

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

February 29, 2012 at 2:57pm

Franklin Graham apologizes for questioning Obama's faith

by Adelle M. Banks by Religion News Service

WASHINGTON -- Evangelist Franklin Graham apologized Tuesday (Feb. 28) to President Obama for questioning his Christian faith and said religion has "nothing to do" with Graham's decision not to support Obama's re-election.

Graham's apology came after a group of prominent black religious leaders criticized the evangelist for saying he did not know whether Obama is a Christian and suggesting that Islamic law considers him to be a Muslim.

Graham, president of the relief organization Samaritan's Purse and the son of famed evangelist Billy Graham, said he now accepts Obama's declarations that he is a Christian.

"I regret any comments I have ever made which may have cast any doubt on the personal faith of our president, Mr. Obama," he said in a statement.

"I apologize to him and to any I have offended for not better articulating my reason for not supporting him in this election -- for his faith has nothing to do with my consideration of him as a candidate."

Graham said he objects to Obama's policy stances on abortion and same-sex marriage, which Graham considers to be in "direct conflict" with Scripture.

More than a dozen members of a religious subgroup of the NAACP had accused Graham of "bearing false witness" and fomenting racial discord.

"We can disagree about what it means to be a Christian engaged in politics, but Christians should not bear

false witness," the NAACP statement said. "We are also concerned that Rev. Graham's comments can be used to encourage racism."

When asked in a recent MSNBC interview if Obama was a Christian, Graham responded, "I cannot answer that question for anybody." He went on to say that because Obama's father was a Muslim, "under Islamic law, the Muslim world sees Barack Obama as a Muslim."

By contrast, Graham said there is "no question" that GOP presidential candidate Rick Santorum is a "man of faith" because "his values are so clear on moral issues." Santorum has also faced criticism for saying the president has a "phony theology" that is unbiblical.

"By his statements, Rev. Graham seems to be aligning himself with those who use faith as a weapon of political division," the NAACP said. "These kinds of comments could have enormous negative effects for America and are especially harmful to the Christian witness."

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Signatories of the open letter included presidents of the National Baptist Convention, USA; the National Baptist Convention of America; the Progressive National Baptist Convention; as well as bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

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