

C O P Y

University of Hue, September 9, 1963

Dear Chau and Trai,

I have only today recovered from the most horrible nightmare in which we have been living for almost a month. I am going to write you a long letter this time and hope you will excuse me for my long silence - I am sure you will, when you get to the end of this letter.

August 15, 1963. Arrived in Hue at 11:20. Got home and gave candies to my two kids. Went to see Father. He had tears in his eyes. He told me what he had done and the things he had told the Ngo family. After his return from the U.S., he was the only official who did not attend Archbishop Thuc's Silver Anniversary, and his talk at Morin auditorium, where he (Archbishop) expressed his regrets for having founded the University of Hue, without which, he said, there would have been no students for ... revolt!

In the afternoon, I went to the Rectorate. There was much tension in the city. 30 students-boys and girls- went to see Father. One of them, Van, asked him: "While Catholic are persecuting Buddhists in a most savage way, why don't you dare as a Catholic intellectual speak up?". Father cried and said: "You are wrong, this is no persecution of Buddhists by Catholics. And I have done something you do not know". Van said he would go and burn himself the next morning at the Rectorate. I was dumb-founded on hearing this. Father asked me and Bui-Tuong-Huan (Dean of the Law School) to speak to Van and dissuade him from his suicidal attempt. Tension grew in the city.

August 16, 1963. Father went to Tourane to attend to some urgent business. I was alone in charge of the Rectorate. At 9:30 a.m., Le Tuyen (Director of Literary Studies at the School of Pedagogy) and 10 other professors came to the Rectorate with the intention of resigning because, they said, the Government had not done anything to solve the Buddhist problem and the situation had so deteriorated that they could no longer teach. I did my best to calm them, and left a letter at Father's house, describing the whole situation. The city was under martial law. There wasn't a soul in sight. About 6:10 p.m., Professor Nguyen Quang Trinh, (Secretary for Education) and Tran Huu The (Ambassador to the Philippines, former Secretary for Education) arrived from Saigon. They called me to the Delegate's residence. I had an inkling of what was to come. Trinh said he had come in the President's name to dismiss Father. Trinh and The looked deeply satisfied. Four days before, the Archbishop himself had to go to Saigon and to use all his power to force out this order of dismissal, and they three had flown back together only this afternoon in great triumph.

August 17, 1963. The new Rector was due to assume his post this morning. I went to the Rectorate early this morning to organize this ceremony. A number of Professors heard of the news and hurried to Father's house. Vu Dinh Chinh (Professor of Zoology) cried in front of the Rectorate. Half an hour before the ceremony, copies of students' decision to boycott school and of the professors' resignation appeared in town. At 9, Trinh came to the Rectorate. The ceremony took place at the Faculty meeting-room. All professors and deans were there. Trinh read out the order of dismissal. The (supposedly acting as Rector only for a few months) stood up and said a few words. Then Father slowly rose to his feet to answer. Here are a few samples: "...I am sure when I hand this cultural torch on to you, Mr. Rector, it will burn brighter, since you are a doctor of Science and must be intelligent, since you were once Secretary for Education and must have great experience in administration, since you are an ambassador and must have diplomatic skill....Besides your name alone spells a program... Your name is 'Huu The' (i.e. 'have protection') and indeed you have the protection of

the President and of the Archbishop. With that intelligence, with that experience, with that skill, with that protection, I am sure the University of Hue will move a big step forward..." Turning towards the professors, Father said a few words and then concluded: "Politics will pass away but culture will remain." Warm applause from the professors. Trinh was pale with anger. Then Dr. Quyen (Director of Hue Hospital, Dean of the Medical School) stood up to thank the former Rector and to wish the new Rector great success, then brought his speech to an end by asking the new Rector to accept his resignation. More applause. Dean Huan of the Law School also resigned. So did Dean Hanh of the School of Science. They were followed by Truong, Director of Scientific Studies, Tuyen, Director of Literary Studies, Tri, Physics Professor, Dean Diem of the School of Letters (Dean Van of the Pedagogy School was in Saigon at this time). The & Trinh looked at each other, green with anger. The ceremony came to an end. Father left. There was weeping among the faculty members. At noon, the administrative staff called on Father at his home. More weeping. Students came later, some were rolling and weeping in the street in front of Father's house.

At 3 p.m. students demonstrated in front of the Delegate's residence asking for the cancellation of the dismissal order. Trinh appeared and said a few words. Some applause drowned by boos. The took fright and flew back to Saigon. Father left for Tourane. Students met once more to confirm their decision to boycott school.

August 18, 1963. Students met again and formally condemned the Executive Committee of the Students' Association led by its chairman Trinh-Giao-Kim because the Committee, influenced by the Government, had protested against the students' demonstration.

August 19, 1963. Slogans calling the students to boycott school were painted all over the university buildings. The arrived from Saigon. Students again demonstrated in front of the Rectorate. (Father had asked me not to resign because there was still some urgent business to attend to). When The arrived at the Rectorate, over 50 professors, led by Dr. Quyen, went into the Rector's office. Dr. Quyen handed in the letter of resignation with the signatures of 47 professors, then he read out a telegram Ambassador Tran Van Chuong had sent to Father. Students loudly applauded. They sent in their spokesman with a letter asking The to resign. The took panic and slipped through the back door. I brought him back and asked him to leave by the front door. I had to escort him to his car. Students started to shout: Down with The! But Tri, the Physics Prof. stopped them.

