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BRIEF STUDIES

LIGHT AND GLORY: DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE HOLY GOSPEL FOR FEBRUARY 2

The Gospel account of the presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary sets four people before us. We shall look at them in turn: first at our Lord Himself; then at the Blessed Virgin Mary; next at St. Simeon the Seer; finally at St. Anna the Prophetess.

I

ST. LUKE 2:22-32

Our Lord's role is passive, inevitably. Yet this is first and foremost *His* day, *His* feast. He is the Cause and Center of everything that happens, the Focus of universal attention. We are so used to the King James Version's account that we forget that the holy Gospel begins in the original, "When the time came for *their* purification, according to the Law of Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord." Thus the evangelist conceives the occasion as the purification not only of the Mother of God but also of our Lord, in the sense that it was His birth that occasioned the carrying out of the ancient rituals which the Pentateuch (Ex. 13:2 and parallels; Lev. 12) traces back to the decades of Israel's desert wanderings. It is our Lord who as the first-born male child of His mother is holy to the Lord and whose release from His obligation must be bought for five shekels of temple silver. It is He whom St. Simeon takes up in his arms and hails as God's Salvation and all mankind's Light, He for whom Saint Anna is to give thanks and about whom she is to speak to all who were looking for Jerusalem's redemption.

We may well be mystified that God let the event be recounted or even let it happen, because the purification and the presentation and the poor man's sacrifice of a brace of turtledoves were all so unnecessary. This was the one birth that called for neither a burnt offering nor a sin offering to restore the mother who offered it to her place in Israel's worshiping congregation, for in connection with this virgin conception and this virgin birth there was no impurity to be purged away. No presentation of the heavenly Boy was needed to acknowledge the obligation and the dedication and the consecration of this Child to God, for this was God's eternally chosen Servant, God's appointed Worshiper par excellence, no less the Incarnate Word because He wore the form of a slave. We have no record that either the Mother of God or St. Joseph paid the five-silver-shekel fee to secure our Lord's formal release from the priest's hand. But all the silver and all the gold and all the wealth of the world could not have bought His release from the priestly ministry that was the whole purpose and end of His mission — a lifetime of sacrificing His will to the Father's and an expiatory death on the cross as simultaneous Priest and Victim.

The Holy Spirit has left it to us to infer why the presentation and the purification took place. It obviously witnesses to our Lord's complete solidarity with our human kind. He had not merely assumed human nature and become *a* human individual in the world of men, to wit, the Son of Mary, or as He appeared to the world, the son of Joseph the artisan. He did more. Through His own people He identified Himself fully with mankind in sin, in alienation, under wrath, under the Law. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law" (Gal. 4:4). The apostolic proclamation had affirmed it.

Now the evangelical record was illustrating it in its Spirit-stimulated recollection of what had happened in His holy infancy. He is our Brother all the way, not merely in the big aspects of shared human flesh and shared human blood but also, more subtly, in the homely aspects of religious and social ritual that in God's providence are the outward and visible signs of the inward and invisible bonds that tie men together.

But there is more to it, just as there is more to the Incarnation than a desperate demonstration on God's part that He feels sorry for our human plight. Whatever theologians may have to say about the absolute place of the Incarnation in God's design, in historic fact God used the Incarnation as a means to His end of redeeming us who were under the Law that we might receive adoption as children. At the very beginning, God lets His Son be publicly marked for His vicarious, representative ministry of expiation and reconciliation and liberation, and of that ministry we in our generation are still the beneficiaries. The presentation, like His circumcision and His Baptism, equally unnecessary by the canons of strict logic, are a part of His total obedience, part of all that He did and suffered for our salvation.

And when we go to God's temple to seek our purification and to make our offering, He is the only one whom we can set before our eyes and God's eyes. There is no other sacrifice that we can bring, just as even the pair of turtledoves or five shekels of temple silver were only tokens and types of His real offering. There is no sacrifice that we can plead except the one that He has brought. And when we present the symbols of our self-offering, our adoration, our prayers, our money, our good intentions, as our response to His generous gift, the only value these oblations have is what they derive from *our* union with Him. Our works are acceptable in any degree only because God has made us acceptable in His beloved Son. But in Him the same God who was pleased to note and to recall that at His Son's presentation He received a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons is still pleased with our 20th-century equivalents — as long as we really bring them through His Son and in His Son and with His Son.

