

"A NEED FOR NATIONHOOD"

Lakeland, Fla.

Dear Sir: Alan Geyer's editorial, "A Need for Nationhood," in your July-August issue raises an important question, indeed a whole series of questions. The main question might be phrased: "How shall a nation be held together?"

If some think that our main concern should be to hold humanity together, I agree with Geyer that we cannot, even in our "global village," bypass the question of the character, the unity and the purposes of the nation. Humanity is still too large, too diverse and too scattered to maintain vital institutions and to provide individuals with the sense of belonging, of meaning and of purpose that they need for satisfactory living. The global soil is too thin for adequate human rooting. Even a nation, especially one as large as the United States, seems too much for the mind and the affections to encompass. Our nation can hold us together, in the individual and in the social sense, when we have accepted myths or beliefs about the nation's origin, history and character. If it is true, as Geyer says, that local patriotisms and sectional, racial and economic interests have usually loomed larger for most people than the national identity, still some central beliefs about the nation's past and its destiny were not widely questioned. If, because of Negro slavery and the post-Emancipation exclusion of black people from the American "dream," we have "been broken from the very beginning," we did not until recently know we were broken. The dream was kept intact by not thinking about the excluded. And if some historians and biographers questioned the glory in our wars and revealed defects in our national heroes, their revelations made no great impression. The schools went on with the traditional indoctrination, the luncheon clubs and patriotic societies promulgated the old myths. The dream and the myths held.

What now, when we seem in fact to be falling apart? When "our institutional glue has come unstuck"? When the national leaders who were going to "bring us together" only divide us the more? When for the first time we have to take into our minds the possibility of defeat in a foreign adventure, and on the domestic level watch enormous effort frustrated? When the ecumenical movement that had revived the ancient dream of Christians holding the world together has less popular support than it had a few years ago—and less glamour even for its leaders? It is easy to be scornful about the Vice President and his admiring, not to say fanatical, millions. In truth, they are protesting the weakening of the glue that holds them together. They are, in a word, frightened—frightened for themselves as persons; a main centripetal force in their lives is disintegrating. Hence the

frantic effort of Mr. Agnew, Billy Graham, and others to revive "old-fashioned patriotism." But in the degree they are successful it will be at the price of creating a more chauvinistic and self-righteous nation than we now have. The world increasingly thinks of the United States as a dangerous nation. The fear is justified, precisely because a powerful nation that has lost confidence in itself is always in danger of fanaticism.

Geyer thinks we must have a "new and more humane nationalism." This raises many questions. What is to guard the new nationalism, however much the emphasis on "humane," from idolatrous worship of the nation? Can the effort to create a new nationalism go hand in hand with a lively awareness of our membership in the human race? What national goals will be stressed? Lyndon Johnson tried to summon us to the building of "the Great Society." Was there something wrong in the idea, apart from its being done in by the war in Vietnam?

I do not think social action by itself will give us a healthy nationhood. To be sure, our crazy passion for more and more technology and gadgets contributes to modern man's emptiness and alienation and the threat of extinction by the bomb and the actuality of pollution are bound to unsettle us in our inner being. But beyond what structural social changes could do, there is a deeper problem. We have now, I think, to ask questions about human existence that neither nationhood nor conventional religion can answer, nor yet a more sane social order. Psychologists can be of some help. (Rollo May's *Love and Will*, for example.) Chardin and Ernest Bloch speak to our main problem. A few theologians are dealing with really fundamental issues. Roszak, in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, astutely analyzes the problem as seen by our dissident young people.

What CRIA has been doing very much needs doing: bringing political scientists, theologians, psychologists together. Only, I think, this needs to be done with a somewhat bolder and more radical approach.

Herman F. Reissig

AND STILL MORE ON "REFORM INTERVENTION"

New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir: Charles Burton Marshall's letter in the July-August issue continues the "Perils of Reform Intervention" debate, but not in the direction of greater clarity on the basic issues, where I had hoped my letter (*worldview*, May) would lead.

Of course his point that all policy must be possible, desirable, and feasible, avoid the dangers of Caesarism and eschew unjust coercion, is a perfectly valid one. He made it brilliantly in 1954 in *The Limits of Foreign*