

Nov. 7, 1959.

Dear Charlie:

It was very good of you to send me a copy of your statement and I am grateful to you for taking the trouble to do so, among so many other things you have had to go through in these days. I suppose so much has happen and so many things have been said, most of the foolish, that it would be out of place for me, at this late date, to add my contribution. Especially since I have already written several letters to Mark, all of them off the target as I did not precisely know what had happened. Well now I have the complete picture, and I can really begin to understand how hard it has been for you. You have not only my sympathy but my admiration. In fact I think you have all done magnificently in this very trying business, notwithstanding the remark of that apparently rather pharisaical senator who said, it seemed to me with disgusting self-righteousness, that "every mature man ought to be expected to tell the truth." How often do senators tell the truth?

I have been very shocked by the whole thing, and what has shocked me about it has not been your part in it, especially, but the whole thing as a kind of symbol and symptom. Your own part, which after all God alone can judge or evaluate, is after all simple in so far as you were beguiled into going against your conscience and were afterwards sorry in a very simple and honest way, after much suffering. To me there is nothing strange in any part of that, because we all do wrong and we are fortunate, by the grace of God, to be generally sorry for the wrong we have done.

But what disgusts me is the fact that when you have done wrong and admitted it a whole nation of people who very often do wrong without admitting it have allowed themselves to judge you. Well, this too I suppose I can understand, because they are after all weak and blind, and do not have the advantage of hearing confessions -- which gives one a pretty level view of human nature, including my own human nature.

You have received the very unenviable role of being the scapegoat for a self-deluded country. They have heaped all their delusions on your back, and hope to be rid of them by shouting at you. That is certainly not a pleasant position to be in. But it is a kind of "prophetic" role, in a sense. It makes it look to me almost as if this were something that had to happen. Something that had to come out, and for some mysterious reason you were picked as the one to bring it out. Nothing in the affair seems to me to be without great significance. None of this could have happened unless you were a very sincere person, sincere enough to believe too much in your own sincerity, as if you couldn't possibly be dishonest, as if when you did something that was objectively a deception, it could not be a deception because you did not really want to deceive. As if it were enough to show them your own absolutely real sincerity and that would completely cancel out the deception. This is actually a great moral and psychological problem in the country I think. It is actually what we are doing as a nation in the world today: we are being deceptive, and more than that we are being aggressive, selfish, unjust, pharisaically pious etc, and counting on our sincerity and subjective "good will", our feeling that we are nice guys, to get us by. It scares me to death, it is terrible. And of course it is in me, as well as in everybody. We are all you, at the moment, and there is no consolation in the fact except for those of us who may be able to see the fact. The sad part is that most people refuse to see that you are all of them. In rejecting you, those who have rejected you have rejected what they ought to love and cherish in themselves-- what would it be? The child capable of being punished, I suppose.

The saddest thing of all is the complete ignorance everyone seems to be in, of the fact that one can be a perfectly good and nice person, and do wrong, and still continue to be a perfectly good and nice person. It is the assumption that anyone who does wrong once, even once, thereby proves that he never was or never could be, good. If people really believe that, and I think they do, then we are in a terrible state indeed. And first of all I hope that all this trouble hasn't somehow poisoned your own view of yourself. I am sure it has not, you have too much sense. The whole thing would not have happened, and would have no meaning, unless you were precisely a good person and are going to continue to be very good and better because of it. The only thing, of course, is that all good people are also bad, but there is more good in them than bad, and most people are that way, all people in fact.

This crazy belief in people who are absolutely good and people who are absolutely bad (the stock in trade of totalitarian society) is inseparable from lack of belief in God, and to me the frightful outcry, scandal, pious horror, and generally unrealistic attitude people have taken toward the case, is simply characteristic of a country that knows nothing of God. But of course, ~~what~~ has there ever been a country, as such, that knew Him? Is not that an affair of individuals, or of groups that are not organized along the lines of merely human society?

If we were really a Christian people (as we are now pretending in some measure to be) we would have been able easily to accept and understand your mistake and to set things right without all these firings and recriminations and dollars flying out the windows in tens of thousands.

Not to prolong this (you must have a permanent headache, which this will by no means help) I end by giving you all my sympathy, and understanding such as it is, and love, while congratulating you on being instrumental in the death (?) of an important illusion. No, they will not recognize it as dead. You will, though. And that is something to be very thankful for. You have been drawn into the empty center of our unreality, and you have been able to experience it for what it is. From now on you can pity and understand so many of the politicians, business men, churchmen (including Trappists), intellectuals and whatnot, who spend their day from midnight to midnight telling themselves and others that they are really very smart on a quiz program and are rapidly becoming rich. In other words that life holds no secrets for them, they understand all, they love all, are loved by all, and will take all.

It is better to be awake. You have that advantage. I cannot guarantee that I do, but what has happened to you is a lesson I will not forget; and I am grateful to you for all you have suffered. And, as I say, you have my admiration. So of course does Mark, and in a supreme degree.

Not that I am urging you to fly to a monastery, but you know that if you want to forget about all this nonsense for a few days, you will be very welcome here. Any time-- just write beforehand. In fact Lax has been talking about coming down these days, though I haven't heard from him about it recently.

With all blessings, and my prayers, and my love

in Christ the Lord