

Protestant Reformation

Who Is The Man Most Responsible for Evangelicalism's Movement Toward Rome?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part five of a series. Read [part four](#).

The clear winner of this dubious distinction is Billy Graham, who in a 1999 Gallup poll was named one of the ten most admired people of the 20th century.

As we noted in our last article, Billy Graham seemed to begin well, stating in the early days of his ministry that communism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam were the three greatest threats to the preaching of the Gospel. But, as we also noted, within a few short years he became a deconstructionist of the Reformation.

Here we give a brief, but far from comprehensive, chronology of Billy Graham's personal movement toward Rome, an example which many Evangelicals have gladly emulated.

In the early 1950s, Graham began to develop solid and enduring friendships with Roman Catholic prelates such as Fulton J. Sheen, archbishop (and later cardinal) of New York, and Richard Cushing, archbishop (also later cardinal) of Boston. As we shall see, these friendships with the enemies of Scripture and the Reformation would expand and deepen over the course of Graham's life.

During the same period Graham began developing similarly warm relationships with men of the World Council of Churches and its American counterpart, the National Council of Churches. Graham began conducting city-wide evangelistic campaigns with the endorsement and participation of WCC/NCC men. A few Evangelicals began to see

the dangers of Graham's ecumenical approach and stopped participating in his crusades. But most Evangelicals spiritually "held their noses" and joined forces with men and churches they knew were openly opposed to the fundamentals of the faith, for the supposed "greater good" of "mass evangelism". But people from liberal churches who "came forward for Christ" during these and all later crusades were not being truly evangelized. At the end of these crusades they were sent back to their liberal, Gospel-denying WCC/NCC churches for followup.

1955 marked Billy Graham's founding of *Christianity Today*, which would initially promote itself as a magazine "to present the Evangelical viewpoint to theologically liberal Protestant pastors" and even today calls itself "a magazine of Evangelical conviction." But starting in the 1960s *Christianity Today* became a major voice for the deconstruction of the Reformation, promoting Evangelical-Catholic cooperation and encouraging moves toward re-union with Rome.

By the late 1950s, Billy Graham was actively recruiting Roman Catholic priests, nuns, and lay brothers to serve as counselors of people who came forward during crusades who identified themselves as Catholics. In later years, on at least one occasion (a Denver crusade) a Roman Catholic priest would serve as the supervisor of *all* of the counselors at a Graham crusade.

In 1961 Billy Graham assented to the Catholic doctrine of salvation through infant baptism: "I have some difficulty in accepting the indiscriminate baptism of infants without a careful regard as to whether the parents have any intention of fulfilling the promise they make. But I do believe that something happens at the baptism of an infant, particularly if the parents are Christians and teach their children Christian truths from childhood. We cannot fully understand the miracles of God, but I believe that a miracle can happen in these children so that they are regenerated, that is, made Christian, through infant baptism. If you want to call that baptismal

regeneration, that's all right with me." (From an interview with Wilfred Bockelman, in *The Lutheran Standard*, the magazine of the American Lutheran Church, October 10, 1961.)

In 1962, Graham had the Roman Catholic bishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil, stand beside him during the invitation at his crusade in that city, and bless those who came forward. Thoroughly twisting the word "reformation", Graham said that this represented "something tremendous, an awakening of reform and revival within Christianity" (*New York Times*, November 9, 1963).

By the mid-1960s Billy Graham was openly saying, in *Christianity Today*, in his crusades, and in media interviews, that Evangelical-Catholic cooperation in "evangelism" was a positive development and must be encouraged.

In 1967, climaxing a week-long program of its *Institute for Ecumenical Dialogue*, Roman Catholic Belmont Abbey College awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Billy Graham. Graham noted the significance of the occasion as "a time when Protestants and Catholics could meet together and greet each other as brothers, whereas ten years ago they could not." He closed his remarks by saying that "the way of salvation has not changed . . . The gospel that built this school and the gospel that brings me here tonight is still the way to salvation." ("Belmont Abbey Confers Honorary Degree," *The Gastonia Gazette*, Gastonia, North Carolina, November 22, 1967).

In 1977 Graham conducted a five-day crusade at Notre Dame University. According to eyewitness reports, his appeal to his audience of Catholic students to "come forward for Christ" was couched in these words: "Many of you want to come tonight to reconfirm your confirmation. You want to reconfirm the decision that you made when you joined the Church."

