

Comment

# The message- Is anyone out there listening?

The Billy Graham Crusade held at the Metro Center in Oct., 1979 has led to a great deal of discussion about Billy Graham the man, his methods and his message.

Two articles published in *The Gazette* discussed this, but in their statements about the Crusade it might be said that the root of the problem was not being dealt with. Much has been said about Billy Graham the man, but little about Jesus Christ, the message about whom the issue revolves. Dalhousie Christian Fellowship would like to discuss the nature of Biblical christianity, its message, and its relevance.

Most people agree that one of the largest problems in the world, certainly in North America, is the lack of communication and the loneliness that results. The major killer among university students in the U.S. is suicide. Over half of the marriages initiated in the U.S. now end in divorce. In an age of unparalleled technological advances we are losing the ability to communicate with each other. Yet honest communication is probably the most fulfilling thing we can do.

The message of Biblical Christianity is that our inability to communicate with each other is closely bound up with our inability to communicate with God. Further, only because Christ has died for our sins, and only through Him, can this lack of communication be restored.

The message is relevant. Is the message true? To some it is objectionable that a loving God should demand such a sacrifice from the innocent Christ, to forgive men's iniquity. Yet this assumes that we know fully what is involved in forgiveness. In reality we probably do not fully realize the implications of sin, or its forgiveness.

Let's examine Christianity further:

### WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

In discussions with students there seem to be two primary charges brought up against Biblical Christianity. These are:

1. The illogical character of faith in general. The stereotype of a Biblical Christian as one of Eric Hoffer's "True Believers"—the man who believes, because he has determined that he will hold to his presuppositions, regardless of evidence which may contradict them, and,

2. The insistence by evangelical Christians that Scripture is exclusively authoritative, and the consequence that the claims of Christ, are not compatible with many other conceptions of God.

The initial consideration is: are the New Testament documents reliable as historical documents? Prof. Edward Meyer (of the University of Berlin) is generally recognized as the greatest authority on ancient history of our century. Prof. Meyer (who was not a believer in evangelical Christianity, and hence his verdict cannot be seen as an unscholarly attempt to bolster

faith in Christian doctrine) says in his *Origin and Beginning of Christianity*:

"It is evident that for our history of Jesus we have by no means to reckon merely with representations of the records of the second apostolic generation, but are taken back far beyond that into the midst of the first generation—people who personally had known Him intimately and still preserved a lively recollection of Him; and that these old recollections lie under our eyes in manifold forms . . . there is no ground at all for refusing to accept these oldest traditions as historically trustworthy in all essentials, and their chronological ordering of the history."

John Warwick Montgomery maintains that, "to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested Bibliographically as the New Testament".

Again, John Lea compares Christian Scripture with Shakespeare for reliability of transmission

"With perhaps a dozen or twenty exceptions, the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars, that any dispute as to its readings must relate rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves. But in every one of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays there are probably a hundred readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur."

The New Testament documents consistently attest to the centrality of the resurrection of Christ. I Corinthians

**'If Christ has not yet been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith'**

15:14, 15 states "... if Christ has not yet been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith". This statement is found in an epistle that is considered by even liberal theologians to be genuinely Pauline, and written between A.D. 52-57. The cornerstone of Christianity is the resurrection of Christ. Although there has been an agglutination of tradition and extra-Biblical dogma in many churches, the basis of a Christian's faith is not in tradition, but in the belief that a Palestinian Jew rose from the dead.

The apostles firmly believed that Jesus rose from the dead—the important question remains though, whether there is an adequate historical basis for this belief. Some modern theologians such as Rudolph Bultmann have discounted the physical resurrection of Christ as an historical event. However, this decision

was not made on the basis of the evidence of the New Testament documents. Bultmann attempted to reconstruct a unified explanation of the events surrounding the resurrection, an explanation which a priori dismissed any possibility of a supernatural element. An approach that has more scholarly integrity is one that includes the possibility of accepting the explanation propounded by the apostles.

Space does not permit an exhaustive study of all of the naturalistic explanations, but even a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals evidence that is hard to har-

**'without faith in the resurrection, there'd be no Christianity at all all...'**

monize with the idea that the post-resurrection appearances of Christ to the apostles were hallucinations.

If someone did believe that the resurrection did occur in history, then turning to God would follow, almost surely. For if the resurrection did occur, this lends great weight to the claims of Christ. Among those claims, was His claim to take away the sins of the world, in order that those who believe His claims would be reconciled to God. Furthermore, Christ made it clear that every man (except Himself) is in need of such a reconciliation.

We have seen, then, that Christianity is very closely bound up with history. The commitment to Christ is not an irrational leap in the dark, but neither can the Christian claim exhaustive knowledge of God, or His ways. Paul says "Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face" I Corinthians 13:12.

The second point mentioned at the outset of the article is

be no Christianity at all. . . Once disprove it, and you have disposed of Christianity".

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* says "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him. 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God'. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice: Either this man was

and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse". C.S. Lewis was converted to Christianity in his early 30's and was Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University.

Much could be said concerning the Billy Graham Crusade. With any human agency, faults and failures are inevitable—however, finding faults in a man or an organization should not lead us to lose sight of the basic message of

Biblical Christianity, which we feel is presented in the literature given to those who came forward at the Billy Graham Crusade. These are the verses presented in a pamphlet of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association:

**A. Man's Problem—Separation**—Romans 3:23—"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God".

**B. God's Remedy—The Cross**—John 14:6—"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me". John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

**C. Man's Response**—John 1:12—"But as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

You are challenged to examine the claims of Biblical Christianity. The author of the Proverbs writes, "My son, persevere sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight".

If you are interested in further investigation, we recommend the following books: 'Mere Christianity' by C.S. Lewis; 'Who Moved the Stone' by Frank Morison; 'Christianity: The Witness of History' by J.N.D. Anderson; continued on page 15

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now answerable. The New Testament documents taken only as history point to the exclusive claims of Christ, and to occurrences best explained by His resurrection. The resurrection puts the stamp of authority on Christ's teaching. Christ taught the authority of the Old Testament in that Jesus many times used Scripture as an authority for His actions. In John 10:34 He says explicitly, "Scripture cannot be broken". This applies to the Old Testament, but the New Testament was written by men who Jesus personally commissioned and taught. Furthermore, Jesus testified that God would send a Comforter to teach them further. Paul makes clear that his teaching is from the Lord (Jesus).

Again, the resurrection is the key to the issue, Michael Green says "Without faith in the resurrection there would