

Protestant Reformation

Are Billy and Franklin Graham Leading Souls to Heaven, or Hell?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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

In over 80 combined years of ministry, Billy and Franklin Graham have presented a false, ecumenical way into the kingdom of God. Rather than calling the lost to the faith of the Reformation they have urged millions to "come forward" to be part of a church that says that anyone who preaches justification by faith alone, assurance of salvation, or the authority of Scripture alone, is *anathema* — cursed of God.

As we mentioned in our last article, 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. Today the Billy Graham organization has net assets of over \$300 million, and a reputation of respect that father and son have cultivated among theological liberals, Evangelicals, and Roman Catholics alike. Franklin Graham continues his father's long-time policy of using the organization's huge financial assets and massive public goodwill to advance the ecumenical march toward Rome.

Here is a chronology of some of Franklin Graham's cooperation and compromise with Roman Catholicism over the past twenty-plus years.

In 1998, Franklin Graham conducted a crusade in Adelaide, Australia. Archbishop Leonard Faulkner of the diocese of Adelaide was present at the media kick-off event

for the crusade in late 1997, and voiced the church's support. Forty-nine Roman Catholic churches were actively involved in the crusade.

In a 1999 newspaper interview, Franklin Graham said that his father's decision early in his ministry to cultivate broad ecumenical participation in his crusades, including the Roman Catholic church, was "the best thing he ever did." He went on to say, "In the early years, up in Boston, the Catholic church got behind my father's crusade. That was a first. It took back many Protestants. They didn't know how to handle it. But it set the example. 'If Billy Graham is willing to work with everybody, then maybe we should too' " (*The Indianapolis Star*, June 3, 1999).

In April 2000, the vice-chairman of the Franklin Graham Festival in Lubbock, Texas was Paul Key, evangelism director for the Catholic Diocese of Lubbock. Key had been an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA) but converted to Roman Catholicism and has now been ordained a priest of Rome. Key was ordained a priest despite the fact that he is married and has two children. The Vatican will break its rules if a prominent "Protestant" will come "home to Rome." Paul Key is the author of a book titled *95 Reasons for Becoming or Remaining a Roman Catholic*, which has been touted as a Catholic answer to Martin Luther's *95 Theses*.

In June 2002, Franklin Graham conducted a "festival" in Cincinnati, Ohio in which five Roman Catholic parishes of that city actively participated. In preparation for the crusade, these parishes conducted week-long training programs to prepare Catholic counselors to deal with those who came forward in response to Graham's invitations. As reported in *The Catholic Telegraph*, invitations were sent out to 9,000 Catholics to request their participation in the training program, and hundreds responded. Catholic priest Charles Bowes told his parish that the Graham mission was a "golden opportunity to evangelize Catholics and to help our parish..." (*The Catholic Telegraph*, May 10, 2002).

In 2004, Roman Catholics participated in a "festival" conducted by Franklin Graham in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

In 2005, Roman Catholics participated in another Franklin Graham "festival" in Corpus Christi, Texas.

In an April 2, 2005 interview with Katie Couric on NBC's *Today* show, Franklin Graham praised the late Pope John Paul II and said that they preached the same gospel: "We disagree on a lot of doctrinal issues and I guess those disagreements will always be there. At the same time we did agree on the fundamentals that Jesus Christ is the son of the living God who came to this earth to die for our sins and when he died on that cross and shed his blood he took the sins of the world with him on the cross; and if we confess our sins and repent and by faith receive Christ into our hearts God will forgive us and cleanse us. These are fundamentals of the faith we agreed on and support and we appreciate this man and the stand he has taken on so many of these moral issues." Such a statement exhibits the kind of un-careful presentation of the "gospel" that has become commonplace among Evangelicals.

Also in 2005, Franklin Graham attended the enthronement of Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. (His father was too ill to attend.) Franklin's preacher sister Anne Graham Lotz represented the organization at Pope John Paul II's funeral.

In 2006, as mentioned in our last article, many Roman Catholics were trained as counselors for the "festival" conducted by Franklin Graham at the Camden Yards stadium in Baltimore. (This was also the last occasion where Billy Graham preached publicly.) Catholic priest Erik Arnold of the Church of the Crucifixion in Glen Burnie, Maryland, led the team of 225 Catholic counselors who participated in the crusade. He said, "It was a great opportunity for the Christian churches to show their unity in leading people to Christ" ("Catholic Counselors Attend Billy Graham Festival," *The Catholic Review*, July 12, 2006). As we mentioned in our last article, the followup

consisted of involving the people who came forward in a new-converts program conducted by the Catholic church.

Also in 2006, Roman Catholics participated in a "festival" conducted by Franklin Graham in Winnipeg, Canada. Each diocese in central Canada was represented on the festival executive committee. Catholic bishops were assured that, "Following in the footsteps of his father, Franklin Graham will present basic Christianity. The Catholic will hear no slighting of the Church's teaching on Mary or authority, nor of papal or Episcopal prerogative; no word against the Mass/Divine Liturgy or sacraments, nor of Catholic practices or customs" ("Central Canada 2006 Franklin Graham Festival Background and Pastoral Notes for Catholic Clergy and Workers," by Luis Melo, Director of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs, Archdiocese of Saint Boniface).

