

the catholic peace fellowship

An educational service conducted by Catholic members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation

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Dear Tom:

Valentine's Day has passed: no let up to the war in Vietnam, however. Love continued to find its unique expression there. Perhaps it is especially suitable that the Times this morning carried a story (enclosed) which had the head: "Vietnam Peasants Are Victims of War."

I confess to you I am in a rather bleak mood today. I suppose I have said som on occasions to numerous to guess at.

For one thing, I am rather exhausted with ideological discussion. Earlier today I began to type out a few thoughts on your paper concerning protest. I was going to say that I think such words as "pacifist" ought to be forever thrown into the trash basket, and that indeed we ought to try to find effective means of getting across our ideas to the public. But the question comes up, as I work on such a response, Who is listening? You -- you will read my comments, and perhaps in some way they will alter your thoughts on the subject, or strengthen them. Yet even then, who are we soeaking to? Your presence will be dutifully noted, and those Christians who care about Baptism and membership in the Body of Christ may be influenced by your meditations. But outside of this spectrum murder goes on without interruption. This appalls me to such a degree that I am weary at writing it down. Bomb after bomb after bomb slides away from the bomb-bay. No doubt for each sentence in this letter, a dozen innocents have died today in Vietnam. The end is now beyond imagination.

This morning I wrote a letter to the editor to Extension magazine, a fairly decent Catholic monthly, in which I explained why a recent editorial supporting the war in Vietnam (by way of attacking the CPF's Vietnam declaration) was poorly reasoned and didn't come to terms with the reality of the situation there, noto to say the most fudimentary Christian ethics. The editor, who agrees with our basic position, had asked me to write this piece, a rebuttal to the publisher. I felt like a man in Germany in the 30s, trying to explain why Jews oughtn't to be sent to the concentration camps.

It all seems so utterly clear. You do not murder. You do not kill the innocent. You do not treat people like blemishes on the landscape, or communities as parcels of real-estates, nor nations as squares on a chess board.

Yet no group seems more distant to these facts than Christian (and Catholic) Americans. I have given up talking to Catholic audiences about Christ; I simply talk about ~~the~~ justice, raw, basic justice. I underatand so well why natural law made its way into our Church. It was simply an attempt to ask men to be, if not holy, then just. At least

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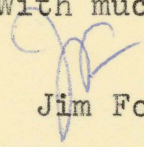
How is it that we have become so insensitive to human life, to the wonders of this world we live in, to the mystery within us and around us?

And what can we do? What can be done? Who can we become that we are not? What can we undertake that we haven't?

I do not wish to sound despairing. I have by no means given up on this work of ours. But truly I feel like an ant climbing a cliff, and even worse, for in the distance there seems to be an avalanche. There is no exit, so I will not bother to look for one. I will continue to work, and there are the saving moments, the saving friendships, the artists, there is in fact the faith.

But I wrote thinking perhaps you would have some thoughts which might help. Don't feel you ~~after~~ have to have thoughts. I don't wish to treat you as a ~~tap~~ faucet, or spiritual irrigation system. But your concern has helped me gain perspective at past times.

With much thanks,



Jim Forest

PS No word from Dan recently; I hope they have forwarded my letters to him. If I hear from him, be assured I will let you know.