

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

February 21, 2018

My dear Friends:

I'm writing this a couple of hours after the news broke that Billy Graham died at the age of 99. Like many, many of you, I greatly admired him and his ministry. But two other thoughts occur to me this morning as I reflect on his passing into glory. One is this: as you know, I graduated from Bob Jones University. What you may not know is that Billy attended for a semester before going to Florida Bible Institute and then to Wheaton College—he met Cliff Barrows at BJU. Also, after World War II, but before the decisive 1950 Los Angeles crusade that made Graham a national name, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., the president of his self-titled college, offered Graham the presidency of the school. In the end, Graham would be president of the Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis, Minnesota (which is why the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association headquarters were in that city for so many years).

By the time I got to BJU, Graham was practically “public enemy number one.” In fact, the historian George Marsden once quipped that the way to determine if someone was a fundamentalist was to ask them what they thought about Billy Graham. There were a range of reasons for this—some theological, some methodological, some quite personal—but I especially remember being able to purchase for three dollars a packet of information sold in the bookstore that warned of Graham's theological “liberalism.” Looking back on all of that now, I can see the ways we all too often attack our should-be friends when they are busy doing the very thing we ought to be and are doing—winning others to Jesus.

The second thought was this: one of the fascinating things in doing the research for my history of the PCA, *For a Continuing Church*, was how southern Presbyterian conservatives loved Billy Graham. In fact, they were so invested in his ministry that throughout the 1950s, *the Southern Presbyterian Journal*, the mouthpiece for the group that would form the PCA, rarely had an issue without something about Graham. In many ways, Graham's utter commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and his passion for worldwide evangelism served as a picture of what our PCA forefathers longed for in the old denomination and what they pledged themselves to in our new one.

While there would be some in the early days of the PCA who would castigate Graham for not being sufficiently “Reformed,” by and large, PCA founders and their successors have appreciated Graham's passion for evangelism and his leadership on that issue. It is a reminder to me that our church has its best moments when we stand right where our motto puts us, “Faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.” And especially when we link together a firm commitment to Scripture (“the Bible says”) with a deep desire for conversions (“Just as I am”), God blesses that kind of ministry.

So, I give thanks for the life and ministry of Billy Graham. I trust that you do as well. And I'm also grateful that the God who used Billy Graham can use you and me in the same way (if not to the same degree) when we are committed to his Word and to his witness.

In the grip of God's grace,



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