is Billy Graham Right or Wrong?*. The author strongly defended Graham's inclusivist methods of cooperative evangelism. By appealing to Scripture and to the example of great evangelists of the past, Ferm tried to prove that Billy Graham was right to cooperate with those who deny the Christian faith. In the space of three short months the book went through four printings which brought the total number of volumes in print to the huge number of 75,000. The book was made available at a low price (75¢ each and 12 for $7.20) and was widely circulated throughout the Protestant clerical community. It was sent to religious colleges and seminaries and to many clergymen free of charge by parties interested in spreading its message. Hundreds if not thousands of copies were mailed out by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. At the National Association of Evangelicals Convention in Chicago free copies were handed out. The entire student body at Wheaton College were given copies of the book. Bob Jones University students received copies, unasked for, addressed to box numbers on an unpublished list. Dr. John Whitcomb, who formerly taught at Grace Seminary, told me that faculty and students there were

flooded with copies of this book. Other examples could be cited.

In view of this, it is interesting that Billy Graham wrote three years later: "I have never made it a point to answer critics, but I do try to answer honest inquiries as to our position. I do not think this work needs defending!" (from a tract entitled *Fellowship and Separation* by Billy Graham, p.9). The work of answering critics and defending his practice of ecumenical evangelism was left to Ferm.

Ferm's book is Scripturally refuted by Gary G. Cohen in the book *Biblical Separation Defended—A Biblical Critique of Ten New Evangelical Arguments* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971). Cohen provides an excellent Biblical Critique of Ferm's arguments.

6. Reaction among Fundamentalists

What kind of Christian concern did Graham's fundamental friends exhibit towards him when he began to take a friendly attitude towards liberals and modernists? Did they confront Graham personally? Did they warn him about the consequences of joining hands with the enemies of the cross? Did they pray for him?

The following is written by Dr. John R. Rice and is but one example of how fundamental men pleaded with Graham to adhere to a separated position:

> *I talked with Dr. Graham again and again about the danger of yoking up with modernism. Again and again he assured me that he had vowed to God he would never have a man on his committee who was*

not right on the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and such matters. I visited Dr. Graham in his own home in Montreat, North Carolina, by his invitation, and we talked earnestly on such matters. Again and again we have talked by long distance telephone sometimes as long as thirty minutes. At his own request, we sent him THE SWORD OF THE LORD air mail, week after week, in his tour around the world. I wrote him in great detail on matters where I thought he was wrong. And all the time I defended him openly and publicly, excusing his mistakes, until he openly declared he had decided to keep company with modernists and put them on his committees and to go under their sponsorship. Then I was compelled, in order to be true to Christ, to come out openly against that compromise.

The issue is not Billy Graham. I have loved him through the years. I have prayed for him daily for many years ... The warmhearted, friendly Cliff Barrows, the beloved Beverly Shea, the dear friend Jerry Beavan, and the assistant Grady Wilson—God knows how I have prayed for them all! I did all that a good man could do privately to help keep Billy Graham for the historic Christian position, and for working with Bible-believing Christians instead of unbelievers [from pp.304-305 of "Cooperative Evangelism*" in Earnestly Contending for the Faith* by Dr. John R. Rice].

Other fundamental leaders, such as Bob Jones and Charles Woodbridge, also approached Graham personally about the dangers of cooperation with liberal churchmen.

7. Where Does Billy Graham Send His Converts (Those Making Decisions in the Crusades)?

Dr. Oswald J. Smith once said of Billy Graham, "Again and again he urged the converts to get linked up with some Bible-believing church where Christ is preached" (see Ferm, p.17). In actual practice, however, when an evangelist works together with liberal ministers, it becomes very difficult for him to refuse to send his converts into their liberal churches. In fact, the Graham organization believes that if a liberal church or minister is willing to cooperate with a crusade, then they deserve to have the converts enter into the fellowship of their church. Consider Ferm's comment on this (p.19):

> *Any minister or church that willingly enters into a cooperative effort, where the Gospel is to be preached without restrictions of any kind, is certainly deserving of having converts who so desire join in the fellowship of that particular church. If later any are led astray, or spiritually starved, the responsibility rests squarely on those churches, not on the evangelist.*

In Graham's newspaper column, *My Answer* (October 29, 1962), an anxious mother asks the question, "We have been going to a church which leans toward 'modern theology.' Our children don't even know what it means to be 'saved.' Should we stay in our own church, or should we join a Bible church where our children will learn about the Bible?" Graham's answer: "If your children don't know what it means to be saved, don't put all the

blame on the church you attend. You as a parent have a responsibility to teach your children the things of God...No church, regardless of how 'orthodox' can do the whole job of teaching your children the things of God... Let God lead you about the church you are to attend..." (How would you have answered her question?)

When he was asked why Modernists support Billy Graham, one of the leaders of the World Council of Churches said, "We do not agree with Billy Graham's theology, but we are using him to build our churches" [*Christian Beacon*, November 22, 1956, p.8].

8. Where Will Billy Graham Preach and under What Conditions?

We have already mentioned the statement Graham made before the National Association of Evangelicals on April 3, 1957: "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the Gospel of Christ, if there are no strings attached to my message."

Ferm has said, "Graham's willingness to cooperate has never influenced him to adjust his preaching to suit any sponsoring groups" (Ferm, *Cooperative Evangelism*, p.13).

Ferm also speaks of Graham's "uncompromising determination to preach this gospel message to any and all who will hear him, accepting the cooperation of any and all who will agree that he shall so preach without any restrictions" (Ferm, p.15).

Ferm also makes this statement: "What about compromise?

It has been agreed by both his supporters and opponents that Billy Graham has never trimmed or diluted the message of the Bible. His pronouncements on every fundamental doctrine have been unqualified" (p.23).

