

Editorial

Billy Graham William Ewald and Oral Roberts: A Strange But Unified Consortium

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If you are at all familiar with any or all of the above contemporaneous persons, you might wonder how they got thrown together to form the subject of this article. No, they did not serve together at a symposium nor do they function on some prominent national committee. They were thrown together at me in the course of a week. (That is one of the marvels of modern communication. It makes possible combinations heretofore unimaginable.) Billy Graham, the fundamentalistic Baptist preacher came to me from Oakland California; Oral Roberts, the faith healer and university president came to me from Honolulu; and sandwiched in between was William Ewald, an existentialistic city planner who came to me from the campus of a local college. At first sight, they appear to have very little in common, but it struck me as I listened to them that they were all talking about a common theme.

Let me review for a moment the things that I heard them say. Billy Graham made his familiar plea for the acceptance of Jesus Christ. He talked about sin; he talked about the moral degeneracy of our nation. And, he talked about the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. He did so, however, in typical premillenarian fashion. The church will be spared those awful days of tribulation and the upshot of the whole thing was that if you, too, wished to escape that awful torture, you had better accept Jesus today. Now this all sounds nice and is very appealing to human nature (who, after all, wants to be tormented) but there is no truth in it at all. You are familiar, no doubt, with that premillenarian position. If not, you can read all about it in Rev. H. Hoeskema's book *Behold, He Cometh!*

Then there was Oral Roberts. He did not practice any of his magical gifts of healing on the television special that I watched. As a matter of fact, I wondered whether I really had the right program. There was nothing religious or sacred about what I first saw: Hawaiian music, Don Ho and his gang, secular to the very core. The disturbing thing to me is that it was planned that way. He had me turned in, you see. He had caught my attention. Then came the Oral Roberts message. And, he talked about, of all things, the coming of the antichrist. Strange, too, he had it all right. I detected nothing of the premillenarian favor of Billy Graham. Had I heard only that part of his program I would have had to say: "That's right, Pastor Roberts, you've got that part straight." And he did. But, then, why criticize, you say? Do we always have to find something wrong with everybody. I can only reply: "No, but if he's wrong, let's not be afraid to call it wrong." And, that is what I believe Oral Roberts to be: dead wrong. But why? He did not, you see, have the spiritual discernment to see that the two parts of his program did not fit together. On the one hand, he talked correctly about the antichrist; he correctly identified him. But on the

other hand, he failed to see just exactly how this antichrist would come. The antichrist is going to do exactly what Oral Roberts did, he is going to thoroughly compromise the secular and the sacred. He is going to wed Athens and Jerusalem and the final result will be that one, unless he has the discernment given him by the Spirit, will not be able to discern between the two. Taken as a whole, then, Oral Roberts really did not understand the future.

Finally, there was William Ewald. Educated, author of five books, and currently a city planner, he, too, offered his insight into the future. He was very much concerned with the future of mankind, of man's ability to survive, especially in the next fifty years. He came to us because he felt that, for a large part, educational institutions were not with it. They were not really in tune with the modern age. It was his belief that we were still educating people to live in the 1940's and earlier. In effect, what he suggested was that if man is to endure the next fifty years, he is going to have to change a great deal. And, the conclusion to the whole matter was that he must become existential. In short, man must throw off all of the encumbrances of the absolute, everything must become relative. Morality, ethics, mores, you name it must not be guided and determined by any kind of absolute, inviolable code but must be subject to change and modification to fit the needs of modern society. His concern for the future was motivated by his desire to survive. He was interested in his own security. Man, after all, wants to live forever at any cost so this position ought not surprise us a great deal.

You see, then, that we have three viewpoints juxtaposed indiscriminately but all nevertheless with a common theme and concern: how are we going to make it in the future?

But you ask, what is the purpose of all this? Why bring it up? These ideas are, after all, very strange and remote. The Christian might often wish that such were the case. Many times, I think, the Christian would opt for the isolated don't-bother-me-with-that-stuff position. We ought not be so naïve, however. The Bible clearly tells us that the life of the Christian is one of one continuous struggle and battle. My concern, then, is that we are adequately prepared to fight. And, this is especially true of younger people. You need not expect calm and serene days in the future. Maybe you are tired and weary of hearing such remarks. Maybe so, but do not discount them lightly. The things that you hear about your future life are not myth nor are they based on wild speculation. Scripture and the experience of older saints witness to these very things. So, the directive comes: prepare yourself. My real concern, then, is with our ability to refute these ideas. Are we going to take the attitude that if we wait long enough, most of these things will eventually slide by me, or, are we going to prepare ourselves to fight in the defense of our faith and our heritage? The only answer to the type of thinking illustrated above is the truth of scripture. Question is, then, are you prepared to give that answer?

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