

‘Strangely Un-warmed’: The absence of emotion in the experience of conversion during the All Scotland Crusade of 1955

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ext**Kenneth S. Jeffrey**

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Abstract

Billy Graham was one of the world's most famous Christian evangelists in the twentieth century. He visited Scotland in 1955 and led a six-week Crusade at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow. Hundreds of thousands of people attended these rallies, listened to Graham preach and many were converted. Revivalist conversions are important moments in people's lives that have often provoked powerful emotional responses and found an expression in bodily manifestations. The anguish and subsequent relief, created by revival sermons have frequently induced children, young people, men and women to demonstrate their new birth with physical expressions. This paper will discuss the manner in which Billy Graham discouraged displays of emotion during the All Scotland Crusade. It will examine his book *Peace with God* and the sermons he preached at the Kelvin Hall in order to determine how he presented conversion as an experience devoid of strong affections. It will further explore why he actively dissuaded people, who attended his Glasgow campaign in 1955, from demonstrative behaviour when they responded to his altar calls.

Keywords

conversion, emotions, Evangelicalism, feelings, Graham, religious affections

I

Conversion is a central idea of Christianity and one of the four fundamental characteristics of Evangelicalism.¹ It comes from the Latin word ‘converti’ that means to change, which finds its biblical origin in the common Greek words *epistrepho* and *metaneo*, that translate to ‘turn around’. These words were used by

the Apostles to describe the radical spiritual transformation that takes place when someone is ‘born again’.² However, the lived experience of conversion has changed considerably

² David.W. Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

¹ David.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989), 5.

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throughout the tradition of the church according to time and place. ‘Mediated by local faith communities in different times, places and cultural settings’, conversion has presented ‘enormous diversity in theological content, ritual expression and behavioural expectations.’³ Kling has further commented, ‘There is no singular (sic) type or model of conversion; each community defines conversion in ways appropriate to that community.’⁴ It is an experience, thus, that has manifested itself in a variety of different forms during the history of the church.

According to the seven stage model of conversion, created by the psychologist Lewis Rambo, the most significant aspect in the event or process of conversion is context. The particular occasion and precise location, the time and place within which it takes place is vital because it influences ‘the nature, structure and process of conversion’ and establishes the boundaries of the other six stages.⁵ Within the Evangelical tradition, that arose in the eighteenth century as the dawn of the Enlightenment began to break upon the Western world, conversion was experienced in a distinct manner. In this religious culture, a typical conversion included three phases. First, there was an experience of uncomfortable spiritual anxiety when a convert became afraid of God’s judgment. They felt guilt and sorrow because of their sins. Subsequently, they had an encounter with Jesus, in whom they believed and from whom they received forgiveness. This precipitated, thirdly, a great sense of relief and spiritual peace.⁶ Perhaps most significantly, amongst Evangelicals, conversion was increasingly understood to be a personal decision that belonged to the private life of the individual that was often datable.⁷

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁵ Lewis.R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 165.

⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 5; Kling, *Religious Conversion*, 7.

⁷ Martin E. Marty, “The Revival of Evangelicalism and Southern Religion,” in *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, ed. David E. Harrell, Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 9.

These memorable experiences were often accompanied by public physical manifestations during periods of revival. The intense personal belief that Jesus Christ had died for me and I had become a new person often gave rise to emotions that found expression in various prostrations. On the morning of 24 May 1738, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, woke, ‘in a state of spiritual turmoil and “continual sorrow and heaviness.”’⁸ Later, however, he reported how

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.⁹

Wesley’s strangely warmed heart was a rather modest encounter with Christ compared to that of other revival converts in the modern era whose experience of conversion included other, more public physical phenomena. Their testimonies included stories of ‘unrefined, spontaneous outpourings, with descriptions of ecstatic behaviour (convulsions, trembling, swooning, dancing, laughing, crying) and dreams and visions.’¹⁰ It was not unusual for revival converts to weep uncontrollably, groan, shriek and fall prostrate when they were ‘born again.’¹¹ Conversion among the early Evangelicals, people who believed in the religion of the heart, was an intensely felt personal experience that often embodied itself in physical manifestations.¹²

⁸ Kling, *Religious Conversion*, 311.

⁹ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xvi.html> (Accessed 22.2.22.)

¹⁰ Kling, *Religious Conversion*, 307.

¹¹ Ibid, 21.

¹² Ibid, 19.

