

# OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN  
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND  
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN  
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM  
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN  
Production Manager

CARL EARL  
Systems Manager

## OUR VIEW

# Billy Graham set his own baseline

The death Wednesday of Billy Graham inevitably drew instant tributes from all over the world.

Perhaps no single figure has been on the national stage for so long with a consistent message: do good and love one another.

The 99-year-old evangelist, crippled by Parkinson's disease, and losing his sight and hearing, was a bastion of respectable morality during an era where the involvement of religion in politics became more marked and more shrill.

In his early days, Graham paved the way for Christian ministry to enter the television era, had a newspaper advice column and wrote more than 30 books on morality that laid the baseline for ethical behavior for generations throughout the world.

He was showered with accolades from unexpected quarters. As well as honorary degrees and presidential and Congressional medals, he has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and earned an honorary knighthood from Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

He traveled the world hosting emotional revivals, sharing his perspective on the Christian gospel and offering millions "hope for the troubled heart," which was one of his book titles. At the height of his prominence, he officiated presidential funerals for Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Most notably in recent years, he helped the nation mourn after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

His Stone Age views on the role of women have been widely dissected and quite rightly criticized.

He managed to stay aloof from the televangelist sex and money scandals of the 1970s and 1980s, and unlike his more extreme firebrand son, Franklin, did not embrace the rigid intolerance of some facets of today's Christian right wing.

What's sometimes forgotten about Graham, however, is his outspoken courage in calling on Americans to tear down racial barriers, beginning way back in the 1950s. Although he and Martin Luther King Jr. differed radically in their approach to the Vietnam War, their lives criss-crossed repeatedly at the height of the civil rights movement; Graham once even bailed King out of jail.

Graham, originally a Democrat, was an adviser to presidents, beginning with Truman and moving into the modern era. Staunch in his Protestantism, he shared mistrust about Kennedy's Catholicism, but years later was flexible enough to embrace Mitt Romney's aspirations for high office and put aside an earlier view that the Mormon religion was a "cult." Critics have suggested some hypocrisy over Graham's loud public support for Israel when declassified portions of taped conversations with Nixon revealed appalling comments about the power of Jews in America, especially in media ownership.

However, people from across the political spectrum have long admired Graham's consistent beliefs and the need for everyone to "love thy neighbor."

He was a product of his time, as devout in his hatred for Communism as he was strong in his Christian beliefs. However history remembers him, we likely will not see his kind again.

The certainty of Graham's faith is reflected in his often-quoted comment: "Someday, you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address."



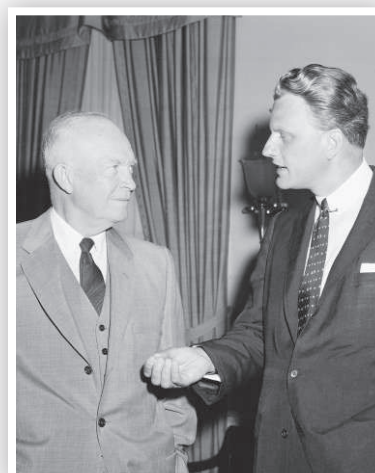
Associated Press

American troops in Vietnam greet evangelist Billy Graham during his 1966 Christmas visit.



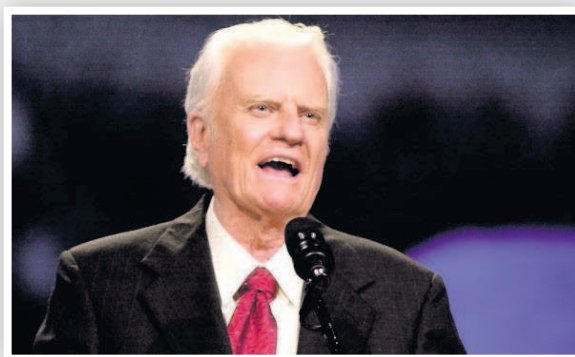
The White House, Pete Souza

President Barack Obama meets in 2010 with Graham, 91, at his mountainside home in Montreat, N.C.



Associated Press

Evangelist Graham, right, talks with President Dwight Eisenhower during a visit at the White House in 1957.



AP Photo/LM Otero

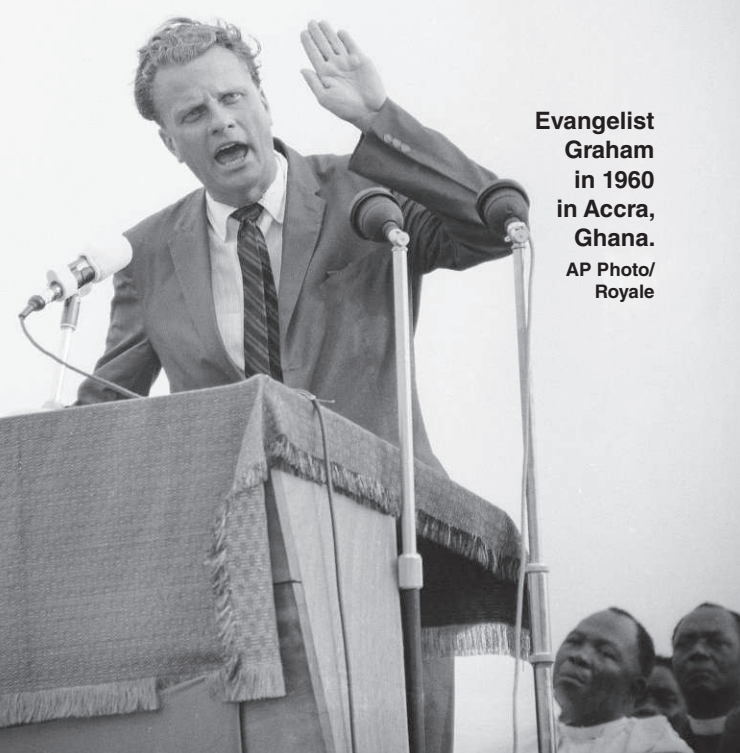
Rev. Graham speaks in 2002 in Irving, Texas.



Associated Press

Evangelist Graham and President Nixon in 1971 at ceremonies honoring Graham in Charlotte, N.C.

**'However history remembers him, we likely will not see his kind again.'**



Evangelist Graham in 1960 in Accra, Ghana. AP Photo/Royale

# Gun massacres have become America's Rorschach test

A Eugene woman I know is an avid duck hunter. In fact, hunting and fishing drew her to the man who would become her husband. Last Friday this mother of two sent a message to her friends with "a simple plea." She urged that they call the NRA to cancel their membership.

"Tell them you are breaking up with them, and tell them you no longer support policies that are leading to mass shootings of children," she said. "Then, take that money that would have gone to the NRA, and pledge it instead to Every Town for Gun Safety or Sandy Hook Promise or Giffords.org."

She added: "I'm not asking you to stop hunting or to get rid of your handguns. But I ask you to imagine your own child (or grandkid, niece, nephew, or neighbor), happily walking into school... and being shot by someone who definitely should not have a gun."



STEVE FORRESTER

Some 25 years ago, Columbia Forum brought Dr. Linda Erwin of Legacy Emanuel Hospital here. A trauma surgeon, Dr. Erwin spoke eloquently and emotionally that night at Fort Clatsop about what it's like to treat gunshot wounds. She's become a leader in what might be called the physician resistance to the business-as-usual tolerance of gun violence.

The first step in moving beyond ignoring an epidemic that takes some 30,000 American lives per year is realizing that it doesn't have to be this way. The state of Connecticut took that step in 2012, following the Sandy Hook massacre. Writing in The New York Times on Sunday, Lisa W. Foderaro and Kristin Hussey report that gun wounding and killings have declined in states that impose controls on gun sales.

"Analyses by the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence show that states with the strictest gun-control measures, including California, Connecticut, New Jersey and New York, have the lowest rates of gun deaths, while

those with the most lax laws like Alabama, Alaska and Louisiana, have the highest," report Foderaro and Hussey.

When it comes to massacres such as last week's in Florida or the prior one in Las Vegas, the military-grade weapons at the heart of those maelstroms have nothing to do with hunting or target shooting. Assault weapons are designed to kill humans with efficiency in battle. Why would it be a good idea to allow sales of such weapons to anybody with a credit card and a mailing address?

Dr. Erwin and others, such as David Hemenway of the Harvard School of Public Health, argue that gun wounding, killings and suicides are a public health challenge. In other words, if a disease were taking this many lives annually, medical researchers would fashion a response. For some years, the Centers for Disease Control gathered statistics on gun wounding, killings and suicides — until the National Rifle Association compelled a compliant Congress to forbid the CDC from collecting

and reporting those numbers.

That repudiation of health care logic summarizes what the NRA, through its surrogates in Congress, is asking us to do — be willfully ignorant of essential information.

The public health physicians are right in their approach to gun violence. But also in the balance is the health of our own psyche.

These gun massacres have become America's Rorschach test.

Fareed Zakaria of CNN on Sunday noted that other nations have as much mental illness as ours, but they don't have the epidemic of gun massacres.

As Maureen Dowd wrote in a column in The New York Times, America may be in the throes of great disruptions and anxieties, but it doesn't take any soul searching to know that "treating children as collateral damage is intolerable."

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.