

Billy Graham and Civil Rights ^[1]

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Letters from Dwight Eisenhower Presidential Library. Below are the transcriptions.

March 27, 1956

Dear Mr. President

It was a delight to talk with you last Tuesday in Washington. I have given a great deal of thought to our discussion, particularly as to the race question. Yesterday I received your letter outlining suggestions. Please be assured that I shall keep both your letter and our conversations in confidence.

I feel with you that the Church must take a place of spiritual leadership in this crucial matter that confronts not only the South but the entire nation. You will be interested to know that I am taking immediate steps to call the outstanding leaders of the major Southern denominations together as soon as possible in Atlanta for a conference on this subject. I shall outline to them your suggestions for racial understanding and progress. In addition, I will do all in my power to urge Southern ministers to call upon the people for moderation, charity, compassion and progress toward compliance with the [Supreme Court decision](#). Your own personal suggestions are excellent.

The great denominational conventions will be held during May, and by that time we should have concrete suggestions to present at these assemblies and conventions that will get it before the average minister of the South, urging him to present these viewpoints from his pulpit. In this area I believe we can make a contribution toward better understanding.

Immediately after the election you can take whatever steps you feel are wise and right. In the meantime, it might be well to let the Democratic Party bear the brunt of the debate. Your deeds are speaking for you. You have so wonderfully kept above the controversies that necessarily raged from time to time. I hope particularly before November you are able to stay out of this bitter racial situation that is developing.

I had a long talk yesterday with Governor Hodges of North Carolina and Governor Frank Clement of Tennessee. I have urged them both to consider the racial problem from a spiritual point of view. They are two of our more "moderate" Southern governors.

I talked to Sid Richardson on the phone the other day. In spite of the fact that you vetoed the gas bill, he is still your biggest booster and friend.

Cordially yours,
Billy

March 30, 1956

Dear Billy:

Thank you for your note. I, of course, was completely confident that you would hold confidential any suggestions I made; otherwise I could not have written as I did. My purpose was to "think out aloud" a bit, and, if any of my ideas seemed useful to you, they would automatically become yours to use as you see fit.

I have read with great care what you have to say about the political situation. I think it a great pity that this crucial matter will, almost inescapably it seems, be dragged into the arena of partisan politics. For myself, I shall always, as a matter of conviction and as a champion of real, as opposed to [spurious](#) ^[2], progress, remain a moderate in this regard.

There are foolish extremists on both sides of the question who will never be won over to a sensible course of action. But we have these with respect to every question that can be raised. So far as any public statements that I may have to make in the future, they will follow the line that I have often expressed before. I shall not, however, make specific suggestions as to what anybody, even the clergy, might do in the circumstances.

With every good wish and warm personal regard,

Sincerely
[Dwight Eisenhower]

June 4, 1956

Dear Mr. President

As soon as possible after our talk in March, I went quietly to work among denominational leaders in the South. I had several private meetings with outstanding religious leaders of both races, encouraging them to take a stronger stand in calling for desegregation and yet demonstrating charity and, above all, patience. I met with excellent and overwhelming response. During the past few weeks I have addressed a number of annual Protestant religious conferences. I have also spoken at Negro universities. On each occasion I laid before them what I consider to be a sensible program for bettering race relations. I believe the Lord is helping us, and if the Supreme Court will go slowly and the extremists on both sides will quiet down, we can have a peaceful social readjustment over the next ten-year period. I am more hopeful now than I was when I talked with you in March.

I asked leaders of the three major denominations in the South to write you their plans, resolutions and statements. I believe they have done so.

I am somewhat disturbed by rumors that Republican strategy will be to go all out in winning the Negro vote in the North regardless of the South's feelings. Again I would like to caution you about getting involved in this particular problem. At the moment, to an amazing degree, you have the confidence of white and Negro leaders. I would hate to see it jeopardized by even those in the Republican Party with a political ax to grind. Your complete sincerity, honesty, fairness and religious conviction are going to carry you overwhelmingly back to the White House with a greater majority than in 1952. You don't need to yield to any pressure groups. I agree with [Governor Dewey](#) who told a small group of us in the home of [Mr. Dewitt Wallace](#) last summer that you would go down in history alongside of Lincoln.

My constant prayer is that God will continue to give you physical strength and wisdom to carry out your tremendous responsibilities.

We started a thirty-day meeting here in Oklahoma City yesterday. In spite of bad weather, we had over 15,000 at the opening service.

Most cordially yours,
Billy Graham

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