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The Significance of Harringay¹

BY THE REV. FRANK COLQUHOUN, M.A.

THAT the Billy Graham crusade really did achieve something big I have no doubt whatever. It turned out to be far more than a Greater London Crusade. It was, in fact, long before the end, an All-Britain crusade. I have had occasion to consult press cuttings from newspapers covering the whole of the British Isles, and one of the things that has impressed me most deeply is the nation-wide impact which the crusade made. The fact that people were prepared to flock in their thousands to the relay services all over the country is but one evidence of this. It may be that the interest aroused was due to little more than mere curiosity; but perhaps there is, more deeply than we have realized, a hunger for God in the hearts of our people at the present day, as Billy Graham so often affirmed.

At any rate, the crusade demonstrated that this is a day of opportunity for evangelism, and that Christian people will respond to a bold and imaginative lead. Many have been waiting for a lead of this kind. For a long time there has been a lot of talk about evangelism on the part of the churches in this country. Books have been written on the subject; conferences have discussed it at length and issued innumerable findings; commissions have been set up to study modern evangelistic methods and pronounce on the religious climate of the age. But with all this, comparatively little has actually been attempted on a really big scale in the field of aggressive evangelism.

It would hardly be too much to say that the Billy Graham crusade implemented many of the recommendations and suggestions put forward in that very significant Church Assembly report (1945) entitled *Towards the Conversion of England*. Among other things the report recommended that modern advertising methods should be enlisted in the service of evangelism and that the Church ought to be prepared to spend money on a five years' publicity campaign at a rate of about £200,000 a year. "The provision of the money required to meet the cost of such a continuous intergrating and developing effort in evangelism would be a matter for prayer and careful consideration from all points of view. In such consideration, account would naturally be taken of the truth that the necessary financial support is never lacking where spiritual advance is being made."²

Despite these hopeful words, the Church of England made no effort to put such a bold experiment in evangelism into practice. It remained for an American evangelist to show the Church in this country how it could be done—and how much could be achieved by spending considerably less than £200,000 on advertising. It is no longer a matter of theory or conjecture as to what part modern publicity techniques can play in the work of the Gospel—particularly in arousing interest

¹ An extract from the closing chapter of Mr. Colquhoun's *Harringay Story* just published by Hodder & Stoughton, and printed by kind permission.

² *Towards the Conversion of England*, pp. 118-20.

and creating an appetite to hear the Word of God. That has been demonstrated beyond dispute.

Of course, good advertising *is* expensive ; and it must be good. But the point is that the technique is here at our disposal, ready to be used, provided we are willing to spend the necessary money. Two conclusions may be drawn from the Billy Graham crusade in regard to these matters. The first is that advertising is one of the things worth spending money on, in that it does, in the end, pay a big spiritual dividend. The second thing is that the money for aggressive evangelism is forthcoming from the Christian public in Britain—*provided they are convinced that it is the real thing*. The Christian public must be forgiven if it does not show much inclination to contribute lavishly towards much of what goes on in the name of "religion" in our churches ; but there is little lack of financial backing when a determined effort is made to preach the Gospel to those outside the Church and win them for the Lord Jesus Christ.

What were the results of the crusade ? In their entirety, of course, they are known only to God ; but here I would like to express the conviction that the ultimate achievement of Billy Graham's mission is not to be measured by the number of recorded "decisions" duly filed in the crusade office, but by the influence it exerted in the wider sphere of the nation's religious life.

In saying that, I am not belittling the value of "decisions" in a crusade of this kind, or doubting the reality of the great majority of them in this particular instance. Fresh evidence comes to hand almost every day of the work of God accomplished in people's lives, and some of the most striking cases of conversion have only come to light several months after the conclusion of the crusade. One such case was brought to my notice by the Bishop of Barking while I was engaged in writing the final pages of this book. In the course of a visit to a Church in the East End of London during the autumn of 1954 the bishop found that the vicar had received some sixty new members into his Church as a direct result of Harringay. Among them was a married couple with an interesting story, which the bishop relates as follows.

"A man of the age of some sixty years told me that he had been a more or less regular church-goer all his life, but that it had meant little to him, and that he had gradually fallen into wrong-doing, which ultimately led him into prison. He was taken to Harringay much against his will by his wife, also a merely nominal church-goer ; God spoke to him that first evening, and he felt himself impelled to go forward at the end of the meeting. Unknown to him at the time, his wife also went forward a moment later and they met in the Counselling Room, where they both gave their hearts to Christ. When they returned home, they decided that they would start reading the Bible together each evening. Two or three nights later, when they were thus reading together, a neighbour called and they told her what had happened to them and how they were now finding in the Bible something of great help in their daily life. The woman asked whether she might join them in their reading. Before long the news got round among other neighbours, and now fourteen people meet together regularly for Bible study in that home. Each one of them appears to

have experienced a genuine conversion, and all are members of the local church."