This paper will examine the nature of the conversion experience presented by the American evangelist, Billy Graham, during the All Scotland Crusade of 1955. The aim is to reveal the extent to which being ‘born again’ among Evangelicals in the twentieth century became an act of the will that did not involve physical manifestations. It will consider the manner in which Graham discouraged expressions of emotion, and will demonstrate how he presented conversion as an experience without strong religious affections. It will further seek to interpret and explain why he actively dissuaded people from demonstrative behaviour when they responded to his altar call and invitations to come to the platform at the front of the Kelvin Hall. Eye-witness accounts, press articles, reports from *Life and Work*, books and sermons will be used to reconstruct, as far as possible, how the conversion experience was presented to people during the All Scotland Crusade. The paper will begin with a brief, uncritical survey of the secondary literature that has explored the unemotional nature of Graham’s Gospel. It will then examine *Peace with God* and the evangelist’s sermons from the All Scotland Crusade in order to consider the kind of conversion experience he invited people to receive in Glasgow. Lastly, it will attempt to interpret the cultural and personal factors that explain why Graham did not encourage ‘strangely warmed hearts’ among his audiences in Scotland in 1955.

II

The unanimous opinion among Graham scholars is that physical displays of emotion were not a feature of his crusades. The services he conducted for more than sixty years were marked by an almost complete absence of demonstrative behaviour. Wacker has commented, ‘The services were orderly affairs, marked by few tears and considerable decorum.’¹³ Elsewhere, he noted how ‘visiting journalists repeatedly said that inquirers

¹³ Grant Wacker, ‘Billy Graham’s America’, *Church History*, Sept 2009, Vol 78, No 3, 501.

showed little overt emotion.’¹⁴ People simply did not display their feelings physically when they responded to the evangelist’s altar call. They behaved very respectfully. Reporting on an early crusade, William Martin described how ‘Serious of mien but devoid of tears or other overt signs of emotion, more than a thousand souls answered Billy Graham’s call to be washed in the blood of the Lamb.’¹⁵ The explanation for this absence of bodily religious affections lies in the plain manner of the evangelist’s preaching, and the serious, sober style of his altar calls. Unlike other popular revivalists, who were prone to displays of emotion, Graham never cried when he preached.¹⁶ His entire deportment in the pulpit, the way he stood and walked across the stage, was a physical demonstration of his straightforward and unemotional approach to the Gospel. Michael Greene, commenting on Graham’s global mission in 1995, remarked upon the noticeable lack of ‘intense emotion or melodrama’ in his sermons. Even the altar calls, he mentioned, were offered in a fairly matter-of-fact kind of way.¹⁷ The conversion experience presented by Graham was constructed, according to Wacker, ‘on classically American understandings of the importance of rational decisiveness’ that left no room for physical manifestations.¹⁸ The enthusiastic behaviour that characterized being ‘born again’ in previous revivals had become in Graham’s crusades, according to these scholars, a thing of the past.

III

There is, however, an interesting difference in Graham’s approach to emotion, and its public

¹⁴ Grant Wacker, *One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2019), 96.

¹⁵ William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story: A Prophet with Honour* (London: Huthison, 1992), 29.

¹⁶ Wacker, *One Soul at a Time*, 96.

¹⁷ Michael Greene, ‘The Billy Graham Global Mission Sermons: The Power of Belief’, *Vox Evangelica*, Issue 26, 1996, 65.

¹⁸ Grant Wacker, ‘Billy Graham’s America’, 501.

displays in conversion, that is found between his written work and his public ministry. In a writing career that spanned sixty six years, from 1947 to 2013, the evangelist produced fifty one books.¹⁹ *Peace with God*, published in 1953, was the third of them. It was an exposition of the Christian Gospel, organized in three parts. In the five chapters that comprise the second part of the book, the themes of repentance, faith, the new birth and assurance are discussed. Here, Graham presented his understanding of emotions in conversion. Being ‘born again’, he believed, was an experience that involved the mind, the heart and the will.²⁰ Nevertheless, he was anxious to warn against intellectual and emotional encounters with Jesus that did not include a deliberate decision or act of a person’s will. People needed, he advised, to exercise their judgment, choose to trust in God and promise to follow Jesus in order to be converted. ‘Even if you have an intellectual acceptance of Christ and an emotional experience’, he said, ‘that still is not enough. There must be the conversion of the will.’²¹ It was possible, the evangelist warned, to have a cerebral conviction about and impassioned feelings towards Jesus Christ and yet remained unconverted. Unless, and until, the will was engaged, the person remained an unbeliever.

