

# Correspondence

## "Nixon's America"

To the Editors: William Barns's thoughtful survey (*Worldview*, April) of what "Nixon's America" might mean to the world leaves some rather important questions in deep confusion, perhaps deepening the confusion. . . . Most urgent is the attitude of "Nixon's America" toward the poor countries. Barns wants the Administration to press for its stated policy of "giving the developing nations as a whole some form of special access for their exports to the markets of the rich nations." Very good. But surely there are, meanwhile, very concrete and unilateral steps the U.S. can take without awaiting such sweeping changes in the nature of international trade. If by the "rich" or "industrialized" nations Mr. Barns is including those in the socialist bloc, it is likely that our grandchildren (and, more important, the grandchildren of the poor in Asia and Latin America) will still be waiting.

Anyone with extensive experience in Third World countries knows that the plausible leadership in most places (as distinct from the anti-American rhetoricians) envision and urgently desire a massive renewal of U.S. direct economic assistance (without political strings) and, in many cases, less inhibited access to U.S. markets. Is it not possible, Mr. Barns, that Nixon is evading immediate opportunities to respond to the poor nations by pretending that nothing can be done without sweeping and complicated changes in the structure of international trade? I think it more than possible and am sorry that "Nixon's America," by failing to point this out, may inadvertently help him in getting away with it.

Laura Govan  
Berkeley, Calif.

William J. Barns Responds:

In response to Laura Govan's letter I should like to make a clarification and amplification.

I do not think that United States action on trade preferences should be dependent upon agreement with the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. It is, of course, entirely possible that President Nixon is using the hesitation of other rich nations as an excuse for American inaction. I do believe, however, that a major effort should be made to work out a joint program with the non-Communist developed nations to provide special access for the exports of developing nations on both economic and political grounds.

There is no reason whatever to hold back increases in foreign economic assistance until the above trade preferences are established. I thought that was clear in my article, but if not I am glad for the opportunity to clarify it.

## "By Puritans Possessed"

To the Editors: I have read Sidney Mead's review of Sydney Ahlstrom ("By Puritans Possessed," *Worldview*, April) with mixed reactions. Professor Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People* is a prodigious work, the most comprehensive and thorough yet available. It is the sort of work that one gladly recommends to anyone who wishes to get a comprehensive survey. (Unfortunately, at \$19.50 it is too expensive to require of less affluent state college and university students.)

The work is obviously that of one man and hence reflects his perspective. That is a perspective which is not shared by Prof. Mead. Mead has long argued for a second major American religious tradition, alongside of, and easily as important as, the Puritan-Protestant tradition. Mead calls that second tradition "the religion of the Republic," or, following Crane Brinton, simply "Enlightenment" religion. I think Mead is essentially correct. That

which transcends or underlies religious (Protestant) particularism in America is not Protestant generalism, unless one is Tillichian in his understanding of "the Protestant principle." The religious substratum of Mead's second tradition has no place for religious exclusiveness relative to public policy especially; hence Eisenhower stood in that tradition when he spoke of the importance of religious faith in America, but added: "I don't care what it is." This sort of position did not result from a mere mental mushiness, but it was, among some of the Founding Fathers especially, a sometimes profound effort to find underlying principles and means for the functioning of society in the face of religious pluralism. Those founders thought they had found that in the religion common to all men or in those truths common to all religions—namely, a providential deity, fundamental morality and human immortality. This, and only this, was seen as essential to a functioning government; anything more was bound to be divisive. It was essentially this same tradition that Lincoln appealed to when he said "The Almighty has his own purposes" and when he added that what was required of all Americans was "malice toward none and charity toward all." That was not what the Puritans had in mind. They were convinced that they knew and could embody the purposes of the Almighty, and they hardly practiced charity toward all.

Few American theologians and church historians have come to grips with the full implications of religious pluralism. The late John Courtney Murray bluntly said that "pluralism is against the will of God"—a position that has the advantage of certainty and clarity. (Murray also argued that men must talk, not fight, in their pluralism.) But under Mead's second tradition pluralism, presumably, is the will of God, in this world at least, and the task of men is to live together in difference, practicing mutual forbearance and love.

Perhaps Sydney Ahlstrom over-