Does Billy Graham really proclaim the whole message of the Bible? Or are there perhaps some things that Graham refuses to preach? For example, in Acts 20:27 the Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he did not shun to declare unto them all the counsel of God (the whole counsel of God). A vital part of the whole counsel of God involves warning believers about false teachers. Read Acts 20:28-31. *Paul warned them about the wolves!* Does Billy Graham warn people about the wolves? Does he warn them about the wolves in sheep's clothing who stand behind many of the pulpits in our land? Does he warn them about the wolves who sometimes sit on the platform with him and who are sometimes asked to lead in prayer and even counsel new converts?

What kind of a message did the Lord Jesus give to the false religious leaders of his day? See Matthew chapter 23. Have you ever heard Billy Graham give such a message?

9. What Does the Bible Teach Concerning Cooperation with Those Who Are Not Sound in the Faith?

1) Avoid them (Romans 16:17).
2) Reject (Titus 3:10).
3) Receive him not (2 John 10).

4) From such turn away (2 Tim. 3:5; and compare Rom. 1:16 and 1 Cor. 1:24).
5) Let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).

For further discussion of these issues see our paper *Contemporary Evangelism in Light of God's Word* (20¢).

10. Why I Should Not Attend A Billy Graham Crusade?

The following was written years ago when a Billy Graham Crusade was scheduled to be held in the Hartford, Connecticut area:

In view of the fact that the Southern New England Billy Graham Crusade is scheduled for May 19-26, 1985 in the Hartford Civic Center, it might be good to remind ourselves of some of the problems connected with ecumenical evangelism:

Problem #1
A Refusal to Practice Biblical Separation.

In such crusades there is a yoking together with unbelievers and religious apostates (2 Cor. 6:14-17). The key word is "cooperation." There is the yoking together of believers with unbelievers. Professing believers join hands with liberal churchmen and all sorts and shades of Christ-deniers. The clear line of demarcation between Bible-believing fundamentalism and Bible-denying modernism is terribly blurred. The Apostle Paul

put a curse on every man who preaches a different and false gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) but today we enlist such people to help in our crusade and to counsel and follow-up our new converts. The enemies of the cross are treated as friends and fellow-workers, instead of being exposed for the wolves they really are (Acts 20:28-31). Biblical separation is not practiced (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Problem # 2
A Poor Concept of the Local Assembly of Believers

There is a naive tendency to regard all churches within "Christendom" as acceptable and to accept all clergymen as brothers and fellow-laborers and to be pleased when people become members of these churches even though they may not be sound in the faith. The Biblical concept of the church is that the local assembly is made up of BELIEVERS--those who honor the Word of God and who have been eternally saved by putting their trust in the Person and work of the crucified and risen Son of God.

Those who advance the cause of ecumenical evangelism are reluctant to be critical of any church and they seem unwilling to expose any false teacher. One begins to wonder if there is such a thing as a false teacher within the organized churches of Christendom. The church at Ephesus could not bear those who were evil and they clearly exposed them (Rev. 2:2). This is certainly not the attitude of the ecumenical evangelists. They do not share Christ's hatred of false doctrine (Rev. 2:15). They do not share Paul's abhorrence towards those who teach a false gospel (Gal. 1:8-9). They seem totally ignorant of the fact that the devil, who himself appears as an angel of light, has his own

ministers who transform themselves into the ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). They seem like respectable clergymen, but in reality they are serving the cause of Satan and doing the devil's work by leading multitudes astray.

A common practice of the ecumenical evangelists is to send new converts back into "the church of their choice." If new believers need anything they need to be protected from church leaders who profess to be "Christian" but who deny the fundamental truths of the Word of God. How can a newborn babe in Christ be helped and stabilized in a liberal church environment? How can the little lambs be ruthlessly thrown to the wolves? This is the most unloving thing that can be done to a new believer.

Instead of being recommended to these churches, they need to be seriously warned about these churches. We need to send converts to the "CHURCH OF GOD'S CHOICE." We need to carefully direct new believers to churches that are Bible-believing, Bible-teaching and Bible-practicing, but how often do you hear the evangelist give this kind of specific direction?

Problem #3
A Promotion of the "Souls at Any Cost" Philosophy

Though we ought to be willing to sacrifice our very lives for the salvation of the lost, this must never be our supreme motivation. Rather it should be this: "Faithfulness to God and Obedience to His Word at Any Cost." Souls at the cost of disobedience to the written Word of God is far too great a price to pay. The Jesuit philosophy that the end justifies the means is an abomination to the Lord (cf. Rom. 3:8; 6:1-2).

The Christian athlete must follow the rule book if he is to be crowned (2 Timothy 2:5). May our evangelism be God-centered, may our gospel be Christ crucified, may our power be God the Holy Spirit, and may the Lord of the harvest be pleased to call out a people for His Name and for His glory.

George Zeller, Revised 1999

"There is a toleration which is treachery. There is a peace which issues in paralysis. There are hours when the church must say NO to those who should ask communion with her, in the doing of her work, upon the basis of compromise. Such standing aloof may produce ostracism and persecution; but it will maintain power and influence. If the Church of God in the cities of today were aloof from the maxims of the age, separated from the materialistic philosophies of the schools, bearing her witness alone to the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the perfection of His salvation, even though persecuted and ostracized and bruised, it would be to her that men would look in the hour of their heartbreak and sorrow and national need. The reason why men do not look to the Church today is that she has destroyed her own influence by compromise."

--Dr. G. Campbell Morgan

"Truth cannot be perpetuated through compromise, and compromise cannot be avoided without separation."

--Dr. John C. Whitcomb

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A complete literature list is available upon request.