According to Graham, there were three constituent elements in the conversion experience: repentance; faith; and regeneration. These events, he contended, took place simultaneously.²² Repentance and faith, the evangelist held, were human actions, while regeneration, or the infusion of the life of God into the new believer, was a work of God.²³ In the chapter on repentance, Graham acknowledged the

significance, if not the salvific value, of emotions displayed physically in conversion. He quoted an uncited source who wrote, ‘Many people abhor all emotion and some critics are suspicious of any conversion that does not take place in a refrigerator. There are many dangers in false emotionalism produced for its own effect, but that does not rule out true emotion and depth of feeling.’²⁴ He also referenced the British Methodist preacher, W.E. Sangster, who once said, ‘The man who screams at a football or baseball game but is distressed when he hears of a sinner weeping at the cross and murmurs something about the dangers of emotionalism hardly merits intelligent respect.’²⁵ Graham accepted the new birth was an experience that elicited demonstrative displays of religious affection. Writing about faith, he continued, ‘the emotions again are involved. . . Emotion cannot be cut out of life. No intelligent person would think of saying, “Let’s do away with all emotion.” To remove all personality from deep feeling is impossible. We cannot imagine life without the warm overtones of feeling.’²⁶ ‘Suppose,’ he imagined, ‘I asked my wife to marry me after I had explained to her first of all that I had no feelings for her at all.’²⁷ A conversion that was devoid of a physical display of emotion was as unimaginable, according to Graham, as an intimate relationship that was lacking in feelings. Towards the end of the chapter, he said openly, ‘There is going to be a tug at the heart. Emotion may vary in religious experience. Some people are stoical and others are demonstrative, but the feeling will be there... When you fall in love with Jesus Christ your emotions are bound to be stirred.’²⁸ Notwithstanding the importance he attached to conversion depending upon the act of a person’s will, the evangelist was just as explicit when he

¹⁹ <https://believersportal.com/list-books-billy-graham/> (Accessed 28.2.22.)

²⁰ Billy Graham, *Peace with God* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1953), 107.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

²² *Ibid.*, 113.

²³ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁵ Graham, *Peace with God*, 118.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

insisted that being born again was an emotionally charged experience.

Nevertheless, when he spoke about assurance, he was clear about the descending order of significance of the three 'f's': fact; faith; and feeling. The facts of the Gospel are that Jesus Christ died and rose again. The faith of the Gospel is the trust a person places in Jesus Christ. The feelings aroused by the Gospel are the emotional response a person has towards their Saviour and Lord. Graham insisted

Feeling is the last of the three words, and it must remain last in your thinking. I believe that much religious unrest and uncertainty is caused by earnest, honest seekers after salvation who have a predetermined idea that they must be in some kind of an emotional state before they can experience conversion.²⁹

The single constituent element of New Testament experiences of conversion was, the evangelist proclaimed, the living encounter with Jesus Christ and the response of faith. Yet, he warned,

Many are looking for something more – some dramatic sensation that will bring a physical thrill, while others look for some spectacular manifestation... A man is saved by trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross and not saved by physical excitement or religious ecstasy.³⁰

At the last, and to avert any misunderstanding, he responded to the direct question, 'What about feeling? Is there no place in saving faith for any feeling?'³¹ 'Certainly', he replied, 'there is room for feeling in saving faith, but we are not saved by it.'³² Love, joy and peace, the fundamental Christian graces and gifts of God, are feelings, Graham claimed.³³ Accordingly, he

made his position very clear about how he considered the position of emotion in conversion in *Peace with God*, published in 1953. People may expect that emotions expressed in a physical manner might accompany their conversion experience, but they should be reminded that feelings carried no salvific significance. Notwithstanding the bodily expressions of their spiritual feelings, the act of the will stood at the heart of being 'born again'.

An examination of Graham's twenty-four sermons from the All Scotland Crusade reveals that he adopted a different approach and attitude towards the place of emotion and its physical displays in conversion when he preached in the Kelvin Hall in 1955. Despite acknowledging that feelings were aroused in encounters with Jesus Christ, the evangelist vehemently discouraged his Scottish audiences from having a bodily, emotional conversion experience. Interestingly, during the first half of the campaign, from 22 March to 11 April, he spoke about emotions in respect of conversion on eight occasions, at a rate of 66%. In the second half of the movement, he mentioned feelings on only a further two occasions, at a rate of just 17%. Conjecture might suggest that Graham was advised by his team to reduce these references because they were considered as either unhelpful or unnecessary. Nevertheless, his remarks can be separated under three main headings: testimony; relations between heart, mind, will; and the body.

In the first instance, Graham drew upon his own personal experience of conversion during the Crusade in order to suggest it was an event that did not involve an emotional reaction. The moment when he was 'born again', at a revival meeting led by the revivalist Mordecai Ham in the autumn of 1934, when he was fifteen years old, was not characterized by any physical demonstration of feeling.³⁴ The evangelist recalled this moment on three occasions during the All Scotland Crusade. On 31 March, he said, 'You say, "Billy, how do you know that (you can become born again)?" I know it

²⁹ Ibid, 146.

