correspondence

"THE PERILS OF REFORM INTERVENTION" CONT'D.

Arlington, Va.

Dear Sir: To attribute intentional bellicosity to Fr. Lucal would be as improper as to imply moral indifference to Ernest Lefever, to whose essay ("The Perils of Reform Intervention," February, 1970) on guidelines to intervention Fr. Lucal has replied critically (May, 1970). Trouble comes from pondering foreign policy in abstract terms. Alas, the subject abounds with such terms! How could *worldview* survive abandonment of the practice of invoking them? So here I go with a few of my own.

Among the laudable aspects of the Lefever piece is its awareness of the refractoriness of issues within societies remote and different from our own, and the fallibility of our perceptions when focused on the merits of such issues. It reveals a grasp of the ambiguity of idealism. (What tyranny, what drive to conquer, has not rested on an ideal?) It discerns the folly of regarding the state's coercive capabilities as instruments to provide us psychic fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction.

The article shows proper consideration for practicability. To be taken seriously, any proposed action in foreign policy must pass three preliminary tests. Is success a logical possibility? Would the putative results, if achieved, be desirable in the measure of a plausible scheme of value? Finally, and crucially, is the undertaking feasible *for us*? By illustrative analogy, consider the idea of excelling Tony Jacklin at golf. Logically possible? Yes. Someone will realize the goal someday. Desirable? Yes. The feat would harvest much satisfaction, fame, and profit. Feasible for me? No. That last answer debars the undertaking. If the answer were otherwise, I would then go on to weigh putative gains against probabilities and costs. So it is in foreign affairs. A notional purpose may be logically possible, and abstractly desirable, but still not given to us to achieve. The perceived end, moreover, may be too chancy and the probable entailments excessive.

As Lefever's piece implicitly reminds us, among the things owed to Caesar is an obligation to avoid ways of thinking, even abstractly benign ones, which conduce to Caesarism. We must recognize the finiteness of jurisdiction and be mindful of the need of restraints on use of state power to coerce by force, ostracism, or deprivation. Perseverance toward the domestic goals articulated in the Preamble of the Constitution, even by coercive means if modulated by due process of law, is rightfully to be expected of our government. Our government should be expected to attend to the common defense as well, even by coercive means applied abroad when necessary. To expect or to press the government—or for the government to undertake initiatives—to apply coercion far and wide abroad, penetrating other jurisdictions, to effect reforms and improvements premised on our preferences regarding patterns of authority and directions of public policy is not rightful. It is a matter not of abdicating such preferences but only of recognizing the disutility of presuming to lay down the law within other realms. Unbridled goodwill as well as rampant evil can perpetuate turmoil. To quote from Leopold Tyrmand a thought applicable to the conduct of nations: "Among other things, civilization means abiding by a convention according to which we human beings agree not to burden each other with our excessive humanity."

The Lefever piece exemplifies Goethe's injunction to keep repeating old truths. Fr. Lucal's failure to see Lefever's points confirms the need.

Charles Burton Marshall

Chevy Chase, Md.

Dear Sir: Ernest Lefever's article in the February issue seems disingenuous; in attempting to fix the limits of America's responsibility to its allies by drawing a line between international security and internal development, he avoids the real crux of the problem, internal security.

Twenty years ago, at the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States adopted a policy of using its own forces to repulse any aggression by the Communist bloc across international boundaries. Americans soon realized, however, that the Communist powers could extend their sphere of influence equally well by encouraging and aiding the subversive activities of various local Communist parties, a process sometimes called "indirect aggression." There were, and are, three possible responses which the U.S. could make to this challenge.

First, America might do nothing except give technical advice and supplies to governments threatened with Communist-sponsored revolution. This concept is popular right now, but for the past fifteen years official policymakers have generally considered it inadequate. . . . If the U.S. were really to follow this course consistently, it would have to begin by withdrawing from Vietnam, for its intervention there would not be posible under this limitation. However great a role Hanoi may have played in directing and supplying the insurrection, it is clear that the United States began pouring combat troops into South Vietnam in 1965 because the Saigon regime seemed about to fall before an insurgent movement composed at that time almost entirely of native South Vietnamese. . . .

The American interventions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic actually reflected a decision to pursue the second possible course of action: suppression of Communist-backed revolutions with American troops. This option gave the U.S. greater control of events; but since in any popular uprising against an oppressive government a well-disciplined Communist minority is likely to seize command, adopting this course led the U.S. inexorably toward becoming a kind of one-nation Holy Alliance, using its own armed forces to prevent despotic governments from being overthrown by their own subjects.

