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Crusade Evangelism

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RUMOURS that a further Billy Graham Crusade in this country might be coming off in the near future prompted a letter to the Church of England Newspaper with a plea against such a proposal. Inevitably the reasons had to be stated with brevity. In addition to one or two critical replies, the letter drew a courteous and friendly request from an official of the Billy Graham Organisation for further explanation. Now the editor of this journal asks for more. What are the reasons for a growing disinclination among evangelicals to support Crusade evangelism? And what lines should contemporary evangelism based on the local church follow? This article is one incumbent's attempt to answer these questions. The personal element, therefore, cannot be excluded.

Lest it be thought that I write under the influence of some strong prejudice against Crusade evangelism in general and Billy Graham in particular, some personal details may be appropriate. Brought up in a home whose parents had been closely associated with united evangelistic campaigns since 1911, when Fritz (later, Frederick) and Arthur Wood were first reaching prominence—and probably being as effective as any British evangelists this century—I was firmly conditioned to believe in mass evangelism. An early, but hazy, memory is of being ushered on to a platform to present the Marechale with a bouquet of roses at the end of a united campaign nearly 45 years ago! Coming to my present sphere just as Billy Graham began his Harringay Crusade in 1954 I greatly desired to see the congregation participate in the spiritual awakening many felt to be beginning. The following year we threw ourselves into the relays from Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, I myself having charge of the local counselling training and arrangements. Convinced that the town needed a Crusade of its own I took the initiative in the coming of Eric Hutchings and his team to Bolton in 1958, and was glad to be secretary of the sponsoring committee. In the planning of the Billy Graham North of England Crusade of 1961 I served on the

Executive Committee and strove for over 12 months to persuade the whole congregation to be fully committed. Their response was most encouraging. By this time the belief of adolescent years that mass evangelism was, if not the only, yet the most effective way of evangelising had certainly been modified by experience. But, as Billy Graham himself was saying, mass evangelism was one method both needed and successful.

What of Billy Graham himself? I had heard him as a Youth for Christ evangelist, almost unknown in this country, preach to a few score persons in an independent chapel in Bristol in 1946. From that time I watched with interest his expanding ministry in America as reported in the Christian press. Although obviously not involved in discussions leading to the Harringay invitation I was most enthusiastic for his coming. For Billy Graham as a Christian leader and evangelist over the past 20 years I join with millions in giving thanks to God. Why then plead that he should not return to this country for another Crusade along the now familiar lines? The answer arises from the following impressions and reflections.

1. The close relationship between the evangelist and the churches, which biblical principles demand, has been adversely affected by the very size and complexity of the Billy Graham organisation. A host of lieutenants and administrators is essential, if Billy Graham is to fulfil the extensive ministry he has developed over the years. But all unwittingly these officials tend to insulate Billy Graham from the local church leaders, with the result that he becomes something of a V.I.P. on an official visit surrounded by protocol. The detailed local planning, even perhaps the first enquiries, of a Crusade must be conducted by assistants in the organisation. They come with the efficiency and expertise born of long experience in mounting Crusades. But what if local churchmen firmly believe the area, or changing conditions, demand some new approach or different method? Biblical insights would surely suggest direct, prayerful discussion between them and the evangelist himself. This is apparently impossible, as Billy Graham is not usually free till the eve of the Crusade. Assistants know his normal requirements, and so local misgivings or positive new ideas give way. All this might suggest inconsiderate inflexibility in Billy Graham and his team. Personal experience of them all soon reveals how false such an impression is. What I am saying is that the system now determines the pattern. If an evangelist is to work in an area where the Church is already planted—and Billy Graham and all similar evangelists never work anywhere else—a biblical view requires direct, sustained liaison between him and the local participating congregations (not just the ministers!) in the initiation, planning and conduct of their evangelism together.

2. Close connection with the training and technique of counselling in several Crusades, not all by Billy Graham, has increasingly raised

doubts about this aspect of modern evangelism. The benefits to many Christians in grasping more surely the fundamentals of the Gospel and in the stimulation to personal witness brought by training classes are not in dispute. As pastoral experience has grown, however, I am less and less happy with the technique applied in the actual counselling. The great danger is in submitting all enquiries, whatever their individual condition, to roughly the same procedure. All worthwhile counselling must be counsellee-orientated as much as message-orientated. Because of the time factor counselling at the end of a Crusade meeting must tend more to the latter than the former. Except with apparently clear-cut enquiries which lead to immediate response to Christ, considerable time ought to be spent in discovering the enquirer's state. Why have they come forward? With many the answer could not be found in one evening. Christian pastoral psychology has progressed much in recent years. Any minister or layman who takes the trouble to understand a person in deep need knows how complex can be the pattern with the interweaving of spiritual, mental and even physical problems.

