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# 'To Whom Should I Write a Letter?'

By JOHN WILLIAM WARD

AMHERST, Mass.—I know you attend to what I say because I am president of the college. I thank you for that, but I want to speak to you in two voices. First, as president of Amherst College; second, in my own voice. I am tense and uneasy with the act of dividing myself in two: My hope, as president, has been not to lose myself in the role, the office, to retain a sense of my own self while still president. My personal unease is made worse because as I said at the start, I know you listen to me because I am the president. It is not Bill Ward you want to hear: you want to hear the president of Amherst College. So, let me begin first with the voice you want to hear, that of the president, and then speak as Bill Ward.

As president, I have a great affection for this place, this college. We know ourselves slenderly, but to the degree I know myself, that was one of the large reasons I was willing to say, yes, I would be president of it.

Let us begin where we are. Let us begin where we stand together. Let us make this place, Amherst College, as good and decent and humane a place as we can. I do not ask you to be more than human; I ask you simply to be human with one another.

## "One feels like a child throwing paper planes against a blank wall."

If we stand appalled at the cruelty and the indecency we see around us in the world, let us not give them a place here among us; let us not in our frustration turn ourselves into a likeness of what we despise and detest. I do not think we are going to save society this way, but we may find Amherst a better place to be together.

Night before last while I was in the Red Room, a student called my home and left word with my wife that he and other students hoped I would write a letter. Write a letter! To whom? One feels like a child throwing paper planes against a blank wall. I might write such a letter and you might cheer and, if the world goes on, you might think me a pleasant and sympathetic fellow. But the mines are laid [outside North Vietnam's harbors] and for the next few days we wait. God knows, I hope Nixon is right. God knows, I hope it works. Not for his sake, not even for the sake of all United States. For the sake of all those I have never seen. For mankind's sake.

We have lived with this bloody war for eighteen years. I was only ten years out of another war and most of you in this room were babies. Who has the strength to raise all the arguments again? I said on this campus three years ago that I think the "Vietnam war is a cruel and foolish mistake, that we got into it on a false ideological premise, that we are so hung up in our own cant that we cannot admit that we are wrong, that we are wasting lives because of a foolish pride." I still think that. To whom shall I say it in a letter? Voices louder than mine have been saying it for a long time. What are we protesting?

Let me say what I protest and what I "Bill Ward," self and citizen, propose to do. As I said when I took this office, I do not intend to disenfranchise myself or lose my rights as citizen because I am president.

Mr. Nixon promised us a solution through Vietnamization of the war. I find the policy repellent but, that aside, it has failed, so now we have the mining of harbors, the bombing

of railheads, the interdiction of all supplies to North Vietnam. Mr. Nixon has ruled out withdrawal; the only way to negotiation again is through the application of greater and greater force; the next move lies in someone else's hands. What if the blockade fails? Mr. Kissinger in his press briefing is reported to have said that nuclear confrontation is an acceptable risk, preferable to the present land war in South Vietnam.

What I protest is not what has been done. What is done is done. No word of mine, no word of yours will change it. What I protest is what may come next. What I protest is there is no way to protest. I speak of frustration and deep despair. John Dos Passos once wrote, "We only have words against POWER SUPERPOWER," and his "U.S.A." ended in icy defeat. I do not think words will now change the minds of men in power who make these decisions. I do not. Since I do not, I do not care to write letters to the world.

Instead, I will, for myself, join in the act of passive civil disobedience at Westover Air Force Base.

John William Ward, president of Amherst, addressed these remarks to the students. The next day he was arrested and fined in an antiwar demonstration for "disturbing the peace."