

"THE CHURCH AS ACCOMPLICE"

Bryan, Tex.

Dear Sir: Bravo! The March issue of *worldview*. Dr. Gordon Zahn leaves hardly anything to be said except that although the American hierarchy would not face Gestapo retaliation as a result of protest of the My Lai massacre and the tragedy in Vietnam, there would be a price to pay.

When one contemplates the results of a Bishop informing his parishioners that Christians must cease to support the Vietnamese tragedy indirectly through taxes or directly with "their own flesh and blood," there are many images of reprisals which take shape (comparable to Christ's agony in the garden). One of the results would be the rage of his own people. Four years experience in a dialogue with priests in at least three different communities reveals that entrenched nationalism in the church is not going to disappear at the first word from the Bishop! Parents who have heard support of this tragedy and the sacrifice of their sons eulogized from the pulpits are not likely to accept the principle which casts doubt (at the very least) on the justification of the sacrifice. Acceptance of this message would be impossible in view of the absence of any relevant advice from the pulpit of "the things which must be rendered to Caesar" and those which must be rendered to God."

Granting the hierarchy the courage to make this decision, how long would any government allow official protests from the pulpit? In the light of repressive measures used against CO's who refuse to go into the service, those burning draft cards and draft files, those counseling resistance of the draft, the prospect of Bishops and priests counseling 40,000,000 Catholics to withhold their support of the Vietnam tragedy (both financial and human) presents a frightful picture indeed! . . .

I know of at least one bishop who is aware of what his witness would involve, because we have corresponded concerning this matter. Like Peter in Passion Sunday's gospel, it is too risky to acknowledge friendship with Christ in this situation. Let us pray that the Bishops, like Peter, will receive the courage to become true shepherds of Christ's church.

Anne M. Holmes

"THE CASE OF DAN MITRIONE"

Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir: The torture of military or civil prisoners deserves the severe censure of humane men. Saying that, I am puzzled by a strange piece in *worldview*, "The Case of Dan Mitrone" (October, 1970), which purports to provide "evidence" of U.S. Government encouragement, "complicity," or approval of torture of "political prisoners" in Brazil and Uruguay.

I refer to the "interview" by Fr. Louis M. Colonnese—with an unnamed person on an unnamed date at an unnamed place—that offers no evidence of wrongdoing by Mr. Mitrone, an A.I.D. public safety officer in Uruguay who was murdered by leftist terrorists, or by any other U.S. official.

The Colonnese "interview" was based on a fraudulent "report" surreptitiously inserted in the *Journal do Brasil* by accomplices of the Uruguayan terrorists without the knowledge of the three correspondents of that paper then covering the Mitrone story in Montevideo. Reuters relayed the juicy story and it was picked up uncritically by media here and abroad and seized upon by certain Americans eager to hear the worst about their government.

The basic facts in the case have been readily available. On August 17, the Baltimore Sun reported a statement by the A.I.D. director in Rio de Janeiro denying categorically that Mitrone was ever involved in torture or the teaching of torture. Since then, a simple phone call to the State Department would have yielded the essential facts. . . .

This is not the place to detail the errors and blatant falsehoods of the Colonnese piece. It should be affirmed, however, that no public safety officer has had anything to do with torture in Brazil, Uruguay, or anywhere else. As far as there has been any U.S. influence in these countries, it certainly has been in the direction of the humane administration of justice.

Since its outset in 1954, the U.S. public safety program has provided technical aid to the civil police in 56 friendly countries, including 15 in Latin America. Its aim is to assist the governments to uphold the civil law by "humane" police methods. An A.I.D. spokesman noted that such assistance has been withdrawn from some countries where police power has been abused, adding that "we guard against abuses," but acknowledged that we cannot control the behavior of other police services. "We constantly tell them not to use abuse, torture, or so-called 'brutality'" (*Washington Post*, November 10, 1970). . . .

In a statement on August 28, the State Department said it "would welcome scrutiny by any responsible person," emphasizing that "police advisers in these programs have never condoned and would never condone—let alone assist in—any form of inhumane treatment of prisoners." If Colonnese has a shred of evidence to the contrary, let him bring it to the proper authorities. If the evidence were sustained, the guilty adviser would be speedily punished.

What baffles me is why *worldview* would publish this vicious propaganda piece when the simple facts of the case had already been published. Can malicious falsehoods ever advance the cause of justice? Can the uncritical publication of such falsehoods serve any good purpose? If *worldview* is critical of alleged torture in Brazil, why is it not equally concerned with authenticated torture and other political crimes in Communist countries? Is not the systematic torture and other forms of terror by the Communists in Vietnam inhumane? In terms of policy, of course, we should be more concerned when our government or that of our allies falls short of our code, but in terms of moral condemnation there should be no split-level morality which condemns the occasional, limited, and unauthorized sins of our friends and overlooks or excuses the officially sponsored and massive brutality of our enemies. Should not all men and all governments be judged by one ethic?

Ernest W. Lefever