There are persons I have sought to help confidentially over a long period, and by the grace of God with some success, who would have been harmed by the experience of going forward under emotional stress in a Crusade to be involved in a half-hour text-quoting conversation. And yet many such persons do go forward in a sense of desperation. One of the advantages of ministering in the same place for nearly 17 years had been to note what has become of persons counselled in various Crusades. While thanking God for some who have persevered, one knows of a number apparently further away from the Church because of their reaction to the invitation and counselling. They now seem to avoid contact lest they be subjected to the same thing again. 'Gospel rejection' may be too easy an explanation of this. The fault may equally lie with the method used on them.

3. The enormous costs of Crusades are common knowledge. Most Christians associated with them are informed by the sponsoring committee of the total required. What is not often realised is that a further incalculable amount is paid out by the Christian public in travelling and other related expenses not only for themselves but for invited friends. For the 21 nights of the North of England Crusade, for instance, our congregation chartered a coach or double-decker bus, offering free travel to all non-members. This must be typical of hundreds of churches over the years. It is beyond dispute that expenditure on the scale required by a Crusade gravely affects for a time the giving of the Christian public to a host of other causes. Missionary societies, work in this country, church budgets have all suffered in a Crusade year. Insight into the financial problems now facing a number of organisations, including societies, colleges and other institutions, leads me to say that they just cannot afford the cost of a Billy Graham Crusade in the near future. For some it would be the last financial straw. It

would not be a responsible act to invite or initiate a Crusade without weighing carefully the harmful effect on other Christian work. Counter-arguments have been put forward in the past. One is that a Crusade, by stimulation of witness and service, and by drawing new people into the churches, leads to greater commitment in giving subsequently. Theoretically this should be. Whether it has been so is very difficult to assess. The evidence is not clear. Again, it has been said that Christians are urged to make their financial support of a Crusade additional to their established commitments. In practice, this does not seem to happen on a substantial scale. Then, it is argued, if only a few persons are won for Christ, and especially if a future evangelist or missionary be among them, all the cost will have been worthwhile. Here emotive language can easily take the place of responsible thinking. None may doubt the value of one person in God's sight, or the potentiality of one life in His service. But this argument alone could justify the most extravagant projects. Other factors must be considered. There are many evangelical Christians in this country today who consider the one or two hundred thousand pounds needed for a Crusade would find better long-term investment for the Kingdom of God in other existing or new projects.

4. Involvement in a Crusade can be a form of escape from the real problems of evangelism in this country today. The Evangelical Alliance report *On the Other Side* confirms the impression that the Church in Britain has really not yet come to grips with those problems. In bewilderment and frustration at the failure to make much impact on the unchurched masses and the unmistakable signs of a shrinking Church recourse to another Crusade has its immediate attraction. But the evidence is that we in Britain are in a post-Crusade era, whatever may be the case in other countries. In 1954 public controversy concerning Billy Graham, stirred by sensationalism in the press, drew many thousands of curious unchurched people to Harringay. Times have changed. The public has seen it all before—large choir, soloists, the old hymns, evangelistic address and invitation. Reference was made earlier to a coach and bus service laid on for the twenty-one nights of the North of England Crusade in 1961. Despite much prayer and diligent visitation of the parish by enthusiastic laity less than a dozen were prepared to accept the invitation to travel the twelve miles to Maine Road, Manchester. None, incidentally, went forward for counselling. Other churches in the area would no doubt claim greater success. But ten years later it seems much less likely that outsiders would gather in crowds for the usual Crusade meeting. In the decade or so after the War large crowds would gather for almost anything—a second or third division football match, an average County Cricket match, any kind of film at the local cinema. Now the public is much more choosy. It must be something extraordinary to pull them away from home. A pop-festival on the Isle of Wight may do it for a certain

kind of young person. But what Christian presentation would attract such needy folk? Here and there a Christian group can no doubt speak enthusiastically of some success in a recent Crusade. It would be strange if this were not so. When the Gospel is faithfully preached with intensive prayer backing some response can be expected. But taking the country as a whole I would maintain that Crusade evangelism does not today have the impact on the masses commensurate with the prayer, finance and energies put in by so many. In other words, the name 'mass evangelism' is a misnomer.

What is today's answer to the biggest of all questions facing the Church in Britain? I do not know anyone who has it. I certainly have no success story of evangelistic breakthrough to recount. That evangelism must be based on the local church is surely indisputable. But in an era that is not only post-Crusade but, even more significantly, post-Christian, affluent and materialistic it must be a long, hard task. There is no alternative to the age-old concept of the whole Christian *laos* witnessing to Christ through personal contacts, more particularly as the crowds do not readily gather to the public preacher whether in church, secular hall or open-air. But shall we be content simply to plod on along well-worn paths? Surely not. The situation demands the most thorough corporate thinking we can give. A Keele-type congress devoted to evangelism alone might provide the forum.

Priority must be given to a clear, detailed assessment of the task facing us. It is not enough to think of all outside of Christ simply as lost and needing a Saviour. What are the factors in the structures of society and in the climate of the age that militate against faith and commitment? Vast numbers of our people are prisoners of their sub-cultures, social groupings and environment. We are finding in immigrant areas the difficulty in reaching Muslims, for instance, because their culture insulates them from alien ideas. Just as surely, the working man, compelled to surrender independent action to the dictates of a vast union, is conditioned against stepping out in personal commitment involving radical alteration to his way of life. The six million underprivileged in this country, who generally through no fault of their own have missed out on the prevailing affluence, are too absorbed in the struggle to manage their physical needs today and tomorrow to have time or energy to think of eternity. The middle class, on the other hand, seem so concerned with maintaining their security of property and person, safeguarding and improving their style of life, that wholehearted commitment to the pilgrim way of discipleship is too much to ask. To sit loose to material security in an affluent age demands courage and independence of mind as well as faith. Then there is the sub-culture of the educational world from school to post-graduate learning, and the permeating influence of the mass media, both profoundly affected by humanistic and existentialist philosophies. The report *On the Other Side* sought to analyse the contemporary

situation. By diligent study we need to determine the accuracy of that assessment and the implications and action needed, if it is correct. Would a thorough sociological survey, carried out by qualified Christians, be a valuable preliminary step? I see nothing in the Bible to preclude it. The prophets and preachers of Old and New Testament times sought to understand their hearers and to relate their message accordingly. Is the Church today taking enough trouble to follow suit?

After assessment of the obstacles attention must be given to pre-evangelism, the preparation of the ground for the Gospel. If a part of the money spent on large scale Crusades in recent years could be devoted to research on ways of counteracting the anti-Christian influences in our society, it could have profound effects on our evangelism. Guidance would be available to Christian literature groups, persons qualified to work through the mass media, Church Synods, as well as local congregations. Suppose a Christian couple now want to use their home to influence their unchurched neighbours for Christ. After a time they became conscious of the extent to which their friends have been influenced by the philosophy of the age—scientific humanism has greatly reduced the credibility of a theistic position, truth is relative, Christian morality is obsolescent. How can they counteract these ideas convincingly? Not by assertions that simply cover up a lack of understanding with dogmatism. They need to know where to turn for helpful literature, and for guidance in approach. Few clergy are sufficiently well-read to have the answers or to assess the value of available literature. A team of specialists, doing for evangelism what Latimer House seeks to do for Anglican theology and ecclesiastical politics, could service the churches. In this area attention would have to be paid to the different sub-cultures in society. For Christians in the artisan sector of society guidance must be relevant to the thought-forms, approach and aspirations of that large section of the community. And it must be recognised that for these people the way Christianity is presented is generally far too intellectualised. Paul Rowntree Clifford in *Now is the Time* (p. 36) says, 'It is the estrangement of the Church from most ordinary folk, not at the level of the intellect but at the level of the emotions, which is the greatest hindrance to communicating the Gospel today'. He in turn quotes David Edwards in *Religion and Change* (p. 51), 'A realistic assessment of religion (or of atheism) must begin where people begin—not with ideas but with emotions, shaped as these have been by everyday experiences and by all the subtle influences of home and school, work and friends'. Clearly, literature alone will not enable the ordinary Christian to identify himself with the needs of his fellows, but it can help him to see what is needed and how to act.

Mention of human needs brings us to what I believe is the crucial point of contact in local church-based evangelism. However much people are conditioned by anti-Christian influences as far as thinking

and behaviour are concerned they remain individuals with basic human needs, afflicted by fears, needing acceptance, security, love, and meaningful relationships. Bereavement, sickness, personality problems, financial stress, family pressures all make them open to that unconditional loving which Christ showed as He 'went about doing good'. While not denying that the Gospel must speak to man in his strength, in practice it is man in his weakness who most readily feels the relevance of its message.

