

Mr. Hugh A. Moran  
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Barnes Hall, Ithaca, NY  
(Presbyterian University pastor)

November 15, 1941

Dear Mr. Moran:

It was good to get your letter of the 10th and I was very much interested in its contents. I am going to give you my first blush reactions to it. They may not be very profound.

I do not think that either of the episodes that you refer to are particularly significant. Two men, both of whom I happen by chance to know—Fiorello La Guardia and Colonel Duncan—have made mistakes in judgment. The Mayor is a vigorous, brilliant personality who, if he does not make at least one good mistake in judgment a day, would not be able to function as effectively as he does. I do not know what sort of a communication he sent you but I do not believe that he told you or anybody else what to preach. He may have made a suggestion but I suppose you get hundreds of suggestions. The important thing is that you are free to regard or disregard them as you see fit. There isn't the slightest suggestion against your preaching anything you want to from your pulpit. I really see nothing more vicious in La Guardia's suggestion than if you got a similar suggestion from some council of bishops or, indeed, from the American Legion or some other such organization. The important question, as I say, is always whether you are free to state and preach what you will. For a preacher to resent suggestions, even though they are essentially out of place or inappropriate, is no more justified, in my judgment, than if General Marshall were to resent some suggestion which is made to him by the head of some other department of the Government respecting military strategy. I admit I may be over-simplifying the matter but I do think I have something important when I say that the country is far too jittery about its possible loss of liberties and that I think you are, perhaps, a little jittery too. If the country is to become frightened by inconsequential incidents such as the two you mention, I believe it is a bad sign. It indicates to me that our adherence to the essential liberties is so tenuous that we become over-sensitive to unsubstantial threats to them.

As for Colonel Duncan. Somewhat recently I made a tour throughout the West of some of the military installations

RG 107-47-6. ASW 014.3 Civil Status & Relations (PR)

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and in the course of my tour I stopped at Denver. Colonel Duncan was the Commanding Officer and he took me around to his field and I stopped in at his house for a short time and met his wife. Lowry Field is one of the most interesting fields in the country. It is the site of the Bombing School. They give the students courses in ballistics and the physical aspects of falling bodies and they also teach the select ones the use of the very complicated bombing sights that we are using. There are courses in electricity and the whole aspect of the place is one of study and training. Quite between you and me, Duncan did not impress me as a "heavy weight" but I must say that he had a good post, the men were alert and so he must be something of a commander. As General Wavell said, "good commanders come in queer packages," and they do. There are long ones and short ones, fat ones and thin ones, bright ones and stupid ones. We have about 10,000 of them and in that group there are probably a lot who lack poise, judgment and common sense. Now and then, one of them makes a slip and it is most unfortunate when he does, because the uniform does carry certain very strong obligations and implications with it, but I really do not think it is anything to be much alarmed about. The country does not become aroused when a Minister of the Gospel takes some outlandish position, as infrequently is the case. I think this incident should be viewed in its proper light. Mind you, I am assuming the newspaper accounts are correct although I am told by General Surles, the Public Relations Officer, that they are not, - that Duncan's remarks were misinterpreted. I repeat that even if the newspaper accounts are entirely accurate the thing should be put down as a minor incident - as an example of what we call "personnel failure" in the Army - and let it go at that. Certainly, if the statements in the papers turn out to be accurate, this man will be disciplined far more severely and under a much harsher code than would be the case of any member of a civilian group who cast discredit on that group.

In short, I think this country is so far removed from having its liberties strangled that it is fantastic to be apprehensive about it. Every type of statement and charge that can be thought up by any political opponent, any newspaper reporter or feature writer can be given the widest circulation without any repression whatever. The people are deceived right and left

by some of these statements. Time and time again we can see where the public weal is definitely impaired by these actions. No one lifts a little finger to stop them for it is thought better to give them free rein. In fact, there has been so much emphasis upon our liberties and so much exercise of them that I fear we are over-balanced in that direction. The sense of our obligations is not as strong by any means as it should be in this country. You ask whether our liberty is to be strangled by preserving it. We have to restrain our liberties to preserve them and, in my judgment, we should be prepared to restrain them far more than the country now gives indication of being willing to restrain them in order to overcome the danger to freedom which really impends.

I am sure the foregoing sounds and reads much more abrupt than I intended. It also contains some fallacies in analogy that I should, perhaps, correct but I am sending it off to you knowing that you will understand it because I have the same feeling that I am glad to see that you have experienced, namely, that I feel I know you much better than our few contacts would indicate.

As a matter of interest, I have asked General Surles to give me a report on the Duncan affair and he tells me that the thing arose from some church in Denver holding America First meetings. He has handed me a release of the War Department which states the War Department's attitude.

Please remember me to Mrs. Moran. My mother speaks often of you.

Sincerely,

(SIGNED) JOHN J. McCLOY

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