³⁰ Ibid, 147.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 148.

³⁴ Wacker, *One Soul at a Time*, 12.

because it happened to me. It wasn't any emotional experience, it was a simple act of committing my life to Christ.³⁵ Six evenings later, he commented, 'You ask me, do I understand it? No. I don't understand it. I didn't understand it twenty years ago when I got out of the crowd... and came and stood there. There were no tears, there was no emotion, just a simple act.'³⁶ Lastly, on 9 April, the evangelist testified, 'I believe because it happened to me... I came to Christ one night in a meeting something like this. When the invitation was given, I came forward, I received Christ, my life was changed, it was transformed. There was no emotion.'³⁷ Graham was clear and categorical. There was no emotion in his conversion experience. There were no tears. He did not weep. There was no hysterical crying. He did not shriek. There was no prostration. He did not fall to the ground. It was an experience that did not involve any demonstrative display of excitement or passion. It seems the evangelist told his story in order to create the expectation that those who responded to his altar call would have a similar experience. They would not weep, or shriek or fall prostrate in the Kelvin Hall.

Secondly, Graham's sermons betray the sharp distinction he made between a person's intellect, their emotions and their will. The evangelist deliberately underplayed the importance of the mind and the heart in conversion. There was a paragraph in almost every sermon when he confessed how he did not understand the new birth. 'Forget about your understanding', he proclaimed on 22 March, the first night of the Crusade.³⁸ 'I cannot explain to you all the mysteries of the Cross, I cannot explain to you all the mysteries of the Gospel, but I

know it works.'³⁹ Notwithstanding his intellectual humility, Graham appears to have de-emphasized the role of the inquiring mind in conversion. Similarly, he minimized the significance of the heart and any physical display of religious affection. Salvation, according to the evangelist and revealed in the following quotations, depended ultimately upon a person's act of the will. Here is an extended quotation from his sermon preached on 28 March 1955.

Here's your emotion. Your emotion speaks up and says, "Now, you know, I am sick and tired of my sins, and sick and tired of the way I've been living. And Christ is a wonderful person; you know, I could fall in love with Him." That's your emotion. But that's not enough... just to have some emotion about it. I've seen men sit and tremble... under conviction... and their tears were streaming from their eyes, and they never gave into Christ. They had all sorts of emotions.⁴⁰

There's something else that has to happen. Your intellect speaks up, your emotion speaks up, but there's another little fellow in the middle, his name is "will"... he sits in the middle... looking, listening to intellect, listening to emotion, but not till Dr Will has said, "Yes, I will renounce my sins, I will follow Christ"... not till that moment are you in the kingdom of God and on the way to heaven.⁴¹

On three, further and separate occasions, Graham continued to actively discourage people from paying any attention or attaching any significance to their feelings, while insisting that conversion was an act of the will. Earlier in the campaign, on its third evening, 24 March, he said 'And then there are other people that have had some sort of little emotional experience as a child; that's not it. You'll never come to Christ... until your will has been bent to the

³⁵ Graham, Billy. "The Ninth Commandment," (Exodus 20:16), March 31, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 15.

³⁶ Graham, Billy. "The Penitent Thief," (Luke 23:39-43), April 5, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 10.

³⁷ Graham, Billy. "Nicodemus," (John 3:1-7), April 9, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 5.

³⁸ Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda," (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 9.

³⁹ Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda," (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 9.

⁴⁰ Graham, Billy. "The Ten Commandments," (Exodus 20), March 28, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

will of God.’⁴² He continued, ‘You say, “Well, I don’t feel anything.” Forget your feelings. You don’t come to Christ just by emotion and feeling. You come to Him by bending your will to Him and saying, “I will follow Him, I will serve Him, I will let Him into my life.”’⁴³ Later, on 1 April, Graham remarked,

And then others of you can be moved emotionally... I’ve been moved a thousand times, and so have you. But I can be moved till tears stream down my cheeks like rivers, but that doesn’t restore my soul.... Something else is needed... I must come to the point where I say to God, “I will, I will follow thee, I will serve thee, I will give thee my life.”⁴⁴

Lastly, and towards the end of the campaign, on 22 April, the evangelist declared, ‘Our intellects are easy; we can believe on God and we can believe on Christ. Our emotions can be stirred and that is easy. But when it comes to bending our wills to God, that’s a totally different thing. It’s the hardest thing to surrender, our will.’⁴⁵ The evidence is irrefutable. Graham separated personhood into three parts, the mind, the emotions and the will in his Glasgow sermons. He insisted that conversion was fundamentally an act of the will, while he significantly reduced the role that the mind and the emotions played in the ‘born again’ experience. Accordingly, and by dismissing bodily-expressed feelings as wholly ineffectual for salvation, he reduced conversion to an act of the will that had no emotional or physical content.