How can the local church, ministers and laity, reach people at the point of need? The Occasional Offices spring to mind immediately. Their effectiveness as opportunities of evangelism is often exaggerated, though undoubtedly they are occasions for caring in Christ's Name. My experience is that funerals are more rewarding opportunities than baptism contacts, with weddings a bad third. The greater the felt need, apparently, the more open is the heart to the Gospel and the love it proclaims. Whether the baptism of infants should be regarded as an evangelistic opportunity to the family is a matter of dispute. Many would argue that our widespread practice of infant baptism is a barrier to evangelism. To this matter we return later. For the moment one would simply wish to ask—would a fuller involvement of the laity with the clergy in the Occasional Office contacts make for more effective evangelism? I believe the phenomenon of Family Services, perhaps the only widespread growing-point in Church life, is related to a basic human need. Many parents, fearful of the pressures on their children and desiring the best in life for them, turn with a rather vague sense of need to the Church. What they seem to want is some help in inculcating a moral, respectable way of life. 'We don't want our children growing up into hippies or drug-addicts!' Few start attending Family Services with a conscious need of Salvation in Christ. Indeed if they felt that the end might be wholehearted commitment to Christ involving sacrificial discipleship, they might keep away.

What I would emphasise is this. Occasional Office and Family Service contacts are digging out of the community, however unchristian it is generally, those persons who feel a sense of need, vague though it may be, and believe God could possibly do something about it. In so far as they recognise the existence of God and relate Him to their need faith is beginning on its long and winding road (Hebrews 11: 6). The major task of evangelism by the local Church, as I see it, is to lead them along that road and to give evangel-content to that faith. For the majority it will be a long process before full assurance of faith is reached. As I try to assess the history of nearly seventeen years in one parish I am convinced that most of those who have evidently become committed to Christ have come to that state gradually over a period of time in the context of the life of the congregation, rather than by sudden conversion. Indeed, the most fruitful evangelistic enterprise of all has been adult confirmation preparation. Here one has seemed

to be bringing, by the Spirit's help, evangel-content to a hitherto vague belief in God in persons who have, one way or another, got attached to the congregation.

This may seem to be relying on a policy of 'in-drag' rather than 'out-reach'. In fact, there is a reaching out to folk at point of need which leads, one hopes, to incorporation in the worshipping community, where full faith is nurtured. One is frequently reminded in pastoral visiting that many more people have a kind of belief in God, chiefly expressed in 'saying prayers', than are seen in our pews. Some evangelicals would dismiss such faith as worthless. None can really believe in God, or pray to Him, it is said, unless regenerate. Until they are born again their prayers never get past the ceiling! I do not think this is true theologically, or borne out by experience. It is a misconception arising from a desire for a watertight theological system. No blurred edges to understanding of God's saving ways with men are tolerable. To be a child of God a person must pass through a fairly rigid pattern of conviction, repentance and faith-commitment to Christ. It almost presupposes the necessity of knowing the moment when saving faith begins. This I take to be indefensible on theological grounds, as well as evidently untrue to pastoral experience. The Holy Spirit has an infinite variety of ways of leading people to Christ. Often conviction of sin and repentance, which is a life-long process anyway, seem to arise after commitment in some measure to Christ. And who can determine exactly the point of regeneration, especially in the lives of those brought within the membership of the visible Church by baptism as infants? If God heard the prayers of 'god-fearers', not yet full believers, in Acts 10: 2, 4, who is to deny that in the lives of many not regularly found in our worshipping congregations faith has begun? If there are these people all around, evangelism by the local church must be aimed towards them at the point of felt need so that they may be brought to a full faith in Christ, grasp of the Gospel and discipleship among His people. The responsibility of clergy and laity is to discover where deep needs are being felt. Mention has been made of the contacts at the crises of life, and with families at the point of parental concern. These are the most obvious opportunities. But we need all our alertness and imagination to discover other situations—the loneliness of elderly folk in modern flats, the insecurity of men at management and shop-floor levels threatened by industrial take-overs, the frustration of ordinary people struggling for justice against bureaucracy. The Christ we preach is relevant to all these needs, but He acts through His people.

How do we let people know the local church is alive and in business, so that contact for Christ's sake and theirs may be established? Again, some ways such as funeral contacts are obvious. But, generally speaking, there is no alternative to each Christian of the congregation looking out and caring for people and speaking of Christ. It is a

slow, unspectacular process, for the most part. Auxiliary ways of establishing contact may doubtless be found. Official 'street-wardens' are very useful in most parishes. Public advertisement, if imaginatively used, can help. Why should almost all our notices in the local paper or on posters outside church be concerned with services? For ten years a large notice board, ten feet by four feet, outside one of our churches situated at a very busy junction in Bolton has carried messages calculated to awaken interest. Over the years it has become a feature of the town and drawn considerable reaction. But such public messages must be couched in non-theological, contemporary idiom. Few churches are without any advantageous display site. Every congregation needs to set out its shop window as best it can, emphasising consistently that it exists for God and for others, and counteracting the impression of an exclusive club for members only. I cannot see how any parish can afford to be without an Outreach Committee, responsible to the P.C.C., giving considerable thought to projecting the right image of the church and establishing every possible contact with the community.

