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27 October 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : Response from Ambassador Bunker and the
CIA Saigon Station to Your Query of
26 October 1968.

The following are the views of Ambassador Bunker and the CIA Saigon Station in response to Mr. Rostow's query concerning the effectiveness of having the Vatican reassure the Catholics in South Vietnam.

1. The Catholics here are essentially divided into three groups: (A) moderates responsive to Archbishop Binh; (B) leftists who, in the event, would probably give less trouble than the others; and (C) the radically nationalist northern Catholics who are not particularly responsive to guidance from the Archbishop nor, as far as we can tell, in close contact with the Apostolic Delegate here.

2. Certainly advice from the Vatican would be helpful with (A); it would be irrelevant with (B); and it might just possibly have a good effect, though only a limited one, with the critical group (C). Accordingly, my judgement is that there is probably no harm, and possibly some good, in trying to get the Vatican to spread the word among Catholic leaders here. The only possible risk is that some northern Catholics might resent what they could consider as "interference" by the Vatican in a non-religious matter.

3. The word could be, of course, not only that they should not fear the entrance of the NLF into the negotiations and that the U.S. is not abandoning them, but also that the U.S. has no intention of recognizing the NLF so that its participation in negotiations would not be as a "separate entity", as is feared here, even though the NLF would hold itself out to be a separate entity.

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
JAN 1995