Moreover, Graham made a further and sharp distinction between the body and the soul in order to explain his understanding of human mortality and eternal life. He was unequivocal

in distinguishing our physical anatomy from our spiritual being. In a dualist, almost Gnostic manner he said, ‘The real you is not your body, the real you just lives inside the body.’⁴⁶ ‘Your physical body’, he went on, ‘is not you. That’s only the house you live in.’⁴⁷ On other occasions, he stated,

‘Your body is temporary... your body soon goes to the grave.’⁴⁸

‘The Bible says that your body is only temporary.... But the Bible teaches that you are more than a body. You are an everlasting and eternal soul, and when your body dies, you don’t die. Its only your body that dies. You live on.’⁴⁹

Despite Graham’s orthodox understanding of the body and soul, his repeated references to the temporary nature of the physical and the eternal nature of the spiritual suggests he attached little, if any, significance to our mortal frames. He held a particular view of our humanity that reduced significantly the importance of any bodily expressions of faith. Consequently, there was no physicality in Graham’s understanding of conversion during the Kelvin Hall meetings. For Graham, being ‘born again’ did not involve the whole body in Scotland in 1955.

There is, admittedly, no inherent disagreement between what Graham wrote in *Peace with God* and what he preached in the Kelvin Hall. In his written work and public ministry, he believed conversion depended ultimately upon the act of a person’s will. Nevertheless, there is a sharp distinction between how he presented religious emotions, that accompanied being ‘born again’, in his book and in his sermons. In

⁴² Graham, Billy. “Untitled,” (John 11), March 28, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 14.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Graham, Billy. “The Sermon on the Mount,” (Matthew 5-7), April 1, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 4.

⁴⁵ Graham, Billy. “The Cost,” (Luke 9:57-62), April 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 6.

⁴⁶ Graham, Billy. “Blind Bartimaeus,” (Mark 10:46-52), April 15, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 2.

⁴⁷ Graham, Billy. “The Rich Young Ruler,” (Luke 10:17-25), April 21, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 4.

⁴⁸ Graham, Billy. “The Great Banquet,” (Luke 14:15-24), April 16, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 6.

⁴⁹ Graham, Billy. “Peter’s Confession,” (Mark 8:27-29), April 18, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 4.

the former, he readily recognized that religious affections and feelings, often revealed in a physical manner, were part of the conversion experience. They held no salvific significance, but they could be part of the Jesus Christ encounter. In the latter, he actively sought to discourage people from displaying any emotion when they responded to his altar call. It would appear it was Graham's determined aim to restrain any physical manifestation of religious affection in his crusade in Scotland.

Graham's altar call, indeed, was direct, plain and simple. Repeatedly, night after night, using familiar phrases, he appealed to people to accept his invitation to be 'born again.' On 22 March 1955, the first night of the Crusade, he beckoned his audience,

I am going to ask you to rise and come quietly and reverently and stand at the foot of His Cross symbolically and say. "I give my life to Christ. I surrender to Him... I am going to ask you to rise and come quietly and reverently and stand in front of this platform and say tonight, "I will follow, I will trust Him, I want Him to touch my life. I want Him to forgive my sins, I commit myself to Him, I surrender my will to Him as Lord and Master and Saviour. And, from this moment on, I am going to serve Him and follow Him."⁵⁰

Graham appealed to people to make a personal decision and exercise their will in making these private promises to follow Jesus Christ. It is also noticeable that he invited his audiences to stand up from their seats and walk to the platform at the front of the Kelvin Hall 'quietly and reverently.' They were asked to come forward calmly and silently, reverentially and thoughtfully. Graham's altar calls were earnest, honest and sincere. They invited a respectable and sober, rather than an emotional, response.

As soon as Graham gave his appeal, and as people began to respond to the altar call, counsellors were be paired with enquirers according

to age and gender by the advisers at the front of the platform. Together, they made their way to the Counselling Room. There, the counsellor took a copy of John's Gospel, a small booklet entitled *Beginning with Christ* and a record card which has been left on the seat.⁵¹ Counsellors were charged with introducing their inquirers directly to Jesus Christ. They were instructed to 'avoid unnecessary doctrinal discussion' and keep their 'explanations reasonable simple and brief'.⁵² Lorne Sanny addressed the counsellors and enquirers. There was a prayer and afterwards one of Graham's associate evangelists spoke briefly on the nature of conversion. A particular emphasis was always placed on the Bible and enquirers were strongly encouraged not to trust their own religious feelings. When enquirers asked 'How do I know I am saved?' counsellors were encouraged to answer, 'God said it, Christ did it, I believe it, that settles it.'⁵³ There was thus a plain, simple, no-nonsense approach taken towards spiritual counselling during the All Scotland Crusade. It is significant that inquirers were told not to trust their emotions. Religious feelings were actively discouraged, while people were dissuaded from physical expressions of their spiritual affections.