In 1979 Graham conducted a crusade in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where the names and telephone numbers of over 3,500 people who came forward were turned over to the Roman Catholic archdiocese for followup. A year before the crusade, Graham had sent members of his team to Milwaukee to conduct a seminar in which Roman Catholics were trained in how to do followup with people who would come forward during the crusade. The post-crusade "followup" consisted of inviting all 3,500 Catholics who came forward to a mass where they were reminded that their "commitment to Christ" must be nurtured within the sacramentalist framework of the Roman Catholic church.

In 1981, Billy Graham met with the pope for the first time, which led to a succession of papal audiences during the next twenty years.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Graham continued to develop strong personal and organizational relationships with Roman Catholic cardinals and bishops around the world, always involving the local Catholic establishment in his city-wide crusades.

In January 1997, Larry King interviewed Billy Graham on his CNN program, and asked the question, "You're comfortable with the Vatican?" Graham responded, "I am very comfortable with the Vatican. I have been to see the Pope several times." King then asked, "You like this Pope?" and Graham responded, "I like him very much. . . . He and I agree on almost everything."

In his 1997 autobiography *Just As I Am*, Graham stated that his goal was not to lead people out of Roman Catholicism: "My goal, I always made clear, was not to preach against Catholic beliefs or to proselytize people who were already committed to Christ within the Catholic Church" (page 357).

In late 2004, Graham personally participated in a crusade for one of the last times, in Los Angeles. Cardinal Roger Mahoney of Los Angeles sent a letter to the priests of his large archdiocese that said:

The Billy Graham Crusade will be held at the Rose Bowl from November 18 through 21, 2004, and we have been invited to be associated with it. Because Catholics realize that doctrinal divisions continue to separate us from other Christians, you may be asked by your parishioners if they can attend the Crusade. You can respond positively to such questions... [W]e can certainly support Dr. Graham's core message of the need for conversion of life and the establishment of a personal relationship with Jesus.

When the Crusade was held in other locations, many Catholics responded to Dr. Graham's message and came forward for Christ. Crusade officials expect the same for the Los Angeles area. These officials have assured me that, in keeping with Dr. Graham's belief and policy, there will be no proselytizing, and that anyone identifying him or herself as a Catholic will be referred to us for reintegration into the life of the Catholic church. We must be ready to welcome them...

Dr. Graham preaches the Gospel with great eloquence and with a true ecumenical spirit, and I encourage your parish to pray for the success of his efforts in our community.

In 2006, Billy Graham preached publicly for the last time at a "festival" (the word "crusade" was no longer used) in Baltimore. Afterward, the *Catholic Review* proclaimed the "festival" a triumph for Roman Catholicism:

The Festival was a success! In July 2006, thousands of people came and heard the Gospel preached at Camden Yards — and many made a new or a renewed commitment to follow Jesus. Cardinal Keeler, the Archbishop of Baltimore, and the Archdiocesan Festival Team wholeheartedly welcome this commitment many have made to follow Jesus.

In order to follow Jesus we need to live in a personal relationship with Him and His bride, the Church. In hopes of connecting Festival attendees with faithful Catholics around the Baltimore area, the Archdiocesan Festival Team sponsored *The Names of Jesus* Bible study and *The One Thing: A Celebration of New Beginnings* [a program to integrate new converts into the Catholic church].

Although most Evangelicals wish to remain in denial about it, the facts are clear: Billy Graham preaches "another gospel, which is not another" and has refused to come out and be separate from spiritual uncleanness. He clearly believes the Reformation was a mistake.

Unlike today's Evangelicals, the Apostle Paul would pull no punches. Were he on the scene, doubtless Paul would write the same things to Billy Graham that he wrote to the Galatians concerning their deconstruction of the Gospel:

I marvel that you are turning away...from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another... [You] pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel...than what we have preached...let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-8).

And Paul would likewise take to task Evangelicals who claim to truly believe in Christ but support Graham and his organization despite their cooperation with and facilitation of apostates:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come

out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

What of Billy Graham's elder son? Franklin Graham began conducting crusades (now called "festivals") for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1989. He became CEO of the organization and its principal speaker in 2000. Contrary to the unfounded hopes of some Evangelicals, Franklin Graham marches shoulder-to-shoulder with his father on the path to Rome.

Next: [In his father's footsteps – Franklin Graham's attitude toward Rome](#)

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