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~~LITERALLY EYES ONLY~~

Friday, November 11, 1966 -- 6:20 p. m.

Mr. President:

I called on the Apostolic Delegate, His Excellency Egidio Vagnozzi, at 5:00 p. m. this afternoon. I made two points.

First, the President was concerned that any appeals for movement towards de-escalation and peace in Viet Nam be evenly balanced. I cited our experience with the 37-day pause, etc.

Second, that unilateral appeals to and pressure on the U. S. might well take us further from peace rather than towards it, because it would encourage Hanoi to believe that American will and action might be weakened.

His Excellency then asked: Is it the President's judgment that the efforts of the Vatican towards peace have not been evenhanded?

I said it was not a question of judgment on the past but a certain anxiety concerning the future.

He then took over and said:

-- He would gladly deliver this message.

-- He was worried that there were influences in the Vatican that were pacifists and for peace in Viet Nam at any price.

-- In fact, he was worried enough about certain actions by members of the Church to consider seriously whether the Church might not have been infiltrated. He cited the focusing of some priests in the U. S. on the Viet Nam issue in terms indistinguishable from Communist positions. He also cited a priest in Milwaukee who was passing out burtons saying "Burn, baby, burn" and talking to negro youths in terms of encouraging them to violence. He plans a conversation with one of J. Edgar Hoover's assistants on this subject.

-- He said that his own long experience in the Philippines convinced him that we must defeat the aggression in Viet Nam or all of Southeast Asia will be lost. (He will send me an interview in which he said as much to the press.)

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I told him something of our trip to Asia and our sense that there are vital nations there which are determined to have their independence and are supporting us fully -- indeed, relying on us for their security.

The interview closed by his again stating his support of our position on Viet Nam, reaffirming that he would promptly inform the Vatican of our discussion and be in touch with me if there was a response.

W. W. Rostow

cc: Sec. Rusk

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