IV

In the final part of this paper, an attempt will be made to interpret why Graham appears to have been opposed to emotional displays of religious feelings during the All Scotland Crusade. The situation of the Kelvin Hall, the personal experience of Graham, the prevailing religious culture and Scottish expectations will be examined in an effort to explain the evangelist's discouragement of physical displays of spiritual affections. Tom Allan, the chairman of the Tell Scotland Movement, was responsible,

⁵¹ Tom Allan, *Crusade in Scotland: Billy Graham* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1955), 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁰ Graham, Billy. "The Pool at Bethesda," (John 5:1-9), March 22, 1955, Glasgow, Scotland Crusade, 13.

along with Graham's team, for organizing the crusade. In his account of the campaign, Allan provided a vivid description of the Kelvin Hall where the meetings took place. He recounted how

As the Service began I had the feeling... that, on the human level, no situation could have been less propitious for the delivery of an evangelistic address. All the factors calculated to destroy the tense atmosphere traditionally associated with the techniques of the mass evangelist were present – the incessant flashing bulbs of newspaper photographers angling for the effective perspective, the uninhibited coughing of a vast and impersonal audience, the frightening ranks of television and newsreel cameras.⁵⁴

Allan depicts a chaotic scene of flashing lights, people clearing their throats and lines of cameras that did not create a context conducive to evangelism. The physical space, it appeared, was not well suited for Gospel proclamation. JWS, writing in *Life and Work* in May 1955 concurred.

The armchair critics who have written about the creation of a dramatic tension certainly have not been in the Kelvin Hall. Indeed there was almost everything there to destroy any build-up of emotion: a much too vast and broken-up audience; the presence of too many mechanical contraptions for the TV circuit, for amplification, and for film cameras; an opening half hour much less moving and meaningful than most ordinary church services. This was certainly not the way to create "atmosphere".⁵⁵

Compared even with a regular Scottish church service, the Kelvin Hall meetings did not create an excited sense of spiritual anticipation. Colin Craig, a reporter from the *British Weekly*, offered his observations from the first night of the crusade. 'Optically', he wrote, 'the concourse looked like the half-side of a football

ground on the day of a goodish cup-tie. That was what it looked like, but it didn't feel like that at all. I had less than no sense of emotions coming up to the boil.'⁵⁶ He continued, 'the impression most powerfully in my consciousness was that if anyone had designed the order of service, they must deliberately have designed it to destroy any sense of build-up... so far from being sensible of any tidal surge I felt not the merest ripple of mass-emotion.'⁵⁷ The order of service, Craig suggested, was designed, not to provoke any strong religious feelings. Indeed, Allan commented, 'It appeared as if the American Team was deliberately seeking to avoid the least appearance of emotionalism.'⁵⁸ He further admitted, 'there was certainly a determined effort apparently made to avoid any suggestion of mass emotion.'⁵⁹ Among the 470 inquirers who responded to Graham's altar call on the first night of the Crusade, Craig noticed that 'Except for a single, tearful lass there was nowhere anything resembling hysteria.'⁶⁰ This situation conscientiously created by Graham and his team in the Kelvin Hall, orchestrated and planned carefully, was designed to avert mass emotionalism. The stage-managed crusade, with a disciplined cast and a methodical producer, did not have religious affections in its script.

A further factor that explains why Graham was unwilling to encourage emotions among his converts is the religious culture that surrounded him. Times were changing, and Graham was a member of a generation which no longer embraced the old revival culture of anxious seats and mourner's benches where people were expected to sit at the end of meetings and express their spiritual anxiety in physical manifestations.⁶¹ One of the chief accusations

⁵⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁵ *Life and Work*, May 1955, 113.

