**Definition:** **Graham, Billy (William Franklin)** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

US Protestant evangelist, known for the dramatic staging and charismatic eloquence of his preaching. Graham has preached to millions during worldwide crusades and on television, bringing many thousands to conversion to, or renewal of, Christian faith.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has been run by Graham's son Franklin since 2000.

**quotations**

Graham, Billy (William Franklin)

**documents**

Graham, Billy: The Lesson of the Worm

Graham, Billy: Salvation through Jesus

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**Summary Article: Graham, Billy (b. 1918)**

From *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*

Evangelist and Southern Baptist minister, William Franklin “Billy” Graham has preached in person to more people than anyone else in history. Born near Charlotte, North Carolina, Graham enjoyed a rural childhood on a dairy farm, with his religious interests developing only after his conversion at a 1934 revival led by Mordecai Ham. In 1939 he became an ordained Southern Baptist minister. He graduated from Florida Bible Institute and later Wheaton College, marrying fellow Wheaton student Ruth McCue Bell, the daughter of medical missionaries to China.

Graham's introduction to radio evangelism came through the weekly program “Songs in the Night,” which featured his preaching. Graham recruited the bass-baritone soloist George Beverly Shea to be his primary musical performer, and Shea would later become a prominent musical feature of Graham’s evangelistic crusades. In 1946, Graham joined the staff of Youth for Christ, where he led evangelistic campaigns aimed at adolescents and World War II servicemen. For more than four years he served as president of the Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis.

In 1949, Graham was lifted to national attention for his Los Angeles Crusade, which was so successful that it was extended from three weeks to more than eight. The success was greatly aided by newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, who, impressed by the evangelist's preaching and anticommmunist passion, reputedly instructed his editors to “puff Graham.” The next year Graham formed the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) to oversee his expanding projects. He also began his weekly “Hour of Decision” radio broadcasts, which are now heard on more than 700 stations around the world. His broadcast audience became so broad that by 1952 Graham was receiving over 1,000 letters a day. That same year he introduced his syndicated newspaper column “My Answer” that now has a combined circulation of 5 million readers. Graham achieved international recognition with his
1954 Crusade in London, and his 16 week New York City Crusade in 1957 helped to secure his position at the center of the post—World War II upsurge in evangelical Christianity.

In style and organizational technique Graham's revivalism and exhortation to repentance stand in the tradition of Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Sunday. In both preparation and postcrusade follow-up, the BGEA evidences extensive and sophisticated organizational ability. While some revivalists are critiqued for generating flashy but transient periods of excitement, Graham's organization has earned much admiration for its concern to follow up on converts and to encourage them to join a local church.

Graham exhibits an irenic evangelicalism and tends to avoid denominational polemic and theological complexity in favor of a presentation of the basic gospel message of salvation by repentance of sins and acceptance of Christ as one's savior. The simplicity of Graham's message, combined with the earnestness and power of his preaching and his ability to communicate to the common man, partly explains the broadness of his appeal. Within five years of Los Angeles, Graham's crusades were supported by congregants and church leaders of virtually all Protestant denominations in America. Some have criticized Graham for downplaying social concerns in his preaching, but examples such as his early policy to end segregated seating at crusades and his funding of various causes of social welfare reveal a concern for social issues. Even so, Graham is not a political activist after the fashion of many social justice workers, and his philosophy is that true social transformation must begin through a personal conversion to Jesus Christ.

Billy Graham has served as spiritual adviser to every US President since Dwight Eisenhower. Although typically remaining apolitical, Graham politically supported Richard Nixon's candidacy. Graham was chastened by the scandal of Watergate and since then, in contrast to more politically active fundamentalist circles, has largely retreated from political entanglements. Observers from many different perspectives have come to admire Graham's integrity, and when many television preachers were beset with scandal in the 1980s he remained above the fray.

In recent years, due to age and declining health, Graham has increasingly curtailed his involvement in the crusades, and his son, Franklin, has begun taking a more prominent role in both the crusades themselves and in administrative concerns of the BGEA and other bodies. Billy Graham announced that he would hold his final crusade in New York City in 2005, but the subsequent disaster of Hurricane Katrina's damage to New Orleans provoked his sympathy, and he held a “Celebration of Hope” in New Orleans in 2006. He continues to participate in occasional events of public evangelism.

Graham has written multiple bestsellers, including Peace with God (1953), World Aflame (1965), Angels (1975), and Approaching Hoofbeats (1983), and he is a cofounder of the magazine Christianity Today. The Billy Graham Center was constructed at Wheaton College in 1977 for the study of evangelicalism, and land near Montreat, North Carolina, which has been Graham's home since the 1950s, was used to construct the Billy Graham Training Center for the training of church laity. The Billy Graham Library opened in Charlotte, North Carolina in 2007. Despite declining health, Graham remains very popular, and he is consistently found within Gallup's yearly poll for “the ten most admired men in the world,” having appeared there almost 50 times, which is more than any other individual. In 1996, he and his wife received the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor Congress can bestow on a private citizen, and in 2001 he was presented with an honorary knighthood of the British Empire. In a career spanning more than six decades, Billy Graham has preached to over 210 million people in more than 185
countries and territories, and countless more have heard him through his many media outlets and publications. His evangelical efforts, both nationally and internationally, have made him one of the most recognized religious figures of his era.

SEE ALSO: evangelicalism; evangelism; Finney, Charles Grandison; Ham, Mordecai Fowler, Jr. (1877-1961); Moody, Dwight Lyman (1837-1899); Sunday, Billy

References And Suggested Readings

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA