



THE CHURCH 1973
Fr. Andrew Greeley

The Catholic Church, to whom witch hunts are not unfamiliar, now seems to be in the midst of yet another. Father Philip Berrigan announces that the returning POWs are war criminals and priests and seminarians in Denver protest against the hiring of a retired colonel as a public relations person at the Denver seminary. Apparently, these worthy clerics think that all professional soldiers should starve to death.

In the strict, legal sense of the word, most of the POWs are not war criminals. Despite Communist propaganda, most of the targets deliberately bombed during the war were military targets. If the United States had deliberately embarked on a policy of exterminating the Vietnamese population (which would have been a war crime) it could have done a much quicker and more efficient job. Indeed, it is very likely that we were even more careful to minimize civilian casualties than we were in World War II. If the returning POWs were war criminals simply because they were military aviators, then George McGovern was also a war criminal in World War II. Indeed, he was probably more of a war criminal because much less care was possible about hitting civilian targets in those days of "saturation" bombing. Does Father Berrigan suggest that the Senator was a war criminal?

But, it is argued, the war was an immoral war and anyone who participated in it was immoral. Thus, the POWs and the unfortunate colonel were war criminals even if they never dropped a bomb.

Here one gets to the nub of the fanaticism of Berrigan and the Catholic radicals. They are not only sure that they have the correct factual information about the war; they are also sure that they have made the only correct moral judgment. Anyone who disagrees is both ignorant and in bad faith — in short, a sinner to be condemned.

But was the war that clearly an immoral war? I do not deny that a case can be made for the proposition that it was. My own hunch is that it was because the means used exceeded the appropriate proportion for the good to be obtained and the harm to be avoided. But all such a plausible case can do is justify a person's refusing to serve in the war. It is not, I think, strong enough to be so self-evident that others are to be written off as war criminals because they do not share the same factual judgments or moral evaluations.

For a plausible case can be made that the war was justified to resist the expansion of a totalitarian tyranny. If the Saigon regime is not exactly democratic it at least had the advantage of being inefficient. An inefficient dictatorship is much to be preferred to an efficient one. There can be no pretense that the Russia of Joseph Stalin was an appropriate ally in 1942.

I am not not convinced of the logic of this argument regarding South Vietnam, but I think it must be insisted that the overwhelming majority of the American people were convinced of it in 1965. The war was entered for a very moral reason: To defend Southeast Asia from Communist tyranny. It may not be Father Berrigan's morality or the "Academic Eight's" morality, and it may be based on a misreading of the situation, but the decision nevertheless was a decision based on a moral judgment.

Like all fanatics, the Catholic radicals cannot abide moral ambiguity or the uncertainty and obscurity of judgments that have to be made in a difficult and complex world. There is only one morality — their own. And everyone else is a sinner and must be punished.

I am not exactly an admirer of certain types of the military mind. But in the world in which we live, one cannot dispense with the professional military. Many of them are unselfish human beings who have dedicated their lives to the service of their country as they see that service required. To make a class judgment against them is an act of intolerable prejudice and bigotry. It is to be hoped that Archbishop Casey of Denver resists the pressures put on him by the bigots in his diocese.

There is, however, a solution: The sob sister from the New Yorker who canonized Father Berrigan tells us that in his presence one feels like falling on one's knees and seeking absolution. Perhaps we could assemble all the POWs and the Denver colonel in Father Berrigan's presence. They could fall on their knees and seek absolution; then he could impose a suitable penance and impart absolution.

Then they would be morally clean again.

RACL Theme For Lent: Reconciliation

The Rochester Association of Catholic Laity (RACL) has selected "Reconciliation" as the topic for consideration at its Lenten meetings. Reconciliation in terms of peace and amnesty was theme of the liturgy celebrated by Father Patrick Logan, professor of theology at St. Bernard's Seminary, at the March 9 meeting organized by Mrs. Marion Koller and held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Curran.

Special guest was Thomas Dorney, a teacher at McQuaid Jesuit High School, who has been active in the Draft Information Center Rochester Area (DICRA).

Mercy Senior Wins Hanson Certificate

Mary Jane Walby, senior at Our Lady of Mercy High School, has been awarded the Howard Hanson Certificate of Merit, Elizabeth M. Coughlin, of the National Guild of Piano Teachers, recently announced.

Mary Jane and the ten other winners will participate in a recital on Sunday afternoon, April 1, 1973 at Nazareth College Arts Center. The selections she will play are Intermezzo Op. 117m No. 2 by Brahms, and Three Fantastic Dances by Shostakovich.

She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Walby of 214 Croydon Road, Rochester.

Dorney led a discussion on the various aspects of amnesty including history, possible scope, and legal and moral implications. Peace as a moral obligation that has to be achieved rather than something that is already accomplished was seen as the central task of reconciliation in which Christians should be involved. The board of directors of RACL together with the members present voted strong support to Bishop Hogan in the position he has taken supporting amnesty and further activity on the part of individual members was encouraged.

The second RACL Lenten liturgy is scheduled for 8 p.m., April 6 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Hardies, 187 Washington Ave., Irondequoit. All members are urged to attend and bring guests.

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