

Ex-presidents salute Graham as his library, history complex opens: Bill Clinton, George H. W. Bush and Jimmy Carter

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Three former presidents and a crowd of 1,500 helped to dedicate the \$27 million library and history complex at Charlotte, North Carolina, created to honor renowned evangelist Billy Graham, who has met with every U.S. president since Harry Truman.

Former president George H. W. Bush gave an emotional keynote address in which he commended Graham for starting a moral awakening in the U.S. and in the former Soviet Union. Indeed, said former president Jimmy Carter, Graham's message had "permeated the entire world."

The May 31 event became so heartfelt that Graham, 88, likened it to "attending my own funeral.

"This building behind me is just a building," Graham said. "I've been here at the library once, and my one comment when I toured it was that it was too much Billy Graham. My whole life has been to please the Lord and honor Jesus, not to see me and think of me."

Bill Clinton, a fellow Baptist, spoke of being impressed by Graham's personal kindness.

"When he prays with you in the Oval Office or upstairs at the White House," said Clinton, "you feel he is praying for you, not for the president." Clinton said he attended Graham crusades in 1959, 1971, 1989 and 2005. "Billy has known me since 1985, but I have known him for nearly 50 years."

Graham has been ill in recent years. He has a condition known as fluid on the brain, as well as prostate cancer and Parkinson's disease. He and his wife, 86-year-old

Ruth, who has osteoarthritis, are mostly confined to their home in Montreat, North Carolina.

The library campus, which opened to the public June 5, includes a dairy barn-styled library, reminiscent of his family's dairy farm, with a 40-foot glass cross as the entrance. Exhibits, multimedia displays and films trace Graham's life from his youth on the farm to his place in history as "America's pastor." -*Associated Baptist Press*