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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 7, 1972

~~ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL/PERSONAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Telephone Call from Reverend Billy Graham

Billy Graham placed a call to the President late this afternoon from Montreat. I took the call, because the President was meeting with staff members, and learned that Billy sought the President's advice about a matter which he described as "strictly personal". He said that he would tell me about it if I would keep it confidential and relay it to the President within the next hour or two. I assured him that the matter would be kept private and that I would do what I could to get back to him by 8:00 p.m. Then, he told me of his dilemma.

He had been called last night by Sargent Shriver, who asked him -- based on their long and close friendship -- to lead the prayer at his acceptance speech ceremony in Washington tomorrow evening (August 8). Billy told me that Shriver said, "I know that you're behind the President, and that you will vote for him. But I'm asking you this favor because you and I are such good friends and because you are the finest person I know in the Protestant ministry." Billy seemed to feel that since Shriver put it the way he did -- i.e. strictly on a friendship basis -- he should probably accept. Yet he admitted that if he accepted, he would have to reverse his earlier decision and attend the Republican Convention. He expressed the hope that he could retain a completely "bipartisan posture" throughout the early stages of the Campaign ... "at least until about October". He said that if the polls should indicate a close Presidential race during that last month before the Election, he could (in that way) throw his support to the side of the President more effectively. He went on to say that he was truly in a quandry about what to do and that he very much wanted the President's personal advice. He closed the conversation by assuring me that he would abide by any decision made at this end of the line -- that he would do nothing to hurt the President or to help McGovern.

In accordance with standard procedure, I tried to contact Bob Haldeman in California, but learned that he would not be in touch with the Western White House switchboard for "another hour and a half". That being the case, I mentioned the Graham matter to the President while chatting with him about some other things -- schedule proposals, etc. The President listened carefully, then answered firmly, "He should not do it. You call him back and tell him that it would be tantamount to his having attended the Democratic National Convention."

About a half hour later I called Billy and told him what had transpired. I could sense some disappointment. He asked me if I told the President about Shriver's having acknowledged that he (Billy) was a Nixon supporter and that he would be voting, of course, for the President. I told him that that part of the story had been made clear to the President. Then he referred to his father-in-law, "a staunch Nixon supporter and an ultra-conservative if there ever was one", saying, "He seems to think it would be perfectly alright for me to accept Shriver's invitation." After all, I'm a clergyman and I would be there only for the purpose of leading those people in prayer."

Because the President had tried unsuccessfully to telephone me only a few moments before, I told Billy that I would have an occasion to talk to the President once again, and that I would seek a confirmation of the earlier decision.

Needless to say, I did not mention the subject to the President when I spoke to him later that evening. He had made his point earlier in the day.

At 8:15 p.m. I called Bob Haldeman, ran the story by him quickly, got his agreement to the President's decision, and in the process learned more about Billy's early summer declinations to invitations to both major Party conventions on the basis of his wanting to hold to a bipartisan stance throughout most of the Campaign period. Like the President, Haldeman saw Graham's acceptance of the Shriver invitation as a radical change of position. There would be no hiding of his presence at the nationally-televised ceremony and so it would be taken by a great many Americans as a gesture of support.

At 8:35 I called Billy and reiterated the President's feeling (and advice). He said, "Fine. Then, that's exactly what I will do."

  
Alexander P. Butterfield