In the summer of 2009, Franklin Graham is conducting what the Graham organization is calling the "Rock the River Tour" of "Franklin Graham Festivals" in cities along the Mississippi River, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana all the way to Minneapolis, Minnesota. According to the GrahamFestivals.org website,

The Lord Jesus Christ is calling all of us to rescue the lost youth of America. This is not just the responsibility of Youth Pastors or Youth Leaders, but the entire church. The reality is that 75 percent of those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior do so by the time they are 18. We should not neglect anyone of any age, but if we want to rescue people for Christ and build Christ's church for the next generation, we must reach out to youth or chances are they will never be reached.

Rock the River is a massive rescue effort for youth. The entire church needs to be totally committed to reach this age group while they are still reachable. The last census revealed there are 72 million people in America under the age of 18. Many do not know Christ. God has placed a burden on the heart of Franklin

Graham to bring the message of hope in a relationship with Christ to youth who live in proximity to the Mississippi River.

The format for *Rock the River* will be [rock] music, the language of youth, and a relevant message. Some of the hottest Christian bands will share the stage with Franklin to give Christians the opportunity to invite their friends to a quality concert. The Good News of the Gospel will be preached and an opportunity to respond will be given. Excellent training preparation and follow-up will be the standard, as with all Billy Graham outreaches.

A number of years ago the Lord laid on Billy Graham's heart a verse that each of us needs to take for ourselves. Psalm 78:4 declares: "We will not hide these truths from our children, but will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord." The future of our nation, our churches, and our young people can be changed if we all join together in sharing the Gospel.

And who will "join together in sharing" what is falsely called "the Gospel"? In an April 23, 2009 article in *The Catholic Spirit*, official newspaper of the archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt wrote: "I have been contacted by representatives of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, who inform me that they are sponsoring four events this summer in cities along the Mississippi River, called *Rock the River Tour*."

Nienstadt appealed to Roman Catholics to volunteer "to counsel the youth who will be present toward a deeper conversion of faith." And, he added, Catholics can participate freely because "I have been assured that there will be no attempt to proselytize young people into an evangelical church. Each person will be encouraged to make contact with his or her church affiliation, whether current or lapsed. . . . They state they are not coming to take from our religious communities, but to invest in our youth."

What Catholics Mean by "Evangelism"

In evaluating Billy and Franklin Graham's compromise and cooperation with Rome, it is important for Scripture-driven Christians to understand that the Graham organization deliberately defines "evangelism" in a sense that is broad enough to bring mainline liberals, undiscerning Evangelicals, and the ever-opportunistic Roman Catholic church under its tent.

But when Roman Catholic leaders speak of "evangelism" they mean something very specific (and completely un-Biblical), and the Graham organization's approach facilitates Rome's agenda. For the Roman Catholic church, "evangelism" means bringing people — non-Catholics as well as Catholics who have lapsed in their participation in the church — "home to Rome."

Roman Catholic teaching is that Catholics who "go forward for Christ" at a Graham meeting already have Christ through their baptism as infants. What is now needed is to bring them into a more active relationship with the sacramental system, through which the Catholic Church claims to have the sole authority to dispense the grace of God. When Catholics hear the term "receive Christ" they do not think in terms of the once-for-all act spoken of in passages such as John 1:12 and Acts 16:31. For a Catholic, "receiving Christ" is something that is done continually through the sacrament of the mass, because (as Rome teaches it) no one can ever be assured of eternal life, and must continually depend on the Roman church for ultimate deliverance from Hell.

Likewise, the Roman Catholic church says that the evangelism of a non-Catholic must begin with bringing that person to the point where he will receive Roman Catholic baptism and begin participating in the Catholic sacrificial system.

Curtis Kneblík, director of evangelism for the archdiocese of Dayton, Ohio, stated the Catholic position on "going forward for Christ" in a Graham meeting. He said it is the same thing that takes place in the Roman Catholic church at every Mass: "We have an altar call every Sunday. Christ is truly present [in the Mass]. We have to stand up and walk toward Him like they did on that field" in the 2002 Franklin Graham Festival in Cincinnati (*The Catholic Telegraph*, July 12, 2002).

Leading Millions to Hell

Throughout over eighty combined years of ministry, Billy and Franklin Graham have presented a false, broad, ecumenical way into the kingdom of God. Rather than calling the lost to the faith of the Reformation — salvation by grace alone, through justification by faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone — they have urged millions of Catholics and non-Catholics to "come forward" to be integrated/re-integrated into the Roman Catholic system — a system which says that anyone who preaches justification by faith alone, assurance of salvation, or the authority of Scripture alone, is *anathema*, cursed of God.

Authentic Christianity in Contrast

Jesus warned against Graham-style ecumenism: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Apostle John told Christians what their attitude must be toward men who compromise and cooperate with those who preach a false Christ: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to

you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11).

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