⁵⁶ Allan, *Crusade in Scotland*, 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁶¹ Graham, *Peace with God*, 116.

levelled against mass evangelism in America in the years before Graham began his ministry was that people responded because they had been manipulated into a state of near emotional frenzy. Billy Sunday had earned, in the early twentieth century, a reputation as a flamboyant ‘show-man’ evangelist who aroused significant responses from those who heard him preach.⁶² This is why Graham, very consciously and deliberately, choose to remove everything from his crusades that could create emotionalism in his audiences. It is also why he chose to focus people’s attention upon the decision that he wanted to present to them. The emphasis upon decision meant that responding to the altar call was seen as a ‘calm, rational and considered choice’ that people made, that was devoid of spiritual affections.⁶³ Despite being repeatedly accused of religious emotionalism, Graham had moved away in certain respects from the old type of revivalism.⁶⁴ Respectable counselling rooms, where people had time in a calm environment to consider their spiritual status before God, had replaced anxious seats where physical manifestations had been accepted as normative. Graham continued to represent the old revivalism in his crusades, but without the emotions.

Thirdly, the personal influence Graham brought to bear upon the emotion-averse crusade cannot be overemphasized. It is significant that Graham’s conversion on 1 November 1934, six days before his sixteenth birthday, was not attended by any physical display of spiritual feelings. Indeed, he had resisted attending the Mordecai Ham revival meetings because ‘there was too much emotion.’⁶⁵ Later, he recalled,

I didn’t have any tears. I didn’t have any emotion, I didn’t hear any thunder, there was no lightning... I saw a lady standing next to me

⁶² Martin, *Billy Graham Story*, 49-50.

⁶³ Andrew Finsteun, Anne Blue Wills, Grant Wacker, ed, *Billy Graham: American Pilgrim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 46.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

⁶⁵ Wacker, *One Soul at a Time*, 12.

and she had tears in her eyes, and I thought there was something wrong with me because I didn’t feel all worked up. But right there, I made my decision for Christ. It was as simple as that, and as conclusive.⁶⁶

He did not weep, or shriek or fall over, while he remembered the day after his conversion not feeling different inside.⁶⁷ Wacker suggests, ‘The preacher’s own tearless conversion experience, back when he was fifteen, set the precedent.’⁶⁸ The formative influence of his personal experience was highly significant. In addition, Graham recalled when

A very intelligent Christian leader once told me that at the time he was converted the demonstration of emotion expected of him by the preacher and the congregation almost kept him from coming to God. Falsely produced emotionalism in some revival meetings has been a stumbling block to many a sincere, searching soul.⁶⁹

Graham listened carefully to these warnings about ‘falsely produced emotionalism.’ Suitably cautioned, the evangelist’s personal experience of an emotionless, plain, unspectacular conversion, and the spiritual counsel he received from others persuaded him to put a soft pedal on feelings and to discourage physical manifestations of religious affections.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, Scottish anxiety against religious emotionalism explains why Graham discouraged the physical manifestation of spiritual feelings during the Kelvin Hall crusade. There was a palpable concern in Scotland, revealed in a series of articles that appeared in *Life and Work*, the magazine of the Church of Scotland, in 1954 that the American evangelist would create a pandemic of religious hysteria in Glasgow and

⁶⁶ David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influences* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 34,35.

⁶⁷ Wacker, *One Soul at a Time*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 96.

⁶⁹ Graham, *Peace with God*, 117.

beyond. In each of the four articles that reported on the Harringay Crusade published before the Scottish campaign started, attention was drawn specifically to the lack of emotion exhibited during the London meetings Graham had led. In May 1954, it was noted 'There is a welcome absence at Harringay of the emotional and sentimental pressures that have been associated with some kinds of evangelism.'⁷⁰ In March 1955, the magazine included a review of Frank Colquhoun's account of Graham's London crusade, *Harringay Story*. 'Of particular interest to us in Scotland', it said, 'is the account of the work of the counsellors – reassuring in its absence of emotionalism and in its impression of quiet effective helpfulness towards the seeker.'⁷¹ A further piece carried several impressions and recollections of the Graham meetings from Dr Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dr Leslie Weatherhead, the British theologian. Fisher commented, 'there was in the campaign a deliberate intention not to exploit the situation unworthily to arouse emotion; there was no 'revivalism'.⁷² Lastly, in a short piece 'From a London Doctor', came the report, 'There was a remarkable absence of the emotional factor.'⁷³ The repeated references to the absence of emotion in Graham's Harringay crusade in 1954 in the Kirk's national magazine betray an anxiety that the American evangelist would bring an old style of revivalism to Scotland that included the arousal of spiritual affections and the promotion of physical manifestations. Tom Allan also gave voice to this concern when he said, 'Modern people, particularly of the younger generation, who seek the extreme emotionalism and sentimentality of the second-rate film, are suspicious and shy of religious emotion.'⁷⁴ The leader of the Tell Scotland Movement recognized that the post-war generation in Scotland

would not respond to an evangelist who played upon their religious feelings and sentiments. Graham had a reputation, from his Los Angeles crusade in 1949, for arousing considerable passion in his audiences. The London experience in 1954 encouraged him to slow his pace and reduce his excited enthusiasm. When he was invited to come to Scotland, there can be little doubt that he was warned by Allan and the Tell Scotland committee not to provoke an emotional response to his Gospel appeals. This, perhaps above all, explains the different attitudes Graham held towards bodily manifestations of emotion in conversion in *Peace with God* published in 1953 and the All Scotland Crusade of 1955. Scottish Presbyterians were not generally accustomed to physical displays of religious emotion and Graham was advised to preach accordingly.

