

The “Notre Dame Ten” and DOW-CIA: A.D. November 18, 1969–November 18, 2009

Friends,

This is a personal statement regarding an event that happened forty years ago, but whose spiritual pertinence for every Christian and every Christian Church in the United States echoes across four decades. The University of Notre Dame is the sounding board from which this temporal and eternal life and death dire spiritual problem emanates in this instance. It is, however, only one Catholic and Christian atmosphere, among tens of thousands of others in the United States, which is bedeviled to the point of gross infidelity to the explicit teachings of Jesus, by its past and by its present entanglements with an American nationalism and militarism rooted in a sociopathic perpetual war economy.

The attached—two posters, a press release, and a ten-page defense brief—relate to an event that occurred forty years ago at the University of Notre Dame on November 18, 1969 and is being remembered and commemorated this November 18. The defense brief that was written by myself and a faculty colleague along with the ten students—who were expelled from Notre Dame on that day for nonviolently protesting the presence on the Notre Dame Campus of DOW Chemical and the CIA for *recruiting* purposes only—is somewhat lengthy. To some, the defense brief may seem boring because of its details. However, I send it to you on the 40th anniversary of the event that precipitated its composition, because it is as morally pertinent at this hour as it was at that previous hour. Pertinent, not only for all Christian institutions of learning at all levels, but also for Christians and Christian Churches, as well as, their present leadership—a leadership today that seems to have fallen into a state of moral stupor regarding from Whom it is that they and their institutions live and move and have their being, as well as, their only *raison d’être* for being.

The gods of nationalism, militarism and institutional survival, spend their deceiving existences tempting Christians to follow their “truths and values” and to set aside the Eternal Truths and Values proclaimed by Christ-God—or at least to set their “truths and values” above those taught by Jesus in the Gospels. On November 18, 1969, the Christian administrators at Notre Dame, knowingly or unknowingly, yielded to these gods and this temptation. Today, in the face of the human slaughter house that the United States Government has made of Iraq and Afghanistan, Christian Churches and institutions of every denomination are succumbing to the very same temptation, either by calculated pusillanimous silence or by energetically praising the Lord while helping to pass the ammunition from 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue into the hearts or heads of hundreds of thousands of God’s infinitely beloved sons and daughters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There have been times in the past when Christians have refused to kowtow to these murderous false gods and stood firmly with Jesus and His Way. The document that is

herein attached is a piece of the record of one of those times. The document's defense of the ten students is divided more or less into two areas: 1) that the students acted in conformity with the nature and purpose of the American University Community; 2) that the students acted in conformity with the nature and purpose of the Christian Community. Since Notre Dame is a Catholic university, it and those who are part of it are morally held to the purposes and standards of both communities—the Catholic community and the university academic community. If a conflict of allegiances should ever arise between the two interlocking community value systems the Christian would have to choose. By the dictates of both faith and reason, the Christian would be morally required to follow the truth embodied in the Christian Community, since it is rationally and spiritually absurd to choose the temporal, the totally perishable, over the eternal and imperishable, as it is equally rationally absurd to follow and obey the words of a creature when they logically contradict the Word who is the Creator (Jn 1:1ff). However, the position of this brief is that in this instance the protesting students were faithful to the nature and purpose of both communities and therefore should not be excommunicated from a Catholic university on the basis of either standard. That they were excommunicated from Notre Dame was an act of raw dominative power. Excommunication in this instance was neither an act of rational justice nor was it an act of Christlike love. It was suffering imposed simply because one had the power to impose suffering without regard to justice, love or his own practical and moral culpability.

When the students were excommunicated, I chose on December 22, 1969, to send in my letter of resignation from the faculty and as Director of THE PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION effective upon the termination of my contract the following summer. The issue for me, as it was for every member of the faculty, administration and student body at the time, was, "Who do you stand with: the excommunicators or the excommunicated?" The excommunicators had my livelihood. (I had just bought a small farm.) The excommunicated had the truth about the "overwhelming moral atrocity" (Thomas Merton's words) that the U.S. Government was perpetrating in Vietnam and in which DOW and the CIA were major-league players. So major, that by 1969 both had become international symbols of the murder, mayhem and misery that was mercilessly being poured out on the people of a nation the size of the State of New York 7500 miles away.

