Correspondence

THE AGRICULTURAL LIFE

To the Editors: After a long day, I was reading Sudhir Sen's commentary on Professor Galbraith's World Food Day address (*Worldview*, May), and I stumbled over a tripwire. The alarm so activated grew louder as I read on, so I went back and it happened again. What was it that, persistently, the mind of this Midwestern livestock producer and grain farmer would not accept? Ah, there it is! (Forgive my paraphrasing.)

"It is a universal practice in the industrialized countries to ensure the agricultural producer a stable and predictable return on effort and investment."

A policy that ensures return on effort and investment? Where? Quick, we must move! Pinch me, I'm dreaming!

No, wait, he goes on.

"But many new nations, by contrast, keep the agricultural prices low as a concession to urban workers and dwellers or because it is politically expedient."

Of course, in this postindustrial age, the writer is correctly including the United States with the new nations. The clamor of the alarm dies away and I read on.

A pleasant article (Galbraithian economics and I have long been on speaking terms—one way, of course), but there is still a faint ringing echo. Come out to the farm one day, Sudhir Sen. We will take tea and time with some of those around here who walk behind the ploughs.

Stable and predictable return on effort and investment indeed!

John Essame

Belview, Minn.

Sudhir Sen responds:

John Essame "stumbled on a tripwire" for very good reason. After all, in recent years the American farmer has seen anything but stable and predictable return on effort and investment, and in most cases through no fault of his own. Budget Director David Stockman, the financial wizard engrossed in his budget-pruning process, missed this elementary point. The Wunderkind fully deserved—and received—a refreshing dose of scolding administered by his down-to-earth mother.

Stockman's error was, indeed, *elementary*. For a farmer's life is a continuous battle against the elements—droughts, floods, storms, frost, and snow—and also against pests and pathogens. In addition, he is mercilessly exposed to the ups and downs of the marketplace. The price swings can be quite violent, as in recent years. Again, like the vagaries of weather, they stem from forces over which the farmer has no control. Only when he is adequately protected against these twin enemies can he effectively fulfill his twin functions that are so vital for a nation: first, to produce food and fiber in optimum quantities and at reasonable cost; and, second, to conserve soil, build up its fertility, enhance the asset value of the farm, and maintain it in shipshape condition for the benefit of future generations.

This is the rationale behind the farm support system. And who can deny that, born in the dark days of the Great Depression, it has served the American farmer and the American economy as a whole wonderfully well? It has spread prosperity through the countryside, which, in turn, has provided essential underpinnings for national prosperity.

Now we all know that a farm support system—like everything else designed by mortals, especially in their political incarnation—can be abused, misused, at times even negated in practice. We need only recall how easily it becomes a plaything of electoral politics at home or a hostage to diplomatic wrangling abroad. Worse still are the macroeconomic follies of the last five years: huge budget deficits, tight money, oppressively high interest rates, the bloated dollar, and record trade deficits. Here one must separate wheat from chaff. It is these follies that are the primary cause of the farmer's woes today, not the principle of price support.

The story of Third World farmers is entirely different. With few exceptions they still languish in a medieval world dominated by feudal landlords. They are not only at the mercy of weather, pests and insects, and so-called market forces but are exploited by their own masters. There is no farm support program to protect them; instead, farmers are used to provide urban support! This is the taproot of the poverty and hunger that are exploding in the Third World today!

So there is a lot to talk about, John Essame. How thoughtful of you, and how kind, to invite me to tea with you and your friends who walk behind the plough. Nothing could give me greater pleasure than to revisit American farms and chat with people like you. May I take a rain check on your invitation?

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

To the Editors: I would have welcomed Professor Lisa Anderson's critical review of my book, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (*Worldview*, April), were it fair and objective. Since subjective views often distort scholarlay endeavors and create misunderstanding, may I offer the following remarks.

First, in reviewing both my book and Professor Bernard Lewis's *The Jews of Islam*, Professor Anderson gives the impression that the two books deal essentially with the same subject and that, of the two, my book is "the more general and less satisfying." Professor Lewis's book, as a matter of fact, is a general study of the Jews in Islam, and, as a historian, he applies the historical method to his subject. By contrast, my book deals with "justice" as a central concept in the Islamic public order and examines in detail the ideas and doctrines of Muslim thinkers about justice with a view to reconstructing an Islamic theory of justice. Committed to the two disciplines of law and political science, I have applied the methods of the two disciplines in theory and practice in relevance to conditions. I have called this method "empirical idealism," and I explained it in a section of my book entitled "scope and method of this study." Thus, by comparing my book with the other under review without indicating the differences, the reviewer has painted a distorted picture of the scope and method of my book.

Second, Professor Anderson describes my book as "a history of ideas" and "abstract doctrines," without reference to "social conditions or historical circumstances." She seems to have missed the whole purpose of the book—that it is not "a history of ideas" but an inquiry into a set of notions about justice in order to derive the meaning and sources of this concept as they evolved from a debate on the subject among Muslim thinkers from generation to generation. True, justice in theory is divine by nature (as laid down in the Revelation), but I tried to indicate how its meaning in practice was at first narrow, confined to political justice; and I went on to explain how the meaning was extended to include other aspects: theological, moral, legal, social, and others....

Third, Professor Anderson uses the terms "Islamic law" and "moral law" interchangeably and, consequently, adds further confusion about the relevance of these terms to justice. It is true that Islamic law contains certain moral elements, but the two systems—Islamic law and moral law—are not the same, since moral rules are recommen-

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