

EVANGELISM'S NEW LEADER

Following Billy Graham's crusade in London last year. British theologian Clifford Hill wrote: "If only someone on the platform had had the faith to pray for the sick, believing that the prayer of faith prevails over sickness."

Commenting on this, the distinguished editor of Britain's *Renewal* magazine, Edward England, wrote: "I believe with Dr. Hill that we need to see a nationwide demonstration of power evangelism."

But, he added, it was "not right to criticize Graham for what he was *not* called to do. Rather, we should challenge those who have the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate it."

Edward England is right. No Christian leader in this century has preached and lived with the integrity and consistency of Billy Graham. God has faithfully honored his pure heart.

Graham is now 71 and many are asking upon whom will his mantle fall. Just as there was no successor to Kathryn Kuhlman, I do not believe there will be one for Graham. God raised him up for a unique purpose—to give worldwide validity to evangelism. He has been faithful to that call. Despite the failures and extremes of others, his balance and integrity has kept the office of the evangelist one of honor.

But new ministries are emerging—evangelists with different but powerful gifts. Foremost, at least here in America,

is James Robison from Fort Worth, Texas. While Graham certainly depends on the Holy Spirit for the winning of the lost, Robison's crusades are characterized by exciting, charismatic praise music and the "power gifts" of the Holy Spirit.

Graham himself has testified that Robison's gifts go beyond those of his own. Graham says Robison is also called to stir the church to action.

In the past, Robison was considered by many to be a loose cannon on the deck of the Good Ship Zion. To others he resembled an angry, wild-eyed hunter on the first day of the season. Armed with a submachine gun, rocket launcher and a pocket full of grenades, he stormed through the forest of television evangelism, shooting off his mouth at everything that moved. He forcefully took on the homosexuals, liberals and devil-worshippers; and after his deliverance from personal demons, he so agitated his Southern Baptist brethren that they

declared him anathema.

But all that has changed. God has done an awesome work in this man. Robison is now received not only by his Baptist brethren, but by Pentecostals and charismatics as well—although he lines up in no specific camp.

The difference, says Richard Jackson of North Phoenix Baptist Church, is "the anointing."

Jackson's right. You can't be around this tall, intense Texan without realizing he lives and breathes the Holy Spirit. The old fire remains, now tempered with clarity and power. I predict the '90s will see Robison (and others too) being used by God to stir the church to its new/old call: evangelism.

Learning from the mistakes of others who have fallen and from Graham's example of accountability to a small group of men, Robison has determined not to re-enter the forum of national ministry alone. He has formed what he calls a "World Evangelism Council," made up of five men from diverse Christian backgrounds. Their task: to stand with him, to hold him accountable, to encourage and endorse, and to caution and correct if things aren't right.

The council will not replace Robison's board of directors, which oversees the business and financial part of his ministry. Rather, it will be his bridge to churches as well as a monitor for his life and ministry.

The council is comprised of five pastors: Jack Hayford of The Church On The Way in Van Nuys, California; Tommy Barnett of First Assembly of God in Phoenix; John Morgan of Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston; Richard Jackson; and myself. Two classical Pentecostals, two Southern Baptists and an independent charismatic. Robison has either heard from God to submit his ministry to such a diverse group—or he's been eating Texas locoweed.

Hayford points out that Robison is "not sacrificing his individuality nor asking [the council] to. Rather, we are blending together in the Spirit of Christ because of larger issues." That issue is evangelism.

Only time will tell whether these prophecies about Robison are true. But this *is* true—he has certainly laid the proper foundation. ■

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