Stories of this kind concerning individual lives remade by the power of Christ are of thrilling interest. And as far as the London crusade is concerned, they could be multiplied almost indefinitely. But the point I am making now is that Billy Graham's visit did something more than simply produce a large number of converts. While in a sense that was its primary object, it did much else besides. It trained hundreds and indeed thousands of church people for the work of evangelism and gave them practical experience in the art of soul-winning. It brought new life and vigour to churches and chapels all over the land and in numerous cases had the effect of increasing congregations. It revived the faith of scores of ministers in the saving power of the Gospel and taught them to preach it with new authority—and to preach for a verdict. It brought the subject of evangelism powerfully before the notice of the whole Church once again and demonstrated what can be done by prayer and faith and effort. It united Christians and ministers of various denominations in a magnificent fellowship of service and showed how little our differences count where the vital realities of the Gospel are concerned. It created a spirit of expectancy among many outside the churches and made Christianity a popular topic of conversation—not only while the crusade was in progress, but for long afterwards. All these are immeasurably valuable gains.

As to the "secret" of what was achieved, it is useless to put forward any single explanation of the crusade's success. A number of distinct elements must be taken into account. These include the first-class publicity campaign which preceded and accompanied the mission; the fine quality of the organization and administration; the active co-operation of so many churches and ministers; the wholehearted service rendered by thousands of voluntary workers; and the generous giving which enabled the work to be carried through without financial embarrassment. Not one of these factors can be ignored.

But there were two essential elements in the crusade which, apart from the human factor of Billy Graham's dedicated personality, must be reckoned with in explaining the results.

The first of these is the Gospel which Billy Graham preached. The history of the Christian Church proves that there can be no effective evangelism without a dynamic evangel; and the only evangel which possesses converting power is the old-fashioned message of Christ and the Cross. St. Paul's words have been vindicated again and again in the story of the Church's evangelistic mission: "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. . . . For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God".¹

Whatever may be said of Billy Graham's message, it cannot be

¹ 1 Corinthians i. 18, 22, 23.

denied that he preached "Christ crucified". Like Charles Simeon, he made it his business to "humble the sinner and exalt the Saviour". And this he did, in season and out of season. Christ was always pre-eminent, and the cross was always central. He never compromised or modified that one essential theme.

Some did not like his message and criticized it as being too old fashioned. According to certain divines it was "fifty years out of date"—a criticism that would seem to imply that the eternal truth of the Gospel requires revision on the part of "modern" man every half century or so. Others attacked Graham's preaching as being "fundamentalist" or "literalist" or "obscurantist". By this they apparently meant that his preaching adhered too strictly to the teaching of the New Testament. That may or may not have been a fault; but if it was, those who offered the criticism should not have put the blame on Billy Graham. The same criticism could have been directed equally well against the teaching of the reformers in the sixteenth century, or to the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield in the eighteenth. The fact is, the redemptive message of the Gospel always has an uncomfortably old-fashioned ring about it for the man of modern thought, and St. Paul's words about the preaching of the cross being "foolishness" to the purely intellectually minded are as relevant in our day as in his.

In actual fact, Graham himself repudiated the word "fundamentalist" in its commonly accepted sense. When challenged on this point by a representative of one of the religious weeklies, he squarely faced the issue. "What do you mean by a 'fundamentalist'?" he asked. "Do you mean by that someone who believes God dictated the Bible to certain men as if they were dictaphones and had no part in the matter except in so far as they recorded the words of God? If so, then I am certainly not a fundamentalist. If on the other hand you mean by a 'fundamentalist' one who believes the great fundamental truths of the Bible and man's need of a Saviour, then I certainly am!"¹

The key to Billy Graham's message, and the secret of its power, consists in its biblical content. It was said of his ministry at Harringay that while he preached from many texts, he always gave the same sermon! And in a sense that was true. One observer summed up the gist of his message under the following five points:

(1) Man was made by God for fellowship with Himself, and only as he lives in fellowship with God can man find true happiness and real meaning in life.

(2) By his sin man has lost contact with God, and the broken fellowship has resulted in his becoming restless, frustrated, dissatisfied, defeated.

(3) Man cannot by his own efforts find his way back to God; he cannot achieve his own salvation.