Mention of outreach to those whose need of spiritual help and first gropings of faith are being felt leads me to emphasise that evangelism must be conducted in the context of widespread baptism. We may deplore the fact that though the majority of our country are baptised neither their parents nor they themselves on reaching mature years have known the significance of their baptism. We may greatly desire a more realistic baptismal policy with greater attention to instruction and follow-up in accordance with the new Canon Law (particularly canons B21-23). And already some Deanery Synods are seeking to establish a deanery policy along these lines. But when all this has been said, we cannot ignore the fact that most of those we are trying to reach for Christ are already baptised. And that must mean something, for on conversion we do not require of them a second baptism. Christians of the early Church could never have contemplated evangelism without baptism. To repent, trust in Christ and be baptised was essentially one matter, even though sacramental rite and inward work of grace were usually separate in time. It is a great weakness of all interdenominational, and much Anglican, evangelism, as I see it, that it can be conducted from start to finish without a mention of baptism. I repeat, Christians of the early Church would not have understood this. But, it may be argued, theirs was a missionary situation, and so baptisms at first would be adult and follow upon confession of faith. As paedobaptists Anglicans would also wish to say, of course, that the children of converts were most probably baptised as well, in accordance with the family-solidarity principle learned from the Old Testament. If this was the case, one would expect the growing child in a Christian home to be taught the link between baptism and personal faith in Christ.

What, then, of our day? Much as we may describe it as a missionary

situation, unless and until baptism is rigidly restricted to families of the worshipping community (whether that is desirable or not is not the point here), and until the present generations of the baptised die off, our situation is not comparable with the first century or the mission field overseas! Whatever else it does not mean, their baptism has already put them in the visible Church, however great the difficulties that presents. And our evangelism must take account of that fact and be done within that context. Contact with people needing help and showing signs of God-orientated concern must tactfully bring in the implications of their baptised state and its significance for their future. Emphasis on God's initiative in baptism, evidencing His love and care, may lead to a recognition that their present felt needs may find their answer in relationship to Him. Emphasis on incorporation into the company of His people as an integral part of baptism may lead to a willingness to share in the benefit of membership. And within the community faith may receive that evangel-content which means assurance of salvation. It is along this line, starting from the given point of baptism, that adult confirmation preparation has proved one of the most encouraging aspects of ministry.

Some may argue that this emphasis on relating evangelism to baptism, when so many of the baptised are apparently near-pagans, is theologically unrealistic. But if any of these 'pagans' are converted, why are they not subsequently baptised by those who hold the paedobaptist position? The answer is, because their baptism as infants is regarded as valid and unrepeatable. So the baptism of any we seek for Christ can never be irrelevant to evangelism of them. Our evangelistic strategy must start from where people are—baptised but ignorant of, and apparently unconcerned about, the Gospel the sacrament signifies, yet in many cases interested in ultimate questions. What this will mean in terms of tactics at ground level should be an urgent concern of the P.C.C., or its Outreach Committee, or, where possible, of Deanery Synods.

Finally, we need to ensure that the content of our message and the idiom of presentation relate to the particular state of the hearer. In a pluriform society there are vast differences in the attitudes and concerns of those outside the Church. The lonely widow who vaguely 'believes' in God and desperately longs for assurance of the life to come, the hippie, the young radical rejecting the spurious standards and selfish injustices of society, the middle-class comfortable couple so concerned about law and order, the lower-paid Trade Unionist and his Bingo-loving wife, the young football ground mobster, the executive squeezed by the pressures of big business, all approach life with vastly different attitudes. The Christian may lump them all together as needing Christ, salvation and regeneration. But simply to talk to them all alike in those terms, quoting the Scriptures without explaining their meaning or relevance, 'leaving it to the Holy Spirit to do His work in them', is not responsible evangelism. As Paul related his approach at Athens

to the background and beliefs of his hearers, so we must take time and thought to relate our presentation of the Gospel to people where they are, and not where we think they ought to be.

Words like security, self-fulfilment, freedom, justice, relationship, purpose, all of them integral to the Christian message, will make more impact than traditional terminology. This is not a plea for reduction of the content of the Gospel, or blunting its cutting-edge, but for relevancy.

Evangelism today requires more penetrative thought, more imaginative insight and wider ethical concern (as well, of course, as prayer and the Spirit's power) than in past generations. Are we serious enough to accept the challenge?