



Letter to Joel H. Hildebrand from Edward W. Strong, March 7, 1949

[Letter, March 7, 1949]

March 7, 1949

Professor Joel H. Hildebrand

Department of Chemistry

Campus

Dear Joel:

I was asked to speak on the topic, "Academic Freedom," before a group of students in Electrical Engineering last week. The substance of what I had to say is set forth in the four sheets enclosed. I am sending them to you because you are concerned with the issues involved in the University of Washington hearings which ended in the dismissal of three members of the faculty and the placing on probation of three others.

I agree with you that no scholar worthy of the name shall place his individual integrity and independence in jeopardy. He shall not knowingly close the door to facts or ideas in subservience to political or other authority, nor condone "tyranny over the mind of man". Have we a warrant, however, to demand of colleagues who are Catholics that they declare their hostility to Catholicism because the Catholic Church in Spain, as reported in the newspapers last week, has governmental sanction forbidding public meetings of Protestants, circulation of their literature through the mails, and banning the performance of marriage and other rites of the Protestant Church? To characterize a party, class, association, or institution in the large and as a matter of knowledge is not thereby to know that every individual member or segment of membership can also be so characterized. Independence and objectivity of thought in the Soviet Union have time and again been abrogated by edict and enforced thought-control. Yet it is as a priori argument which concludes that every individual who is now a member of the Communist Party in this country has not only jeopardized but sacrificed his own integrity and independence of thought. He may, of course, have done so and proof of the fact would be grounds for his dismissal from a University. The worst tyranny of our time was that which condemned individual citizens in Germany of guilt by race and executed Jews because they were Jews. In our eternal hostility against every form of tyranny, must we not be ever-vigilant not to condemn communists because they are communists, but only as individuals in what they have done or failed to do in an area of obligation?

Sincerely yours

E. W. Strong