The whole concept of stewardship is basic for an adequate understanding of the essence of the Christian gospel. The United Stewardship Council has adopted the following definition: “Christian stewardship is the practice of systematic and proportionate giving of time, abilities, and material possessions, based on the conviction that these are a trust from God, to be used in His service for the benefit of mankind”. . . . It is this basic idea of the absolute ownership of God that forms the background of this message. When an individual accepts this idea, the whole emphasis of his life changes—the emphasis is not placed on what he OWNS but on what he OWES . . . We come to a deep and abiding sense of God’s ownership of all that we possess, and realize that He has entrusted us with the use of what we call possessions without giving up His ownership. . . .

Consider what we spend for insignificant things, and we will see that we give far too little for worthwhile causes. A survey made by the Golden Rule Foundation reveals that in a single year Americans spent on cosmetics and personal care $2,200,000,000; on cigarettes and cigars $2,700,000,000; on movies and other recreation $5,500,000,000; on alcoholic beverages with many a headache and bad morning afterwards, $7,100,000,000.; on gambling $10,000,000,000.—and contributed to churches and to church charities a sum far below any of these: $900,000,000. These statistics are startling. Now I am not saying we should totally refrain from luxuries. But I am saying that if we are Christians, following in the way of the Lord, then God’s work must come first—before cosmetics, cigarettes, expensive clothes, etc. . . . You would consider it idolotry of the lowest form if, in place of the Cross, you should find on the altar of the church a bottle of perfume, a carton of cigarettes, or a pair of tickets to the Coliseum—you would rise up in wrathful denunciation; and yet, I say that these are the things which have supplanted the Cross on the private altars of many Christian hearts. . . .

I make no apologies for asking for financial support for the church. The Church has a just claim on your active, practical, and financial support if for no other reason than that your home is better, your community is better, your nation is better as a result of the existence of the Church. With all of its faults—and it certainly has them—the Church is man’s strongest ally in his struggle to discover life at its best. . . .

Some of you will say that you support many charities and causes outside the church. I have nothing but highest of praise for these charities which are doing so much to alleviate human suffering. I support them strongly myself. But which requires primary support and is most deserving of it: the Church, which was the source of all charity and which will be the source of many more, or the individual
We who are members of the church are the lighthouse of the world. We are responsible for one task above all others—to keep the light of the gospel burning. All else must be secondary; and no amount of spending or righteous philanthropy will excuse us from the faithful fulfillment of that task. . . . $22,300.00 to pay for the fuel that will keep the light of the gospel burning in Dexter! Yes, we can do it! As you prayerfully consider this, make your pledge—not to me, not to the officers—no, not even to the Church; but to GOD. Make it so that you would be unashamed to stand in His presence and present it to Him personally.

Stewardship means not only giving our money but also our time. It is everything from regular attendance to an effort to let everybody you meet know how deeply you feel in debt to the Church. It is being willing to come and sing and teach and wash dishes and serve on committees and then to give the Power of God’s Spirit a chance to change your life and make you what you have never dreamed you could be. . . . The church has always put us first before anything else. It took us in as babies, before it knew who we were, what we might be, what we might have. It called us “children of God” and received us into its arms; it walked besides us in good times and in bad times; was a bulwark against the world, the flesh, and the devil. It prays for us when we go astray, welcomes us back as a loving mother when we come to ourselves; it is with us in sickness, sorrow, and death. Every other organization we join first ascertains who we are, what we have, what our social standing is; asks if we will ‘fit in’, what we have to offer, etc. . . . How different is the Church which says “I don’t care who you are, what your background is, what you have. You are a child of God and as such I welcome you without reservation; I offer you all the privileges and blessings; and I shall belong to you and you to me now and forever. Pray for Dexter, work for Dexter, give for Dexter.

Showing them the image on the coin, He said, ‘Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and to God the things which are God’s.

PD. Dexter Echo, 6 November 1957, CKFC.

To Chester Bowles

8 November 1957
New York, N.Y.

In mid-1957 King joined the National Committee of the American Committee on Africa. Later that year he agreed to serve on the International Sponsoring Committee for a day of protest against South Africa’s apartheid government, which the American Committee on Africa had initiated. On behalf of this effort, King and United States

1. John Gunther to King, 24 June 1957; Ballou to Gunther, 8 July 1957.
2. The protest also included the release of the Declaration of Conscience, signed by 134 world leaders (International Sponsoring Committee, Declaration of Conscience on South Africa and Day of Protest, 10 December 1957).