

# Correspondence

## The Pope and Vietnam

To the Editors: I think that the Vatican can never fulfill the function that Denis Kenny seems to envision for it as a peacemaker ("Pope Paul VI and Vietnam," *Worldview*, July, 1972). Indeed, the example of Christ suggests that the Pope *should not* assume such a role of direct intervention. We read in Luke 12 (13-14): "And one of the multitude said to [Jesus]: Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And [Jesus] said to him, Man, who hath appointed me judge or divider over you?"

The function of the Church in fostering peace and brotherhood can only be along the indirect lines indicated by Stephen Verosta in the same issue ("The Holy See and International Organizations").

The Church's proper task is to foster these principles of morality whose observance in the web of social life would weave the fabric of peace. The only way in which the Vatican might intervene would be if the warring nations should ask the Pope to arbitrate their conflict. It is obvious, however, that our world is far from ready for such an eventuality. Otherwise the Pope would be making as big a mistake as Paul V when he deposed Queen Elizabeth of England in 1570.

The Rev. Vincent A. Brown

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Denis Kenny Responds:

The burden of my article was to provide evidence for a view that I hope to develop in a later article, that there is something faulty with the moral stance implicit in the present structure and assumptions of Vatican

diplomacy. One of the faults consists in the tendency of the Vatican to think only in terms of the power units of nation-states and to ignore or condemn other political units, viz. movements of national, class and racial liberation. A second fault consists in the tendency of the Vatican to align itself with the powerful against the oppressed. One of the services the Vatican could provide—were it not for these tendencies and the interpretation of Christianity which nourishes them—would be that of providing an antidote to the ideological distortions which the nationalistic and class allegiances of Catholics within each nation induce. In recent centuries the Church has tended, when it did not reinforce, at least to leave intact these distortions rather than risk losing the ecclesiastical loyalty of Catholics by challenging them. This is not to advocate the policy of Paul V vis-à-vis Elizabeth I, because the issue is not an ecclesiastical one but one of human justice and peace. To challenge the nationalistic or class pieties and orthodoxies of Catholics, however, may have the same consequence for the Church as in England.

## Patriotic Piety

To the Editors: "Requiem for Patriotic Piety" by Sydney Ahlstrom (August, 1972) is in many respects a moving analysis of our current national loss of faith. In part, Professor Ahlstrom seems to be saying that his really is a requiem, that patriotic reverence is a thing of the past now of primary significance for historians. Yet, throughout his survey, he cannot repress his own longing for a re-

surge of such piety, no doubt in some newer and more refined manifestation. Indeed he tells us that "A United States that does not take 'this sacred trust' seriously is a contradiction in terms," and predicts that in this case American democracy is nearing its end.

What seems to be missing in Ahlstrom's argument—and in that of Paul Nagel, which Ahlstrom is evaluating—is a keen awareness of how historically, and even ethnically, if one may use the term, narrow is the basis on which American patriotic piety was constructed. I do not have in mind here merely the rather superficial celebrations of ethnicity advocated by Peter Schrag, Michael Novak and others—although neither can we lightly dismiss their case for an ethnic renaissance. I am more disturbed by Professor Ahlstrom's apparent failure to come to terms with what is genuinely "new" in what constitutes the *present* American experience.

The national piety which Ahlstrom affirms, although with some ambivalence, was constructed before America became an imperial power, for example. Does not the exercise of actual world *imperium* (which is not necessarily bad) qualitatively change the American experience? Similar questions must be raised in connection with enormous changes—both in consciousness and fact—in race relations, in the innocent impersonality of free enterprise capitalism and in assumptions about the beneficent character of man's domination over nature. Other examples might readily be multiplied.

I grant, of course, that Professor Ahlstrom is an historian, and therefore he might claim that his business is exclusively with the past. But in his article he declines that evasion and does suggest a cure for the relevance of the past, a proposal that we somehow recapture a patriotic piety that now seems irrelevant, if not odious, to most Americans. If [his argument] is to be taken as more than an exercise in nostalgia, he must, it seems to this reader at least, come clean on the enormous

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changes, both positive and negative, which have made the American experience something quite different from the nation whose patriotic faith he would celebrate.

E.L. Grossman

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Sydney E. Ahlstrom Responds:

Mr. Grossman's comments on my review of Paul C. Nagel's two books on the Union and on American nationality are well taken. The questions he raises should not be ignored. But fortunately I share his belief that proposals for the renewal of the country's jaded *esprit* must take full account of immense changes in American life and thought as well as in the overall world situation. Lest there be any doubt, moreover, let me affirm my causative interest in ideological reconstruction. My description of our present calamities must not veil my conviction, but serious thought about the

grounds of American loyalty and idealism is among the most urgent of contemporary national needs. And since it is not likely that leadership in this realm will come from the presidential office (as it would have in the times of Jefferson, Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt), the obligation on private citizens is all the heavier.

Since writing the review in question I have anticipated some of my critics' reservations in a fairly long essay on the seven major stages of American ideological development. In discussing the latter stage (dated roughly from the years between the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King) I try to suggest the ways in which change in both domestic and world circumstances, together with the rise of modern intellectual and religious attitudes, require new concepts of national purpose, and that the classification of these ideas is an eminently worthy task despite the degree to which the patrioteering of recent decades has degraded the idea of national loyalty.

(My essay, "The American National Faith: Humane Yet All Too Human," was read in Los Angeles September, 1972, at the National

Congress of the Learned Societies for the Study of Religion, and published in *Religion and the Humanizing of Man*, James M. Robinson, editor, Council for the Study of Religion, 1972.)

In the near future I hope to enlarge upon these themes with special attention to the ways in which the ideological tradition has, in fact, been freed from the Protestant *laissez-faire* and Providential preoccupations that have in the past been so intrinsic to American patriotic rhetoric. Above all, I would like to insist that loyalty to the Union in the present day involves a solemn moral commitment to the achievement of liberty, equality and felicity for all men. Despite abysmal failures in the past and frequent periods of governmental inanition, I still believe the goals of justice and domestic tranquility which the Federal Constitution lays upon the conscience of every American are an incomparable basis for the restoration of our national faith.

In closing I should like to correct an error in my review. Mr. Nagel's book on the Union is entitled *One Nation Indivisible*, not *One and Indivisible*.