August 20, 1963. Feelings went high in town. The teaching staff of Dong-Khanh High School resigned. The faculty member of Quoc Hoc High School held meetings.

Night of August 20, 1963 and Morning of August 21, 1963 about 3 a.m. Armed police attacked Tu-Dam pagoda. People inside the pagoda called for help through loud-speakers. Other loud-speakers from the Archbishop's Palace were turned on at full blast, with songs, in an attempt to drown out the pagoda's call for help. Gun fire was heard. Heart-rending cries for help, weeping, moaning could be heard for almost two hours. The population rushed to the rescue of the pagoda, but only to find that troops were taking command of various strategic corners and that they were forced to run back because of martial law. Even those who lived near the pagoda could not be of any help because the pagoda was surrounded with troops. A great number of monks, nuns, young monk apprentices, students and other youths who were keeping watch inside the pagoda perished through bayonets, clubs and rifle butts. When morning came, all powers were in the hands of the army. Tuyen, Truong, Tri, Huan, Vo Nhu Nguyen, Dr. Quyen, Bui Nam, Chuoc... (14 in all at the University) had been arrested between 3 and 4 a.m. I heard of the arrests at 7:30 a.m. and went and saw The who was staying at Duy-Tan guest-house. The looked triumphant. He said he could do nothing for the professors because the army had all the power now. I left him to go and seek and interview with Do Cao Tri, Brigadier General, in whose hands now lay all power of life and death over the whole of Central Vietnam. I met him at 4:00 p.m. and asked him to



treat the arrested professors with some decency. Tri said he would give the necessary orders.

August 22, 1963. I got together some clothes and gifts for the arrested professors. At noon, Nguyen Si Hai (Law Professor) and Tan (Mathematics Professor) were arrested. I ran about trying to help some students in trouble. Dean Van had come back from Saigon two days ago. He sent in his resignation yesterday and stayed at home waiting to be arrested. Dean Diem resigned on the same day as Dean Van.

Sadness covered the University like a shroud. The administrative staff had cried on hearing of the savage attack on the pagoda, of the death of defenceless monks and of the brutal repression which followed. A good number of Catholics on the other hand were exuberant.

August 23, 1963. The number of arrests exceeded 800. At 10:25 a.m. the secret police came with guns to arrest me in my office. The whole staff at the Rectorate was struck with terror. I was taken into solitary confinement and interrogated. I was accused of having acted as leader and advisor to the students. Fortunately for me I had been away for three months in the U.S., when the students had started their demonstrations. Otherwise I would have had it good this time. I was released after a few days. I was dismissed from my position as Secretary General and was replaced by Buu-Tri, a new Catholic convert from Vinh-Long (a two-month old conversion). I went back to my former position (!) as instructor.

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... The scums of the town are on the winning side and are acting like the new masters. The former followers of Ngo-Dinh-Can who have not changed sides quick enough are being persecuted. Brother Can is stripped of all his former power. His office was closed down two months ago. ... USOM has cut aid to the University. German professors will not come.

Dr. Quyen, Huan, Vo Nhu Nguyen, Tuyen are still in prison. Tuyen is seriously ill. When the secret police came to Dong Khanh School to arrest the faculty members who had signed the anti-governmental manifesto, Mrs. Hy, the Head of the School, accepted all responsibility then tried to kill herself. But they stopped her and took her away. She was later carried to Saigon by the police. Her husband, deputy head of Quoc Hoc School, was also arrested. (They were both Buddhists. It is striking that all the people who have been stated as arrested in this letter are Buddhists). The Head of Bo-De School and all the teaching staff (Bo-De School is a private Buddhist School) were arrested...

Since August 21, the population has been living in deadly terror. I myself startled several times a day each time a car stopped in front of my house, because I thought the secret police had come for me again. My wife and children have been living in constant fright. We are closely watched by the police.

Anger and resentment are at their height. The sufferings of the people here cannot be described. You would have to live through this nightmare, to have an idea. People are sick of it all, they have enough, enough...

I have more respect for the students. They have shown such spirit, such courage. They all knew too well they would be arrested, tortured, drafted, and some of them executed. Some of them such as VVT and NVB had been outstanding as students. Now they proved to be skillful leaders as well...

When "they" saw Hue on the verge of open rebellion, "Saigon" wanted Father to return to the University. But "the power in Hue" used its ecclesiastical prerogatives

to force Father to write a statement to the effect that he would not go back. Father wrote this statement in Vietnamese with spelling mistakes to show that pressure had been put on him. And now the Archbishop dared open his wicked mouth and say he had founded the University in Hue! We were forced to go and listen to that infamous speech and to keep our mouths shut. We had trouble to keep our hearts from bursting!

The Government has forbidden the population to listen to news from foreign stations. Yet people still lock their doors and listen in secret, praying in fear and misery for some help from abroad.

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There are still many things I could tell you, but I have to stop. You will read more from me later. Please let Herb Izzo have these news. Thank you.

Best wishes for happiness in freedom and security.

Yours ever,

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