Followed to its logical conclusion, this program would not only make America a leading bulwark of tyranny, but would stimulate misrule on the part of the protected governments. In a non-democratic system a cycle seems to develop, in which a regime rules well for a time, but then gradually becomes arbitrary and corrupt, until eventually it is so discredited that it is overthrown. If an authoritarian regime has an inclination toward corruption and repressiveness, the only natural check on this tendency will be the fear of being overthrown; and if its ascendancy is guaranteed by foreign troops, its rule will grow steadily more oppressive. This may, in fact, be what has happened in South Vietnam in recent years. . . .

A policy of simply suppressing revolutions in allied nations by force, therefore, would in the end be the worst kind of interventionism, and would tend to impose upon the recipient peoples a more oppressive tyranny than the U.S. would ever have imposed upon its own colonies. This problem could be alleviated only by adopting the third possible course, which was particularly associated with certain advisors of the Kennedy Administration. According to this concept, the U.S. would balance its counterinsurgency warfare programs with political pressures designed to make each protected government either take action to satisfy the needs and wishes of its people, or establish democratic institutions by which the people themselves could make their government responsive to their aspirations. Obviously, this program would entail immense difficulty, and would no doubt fail in many cases; but unless the U.S. is to withdraw from Vietnam and renounce irrevocably any further Vietnam-type interventions (even when they seem to offer much better chances of success than the prototype) it may be the only acceptable alternative.

Robert Banville

" 'CAN THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY?' "

Amherst, Mass.

Dear Sir: It is rare that a writer succeeds in befuddling an issue as thoroughly as Arthur J. Moore managed to do in his guest editorial, "Can the Violent Bear It Away?" (*worldview*, May, 1970). In introductory political science courses we teach our students the difference between "force" or "coercion" (used by the state) and "violence" (committed by individuals). Surely Mr. Moore, if only he made the effort, could grasp that distinction. I don't mean to be nasty, but when someone tells us in all seriousness that "the Chicago Police and the Weathermen, the F.B.I. and the Black Panthers are morally in the same boat" for they are all violent, one truly despairs of the fate of rationality and the meaningful use of language.

Must one remind Mr. Moore that the Chicago Police not only beat up demonstrators; they also maintain, however imperfectly, the city's peace against crooks, thieves, and murderers. The F.B.I. not only snoops around political dissenters; its agents also catch spies, bomb throwers, bank robbers and kidnappers of innocent children. Is Mr. Moore prepared to do without these services to society? Does he really see no moral gain in these actions? If not, he has no right to argue that resort to force by law enforcement agencies is "morally in the same boat" with the acts of violence committed by those breaking the law. One need postulate neither the divine origin or character of the state in order to conclude that the use of coercion by agencies of government is necessary not only for the existence of government but, until the coming of the millennium, for the maintenance of the fabric of organized society as well. Some policemen here or there may act like "fascist pigs," but by and large the police's use of force against the violent acts of persons who attack other persons or the government is essential in order to protect the possibility (and no more than the *possibility*) of individuals leading a life of peace and morality. This finding, I would insist, is more than just a "prudential judgment."

I agree with Mr. Moore's aim of seeking "to produce a society based as little as possible on coercion." Few men, not even the pessimistic St. Augustine, ever saw merit in coercion per se. But nothing will be gained by regarding the state, contemporary or ancient, as the work of the devil. Unless Mr. Moore is prepared to follow the logic of his arguments and opt for anarchism, i.e., a stateless society, he should concede the *moral* difference between force and coercion and violence. Needless to say, even democratic states do not always use force for moral ends, and individuals on rare occasions may advance morality through their violent actions, but these exceptions to the rule do not negate the basic distinction we are talking about. One should add that deflation of the moral authority of government and loose talk about "the sheer violence of our society" are unlikely to help keep the actions of the state on a moral keel.

Guenter Lewy

Berkeley, Calif.

Dear Sir: The Graduate Theological Union Library is trying to build up a collection that will document the church's response to current issues in terms, not only of official pronouncements, but also of what pastors and laymen are actually saying. We would appreciate having your readers furnish us with copies of sermons they may have preached or heard dealing with current issues such as the war in Southeast Asia, race relations, crime, etc.

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The Rev. David E. Green
GTU Reference Librarian