(4) God in Christ has done for man what he could not do for himself; by the cross He has wrought for all a full and free salvation—forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life.

¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 20th May, 1954

(5) When by faith man responds to the love of God and accepts Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within his life, transforming him from within, making him a new creature, and enabling him, in the fellowship of the Church, to live a life of love and good works.

If that is not the biblical message of redemption, then I do not know what is. And it is not a "party" message, divisive in its effects. It is the one and only Gospel of the Church, the unchanging truth of catholic and evangelical Christianity. Just after he left London at the conclusion of the crusade, Billy Graham received a letter from the vicar of a church in south east London. It is as follows, and it speaks for itself :

"Dear Dr. Graham,

"This little note comes from an elderly priest of the Church of England, who would probably be classed as an Anglo Catholic of the 'extreme' variety.

"It is to say how I thank God for your mission in this country. The Gospel you preach is THE GOSPEL, the only foundation for the teaching of the Church. I pray most fervently that it may bear rich fruit, wherever you are and wherever you go.

"May our dear Lord protect you, fill you with His grace and bless you. And a 'Thank you' from. . . ."

The second essential factor in the blessing attending the crusade was the prayer which surrounded it from beginning to end. This is one of the most impressive lessons which the Church has to learn from Billy Graham's campaign—that prayer is the most important factor in every Christian enterprise. Long before the crusade began prayer partners were enrolled in their thousands up and down the country and overseas. As the crusade drew near, prayer groups came into being on every hand, including some 500 "cottage prayer meetings" in the Greater London area. Many all-night prayer meetings were held during the campaign, both in London and elsewhere.

These facts must be borne in mind in considering the question, Why was it that when Billy Graham preached the simple message of the Gospel to those thousands of people night after night so much power rested upon his ministry and the response on the part of the congregation was out of all proportion to what had been said? That question cannot be answered adequately simply by reference to the personality of the preacher or the content of the Gospel which he preached. The only explanation is that all over the world—and that is quite literally true—the prayers of tens of thousands of Christian people were focused upon London, and it was their prayers which released the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Hugh Redwood wrote afterwards :

"The master secret of the crusade was that the atmosphere of every meeting was saturated with prayer. Never can any missionary effort have been backed with prayer as this one was. Right round the world there was mobilized an army of praying Christians, and modern means of communication kept this spiritual force in touch with every stage of the campaign. The effectual, fervent prayer of a multitude of God's

elect people was constantly beamed on the Harringay Arena, and it availed mightily".¹

No one was more conscious than Billy Graham that the power in the meetings was not of himself. He declared more than once that he often felt as though he were a mere spectator, standing on one side and watching God at work. The power was that of the Holy Spirit; and such power is generated by prayer alone. This is not a matter which one can "explain" by some logical process. It is a simple fact of spiritual experience. And there is no secret about it. Or at least the secret is an open one. To quote Hugh Redwood again: "The Church of Christ has it *now* in its power to call into play vast spiritual forces. What prayer accomplished at Harringay is only a pointer".

¹ *Bible Speaks to Britain*, July 1954

The Person of the Holy Spirit

BY THE REV. E. HIRST, M.A., Dip. Th., A.R.C.M.

IN the innermost recesses of his spirit man bows before One whom he knows to be the supreme Spirit and Sovereign over all. This has been the case throughout human history. His finite spirit has ever soared upward in the hope that he might have communion with the Infinite Spirit whom he knows as God. In his efforts to attain his end, he has called his various faculties to his aid. Reason has been able to lead him so far, but has stopped short of the final goal. Experience has convinced him of the fact of God's Being and has shown him something of His character. In our own day, science has revealed much of the working of God's mind. Yet even with these, man has not been satisfied. His heart has yearned for love, and is ever craving for that love. So when man has gone as far as he can in his search for God, he has had to turn for that which he lacks to the truths which God has revealed about Himself to men. It is as the hymn says:

" It was the Voice of Revelation
That met my utmost need "

When He was on earth, our Lord said, "God is Spirit"; and Temple says that this is "the most fundamental proposition in theology"¹. He also says: "God is not the totality of things—the All; nor is He an immanent principle to which all things conform; He is Spirit—active energy, alive and purposive, but free from the temporal and spatial limitations which are characteristic of matter". It is from that point that we Christians are able to go onward in our search for a fuller knowledge of God. With the Bible in our hands, we are able to compare our own experiences of God with those of others, and above all else, with the facts of Revelation. Then, out of these experiences of God in prayer, and in study of the books of Nature,