Contrary to what has been published about this event in various places over the last four decades, all the students who were expelled did not eventually graduate from Notre Dame. And, many of those who did still paid a price for speaking truth to murderous power and to those it manipulates. Every word of this defense document is embedded in suffering. I send it out on the 40th anniversary of the event because of the "silence" on U.S. Catholic and Christian campuses today—as well as in the American Catholic and Christian Churches in general—in the presence of the U.S. Government again engaging in another "overwhelming moral atrocity" in Iraq and Afghanistan. This silence is the clearest statement possible that U.S. Churches and U.S. Christian educational institutions, including parish religious education programs, have lost their way. They simply are not seriously nurturing that empathic catholic consciousness and conscience that Jesus and His Way absolutely require for fidelity. Regardless of their size, wealth or history they are

obstinately and brazenly proclaiming to the world a mendacious gospel of “I will not teach what You commanded me to teach, I will not obey what You taught me to obey—and this is authentic fidelity to Jesus, this is being a good Christian” (Mt 28:20).

Silence is not neutral. Silence can be as violent, as merciless and as morally corrupt as propagandizing abortion as the moral equivalent of an appendectomy. Silence can be the moral support system without which murder could not take place. Ten students were thrown out of a Catholic school because each communicated with his whole person that monstrous evil—as determined by the standard of the teachings of Jesus—had no right to recruit on a Christian Campus.

When asked by their children and grandchildren today, “*What did you do in the face of the moral abomination called the Vietnam War?*” they can say, “*I was not silent. I called murder by its right name: murder. It cost me much pain to do this, but I knew that compared to the horror being endured by the Vietnamese people in their homes and fields 7500 miles away, it was very small sacrifice on behalf of Christic truth and love.*” When the U.S. butchery in Iraq and Afghanistan becomes as clear to the children and grandchildren of today’s students, what will most of them have to say? “*I did not know what was really going on.*” Or perhaps, today’s students (and others) will say as poor Cardinal O’Connor said to Nat Hentoff in an interview about his famous book (A CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN LOOKS AT VIETNAM), which was employed throughout the U.S. Catholic Church to morally justify the Vietnam War and to justify recruiting and sending Catholics and others over there to kill people: “*I wish I never wrote it. I didn’t know they [the government] were lying to me.*” (Evidently he was as unaware as most of today’s Church leaders appear to be unaware of being under a severe moral obligation to seriously consider the universally known and ancient truism that, “The first casualty of war is truth,” when evaluating whether a war is mass murder or is in conformity with the norms of Catholic unjust/just war morality.) It would of course be worth more than perhaps anything else if today’s students could say forty years from now, “*I saw mass murder and spoke out against it. I tried to stop it.*” I say *worth more* than perhaps anything else because “Whatever you did for the least, you did for me,” is intrinsically tied to one’s own and everyone’s eternal well-being. “The least” in a society’s war-consciousness is always the enemy *de jour*. The enemy, be it he or she or they, is “the least,” either by active hate or by indifference to the misery rained down on him, her or they.

The Vietnam War is history. The Iraq-Afghanistan War is history repeating itself. The Notre Dame 10 are history. Where is the Notre Dame 10’s history repeating itself on Christian college campuses today? In Christian Churches? Among Christian leaders? We know where the history of Johnson, McNamara, Nixon and Kissinger is repeating itself. We know where the history of DOW and the CIA is repeating itself. We know where the history of those power-people who gave support to Johnson, McNamara, Nixon, Kissinger, DOW, the CIA is repeating itself. And we know where the history of Christians murdering people by the thousands with the blessing of their Churches, their bishops, priests, ministers, pastors and chaplains is repeating itself. But where is the history that called, at a cost to self, mass murder by its correct name—mass murder? Or, perhaps in the future the present generation of Christian leadership and laity will comfort themselves with the

pitiable words of Admiral Chaplain-Cardinal John O’Conner, Ph.D.: *I didn’t know they [the government] were lying to me.*” Words which are the moral equivalent of the post World War II German who says, “ *I didn’t know Jews were being harmed so badly.*”

I place such unseeing, unquestioning expressions of innocence-bestowing naïveté concerning what government-at-war is about, over and against the following statement of Daniel Berrigan, S.J., given at his trial for burning with napalm draft files taken from the Catonsville, Maryland draft board office in May of 1968 in protest of the gross destruction of life that the U.S was responsible for in Vietnam. 1968 was the same year Cardinal John O’Connor, then Navy Chaplain-Commander John O’Connor, published his famous book morally justifying Merton’s, “overwhelming moral atrocity.” To the Federal Court Berrigan said on behalf of himself and the eight other defendants:

*Our apologies good friends
for the fracture of good order the burning of paper
instead of children the angering of the orderlies
in the front parlor of the charnel house
We could not so help us God do otherwise
For we are sick at heart our hearts
give us no rest for thinking of the Land of Burning Children*

(REV.) EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY