"VIETNAM: THE BASES FOR A U.S. VICTORY"

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir: In his article, "Vietnam: The Bases for a U.S. Victory" in your April issue, Thomas Molnar writes: "Now one could of course say, repeating a phrase Mr. Herman Reissig used one day in a brochure, that 'if the Vietnamese want to live under communism, let them try it.'" Your readers may think this is an exact quotation. It is not. In my pamphlet, *How to Combat Communism*, in which no reference is made to Vietnam, I wrote: "Much as we deplore some aspects of Communist thinking and practice, if some nations want to try the Communist way, let them try it! But an organized conspiracy—part secret, part open—to overthrow all non-Communist orders and to set up a world Communist system, patterned after Moscow and Peiping, must be combated." What I wrote is thus a little different from what Mr. Molnar represents me as saying.

Incidentally, my pamphlet was written in 1962, which accounts for the linking of Moscow and Peiping in a fashion that would not now be done.

While I am writing may I express my great admiration for Alan Geyer's perceptive and balanced article, "Ethics in the Dirty War," in the same issue. Dr. Geyer gently but definitely spanks the churchmen for whom the ethical issues in Vietnam seem so overpoweringly clear. John Bennett's letter poses some incisive questions with which Geyer does not deal, but Bennett refrains from the ethical dogmatism to which Geyer objects. One might offer a reservation when Mr. Geyer writes that the U.S. "may fairly be questioned as to its presumptuousness in playing policeman for the world community." A great power will be criticized if it uses its power and criticized also if it refrains from using it. In world affairs as in domestic situations a policeman will often be needed. The specific problem of Vietnam aside, it is not clear to me that the U.S. should refrain from police work in Asia or Africa, when it is needed, at least while no universal organization is ready or able to take on the disagreeable job. The only alternative available at present would be the division of the world into spheres of influence, with China assigned to the Asia "beat." This seems to be what Walter Lippmann is willing to accept. It does not seem likely that India, for example, would relish this alternative to U.S. police work in Asia. To the other uncertainties that Dr. Geyer lists I would therefore add the question whether the U.S. is presumptuously playing policeman for the world community or is engaging in a responsible use of its power.

Herman F. Reissig
Council for Christian Social Action

"VIETNAM: ETHICS IN THE DIRTY WAR"

Nyack, N. Y.

Dear Sir: I have just seen your issue of April and am led to write this comment about Alan Geyer's article "Ethics in the Dirty War." Without taking up the substance of Mr. Geyer's article, I do want to raise a question about the ethics of the way in which he himself has dealt with the Fellowship of Reconciliation's "complaint" against Mr. Johnson, from which the quite clear inference is to be gained that this "complaint" was directed against the President's April 7 speech.

Mr. Geyer's first two paragraphs refer to that speech and the "chorus of acclamation" which followed it. Then came the words "several days later, the morning mail brought the simultaneous complaints of *Human Events* and the Fellowship of Reconciliation against Mr. Johnson. The former charged that the President's speech 'smacked of appeasement' because it failed to insist on victory. . . . The F.O.R., . . . attacked the President from the opposite flank. . . ."

I wonder whether anyone could be expected to gain from this the information—the accurate information—that the Fellowship's letter to the President actually appeared in the Sunday New York *Times* of April 4, three days before his Johns Hopkins speech. Surely that fact is relevant. It was known to the Administration: on the morning of April 8 we had a telephone call from the State Department asking what we felt about the President's speech. The

Clergymen's Committee for Vietnam of the F.O.R. subsequently telegraphed to the President congratulating him on the positive proposals in the second section of his speech, but pleading for an immediate cease-fire in order to give an opportunity for the offers of "unconditional discussions" to be accepted, and asking also that the attempts to further isolate Communist China from the community of nations be discontinued.

As the bombings continued and were intensified, the Fellowship consequently published another message, again asserting its approval of the constructive proposals and the offer of "unconditional discussions" by the President, but again making the point that the intensification of the war was not likely to bring the other side to the conference table, and that since the war is in fact against the National Liberation Front, the NLF should be included among the parties with whom discussions and negotiations be held.

Alfred Hassler

Executive Secretary, F.O.R.

The Author Replies:

Staunton, Va.

Dear Sir: As one who has always had great respect for the work of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, I very much regret any pain which my article on Vietnam may have caused its leadership. Mr. Hassler's chronology is certainly correct, and it is good to have it published for the record.

Nevertheless, I would not want to define the issue as primarily chronological. Perhaps my greatest concern is that foreign policy debate, of which we have all too little, not be plagued with an absolutism of moral passion which condemns those who conscientiously disagree to an ethical Devil's Island. While I have been strongly critical of our Vietnamese policy at many points, as my article indicated, I am sincerely troubled when any group presumes to address the President of the United States: "In the name of God, STOP IT!" The more I have tried to understand Southeast Asia, the less confident have I been that anybody could presume to pronounce upon events there "in the name of God." And if searching moral criticism is in order, I am very doubtful about the fairness or wisdom in conferring the excommunication of "moral bankruptcy" upon our policy-makers who, it seems to me, have often displayed moral sensitivities for which we should all be grateful—even in Vietnam and even if we are in fundamental disagreement with either the objectives or execution of their policies.

Alan Geyer

• • •