V

This paper has examined the character of the conversion experience Billy Graham presented during the All Scotland Crusade in 1955. It has revealed that in *Peace with God*, published in 1953, the evangelist acknowledged the non-salvific presence of emotion in repentance and faith, the human elements in the event or process of conversion. It has further disclosed that he actively discouraged his audiences from displaying their religious feelings in his sermons when they responded to his altar call during the Kelvin Hall campaign. The invitation to come 'quietly and reverently' to the platform, and the follow up meetings with Crusade counsellors where spiritual affections were discouraged, demonstrate how Graham wanted people to experience conversion as an act of their will that was not accompanied by overt emotions. The influences of the Kelvin Hall, the revivalist culture of the mid twentieth century, the formative effect of Graham's conversion experience, and Scottish expectations that surrounded the Crusade were discussed in order to explain why the evangelist was so averse to scenes of a physical nature. It was argued that the apprehension

⁷⁰ *Life and Work*, May 1954, 123.

⁷¹ *Life and Work*, March 1955, 58.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷⁴ Allan, *Crusade in Scotland*, 121.

of Scottish church leaders towards old revival emotionalism was the main reason Graham discouraged his audiences from demonstrating their religious feelings in a physical manner when they responded to his invitation to be 'born again.' Evangelical conversion under the significant influence of Graham became, in the second half of the twentieth century, an act of the will that was increasingly unaccompanied by public displays of emotion.

Kling has claimed the 'new birth' 'is a multi-faceted phenomenon' and 'understandings and experiences of conversion are subject to the vagaries of history.'⁷⁵ A host of various factors and influences have, throughout tradition, determined how being 'born again' has been known and enjoyed.⁷⁶ He has also argued that conversion is more than a cerebral act of the mind. It is an event or process located within the whole body, and there is, therefore, a 'physicality to conversion.'⁷⁷ However, after the Enlightenment, a new humanity was conceived and born that was progressively more self-aware and conscious of its own agency.⁷⁸ Hindmarsh has indicated how the Age of Reason gave rise to a 'new understanding of the self' and a much stronger confidence in human actions.⁷⁹ Consequently, the new assured person enjoyed the freedom to make their own rational decisions and did not need the help of God or the agency of the Holy Spirit, nor even the endorsement of emotions or feelings, to be converted.

Notwithstanding the mystery that will always surround human spiritual experiences, it is contended that conversion has become in the twentieth century, among many Evangelicals

and under the leadership of Graham, an act of the will that is not accompanied by bodily manifestations prompted by religious emotions. For example, Alpha is an evangelistic course that began at Holy Trinity Brompton church in London in 1977 and became popular among Evangelicals after it was taken over by Nicky Gumble in 1990.⁸⁰ Anna Stout and Simon Dein examined 'Alpha and evangelical conversion' in an empirical study based on eleven interviews with 'born again' Christians conducted in 2009.⁸¹ It is significant that during this course, that is largely shaped by Charismatic spirituality and attends more to experience than the intellect, four of the eleven participants were converted during the course, and only one of them, Mary, had a physical prostration.⁸² Stout and Dein discovered 'most of the informants did not describe a sudden coming to faith, a 'road to Damascus' experience, but rather spoke of gradually coming to a decision to commit to a belief that was already present in them, in a passive, background way.'⁸³ Their testimonies were stories of 'a gradual, ever developing, journey' that did not include a spontaneous or sudden moment of new birth accompanied by physical manifestations.⁸⁴ It appears, therefore, that the physicality of conversion has been lost. This is the legacy many Evangelicals inherited from Billy Graham. No longer do we expect, in the twenty first century, hearts to be 'strangely warmed' when people become Christians.

Acknowledgements

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⁷⁵ Kling, *Religious Conversion*, 662, 669.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 661.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 666-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 665.

⁷⁹ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 10.

⁸⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_course (Accessed 5 May 2022)

⁸¹ Anna Stout & Simon Dein, 'Alpha and evangelical conversion', *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 34:2, 2013, 256-261.

⁸² *Ibid*, 259.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.