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General Lansdale

September 28, 1965

Rufus Phillips

Religious Reconciliation and Unity

1. All indications that I have received from Vietnamese friends and acquaintances point to religious differences as being the most divisive force at work among the non-communist Vietnamese. All say it is a very delicate problem; most hope that we can help do something about it. My own feeling is that we must do something about it.

2. The major division is, of course, between the strongest Buddhist group (Vien Hoa Dao) and the Catholics. The Catholics and others have attempted to weaken the Buddhists by backing the Southern Buddhist splinter faction. This has not weakened the Vien Hoa Dao and has driven the Catholics and the Buddhists further apart and made reconciliation more difficult.

3. There appears to be a chance of bringing Father Quynh and Tich Tam Chau together. Bui Diem said he had tried it but did not succeed. (Father Quynh told Bernie Yoh that Tam Chau was the only Vien Hoa Dao leader he had any confidence in.) On evidence offered by Bui Diem and others, Tri Quang appears hopeless although I believe a try should be made.

4. Beyond personal discussions between you and the leaders, for which there is no substitute, it is believed that the Cao Dai can play a major role in bringing about religious unity. Dr. Khoach is working on this unofficially; however, judging from a recent cable the dispute between factions of the Buddhists may be swamping this effort. (This should be checked out more thoroughly.)

5. I believe we should try to make Dr. Khoach's proposal for a meeting of religious leaders in Tay Ninh towards the end of October succeed. To succeed it must be composed of religious not political leaders. It is hard to distinguish among the Buddhists but both Tam Chau and Tri Quang should participate; or Tam Chau as a minimum. Among the Catholics it should be Archbishop Binh rather than Father Quynh. Among the Cao Dai -- Cao Hoai Son and Le Thanh Phuoc with Dr. Khoach in the background. Among the Hoa Hao, probably only the two top members of the Council and possibly So's mother.

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6. It is suggested that the following might come out of the meeting.

- a. Some statement of common religious and moral principles by which all Vietnamese should live and around which Vietnamese may unify.
- b. A statement condemning deliberate murder as immoral and an announcement of the formation of an inter-religious committee to investigate acts against humanity and religious principles.
- c. A statement of compassion for all war victims and an announcement of the formation of a permanent inter-religious welfare committee which will jointly distribute all relief supplies in its name rather than in the name of any particular religion.

7. These statements and the formation of the committees would provide the vehicle to carry out actions which would clarify the moral basis for the war, the general moral atmosphere; and which would gradually dispel the existing mistrust through personal contact and mutual participation in religious acts of charity and compassion.

8. I suggest that George Melvin and Hank Miller be assigned to assist you with this project. George to work with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao and Hank to get to know the Buddhists. At some point you might wish to call in Dick Garde from Hong Kong for advice and assistance (although he may be close to the Southern Buddhist faction only). The invitation from the Cao Dai to go to Tay Ninh, which General Cao is obtaining this weekend appears to be the first step in this operation.

LG: RPhillips:pag
September 30, 1965

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