II

ST. LUKE 2:22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 33-35

The first impression of St. Mary in the account before us is that of a thoroughly self-effacing person. If the ancient tradition is right and the first two chapters of the Gospel According to St. Luke ultimately go back to the lips of the Blessed Virgin herself, the significance of this appears all the greater. In the three sentences in which she is a subject of the verb she does not appear once by herself. "They" brought the holy Child up to Jerusalem, and the plural subject of the verb, unexpressed by a pronoun in the Greek original, is clearly St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin. "The parents" bring the child Jesus into the temple to do for Him according to the custom of the Law. "His father and His mother" marvel at what St. Simeon says about the holy Child. She shares with her husband and her Son in Simeon's blessing, and she is singled out only as an object when St. Simeon, led by the Spirit, foretells the ministry and destiny of our Lord and predicts her own passion in connection with it. In brief, she exemplifies in her behavior the words that she takes on her lips: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (St. Luke 1:46-48). She means what she sings. Do *we?*

The second characteristic that impresses us in this account is the determined earnestness of her piety. We have already reflected on the fact that the whole procedure here recounted was ultimately unnecessary. Whatever her insight into the mystery of salvation

in which she was so vital a participant may have been, the temptation to dispense herself from these ceremonies must have been very real. After all, neither Law nor custom required her attendance in the temple. The redemption of the son could be made before any priest. Even the mother's purification did not require her presence. That chore could easily be delegated to the ministering laymen who represented in the worship of the temple all the people who came from their district. Again, the ceremony was not particularly edifying. Liturgical efficiency experts had been at work, and a brisk commercialism pervaded the whole procedure. The price of the sacrificial turtledoves was calculated and announced once a month. The proletarian worshiper dropped the specified amount in chest number three in the court of the women. Once a day the chest was emptied, and half the contents was applied to sin offerings, half to burnt offerings. At the hour when incense was kindled on the golden altar, those who were present and the substitutes for those who were absent took their places, the sacrificial birds were dispatched with practiced skill, and the congregation departed, their liturgical defilements removed. Whatever prayer and praise did come out of genuinely grateful hearts remained unspoken. The significant fact in this connection is that the Blessed Virgin did *not* dispense herself, and her insistence on personal participation even under the circumstances described says something about the way *her* heart was fixed. It is something that *we* can take to heart.

The third impressive fact about her in the narrative is her amazement at St. Simeon's Nunc Dimittis. As we have already suggested, the Sacred Scriptures do not satisfy the curiosity of theologians about the extent of the Blessed Virgin's insight into the divine plan for the world's salvation. Apart from unrecorded revelations which she may have had, St. Gabriel's words at the Annunciation, St. Elizabeth's words at the Visitation, the angelic revelations to St. Joseph, and the staggering events of Christmas Night had given her enough to ponder. That is not to say that there were no gaps in her knowledge, or to suggest that she might have formulated the Decree of Nicaea or have anticipated by 15 centuries Martin Chemnitz's tract *On the Two Natures.* David Chytraeus is giving way to historical hyperbole when in his *Onomasticum* he describes the first church council in the New Testament as the one attended by St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth, St. Zechariah, and their intimates, which defined the mystery of the virgin conception of our Lord on the basis of the divine interpretation of the events in which they had been participants.[1] Still, by any criterion, the Blessed Virgin Mother must have known very, very much. But with all that she knew, the marvel is that she could still marvel at what was said about her Son. And yet the secret of this holy wonderment is no secret; it is disclosed every time that the Gospel of the infancy tells us that she *kept* all these things, *pondering* them in her heart (St. Luke 2:19, 51). Here is the antidote to that spiritual disease from which we all suffer — that acedia, that spiritual torpor and apathy and sloth and laziness and coldness of heart — which lets our little knowledge grow weary so promptly and after so little time spent in reflection, and which makes so sated and so satisfied so soon. If we too should learn the secret of keeping and pondering in our hearts the mighty acts and words of God, we too might marvel more.

So much for the Blessed Virgin as subject.

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[1] "Prima Synodus Novi Testamenti fuit congressus Mariae, Elizabeth, Zachariae et aliorum, in quo promulgatus est Articulus de concepto et iuxta promissiones patribus datas exhibito Messia Redemptore, Luc. 1." From the "Catalogus Conciliorum" appended to David Chytraeus, *Onomasticum theologicum recens recognitum* (Wittenberg: [Clemens Scheidt et Antonius Schön], 1578 [1577]), p. 895.

She has one important thing to teach us as object. The lesson is hid in the parenthesis that St. Simeon inserts into his mysterious oracle. After describing her Son as being set for the fall and rising of many and for a sign that is spoken against, he adds: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." Therewith he enunciates a fact in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary that 19 centuries of Christian experience allows us to generalize into a principle: To be close to Christ involves getting hurt. St. Simeon is not talking about the pain of martyrdom, acute, brief, and glorious. No tradition of martyrdom surrounds the Virgin's falling asleep as the ward of St. John the Beloved either in Ephesus or in Jerusalem, and we do not read that a hand of violence was ever raised against her. The sword Saint Simeon foretells is not the efficient blade of the Roman legionary, but the barbarous, brutal, bloody, messy scimitar of the uncivilized Thracian. Hers was the slow sorrow, the protracted pain of seeing Him who was both her Son and her Savior misunderstood, misrepresented, deserted, hated, hounded, nailed to a cross as a common criminal, and mocked and blasphemed in the very hour in which He died to save His persecutors. The scimitar that pierced the Virgin's soul is still the occupational hazard of all those who walk in the company of her Son. If you belong to Him, it will be alternately poised over you and pressed into your soul as long as you live. It has no saving value in itself; our salvation, like that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, rests wholly on the atonement wrought by her Son. But when you feel the pain of the scimitar's piercing, rejoice, for this is one of the ways in which God is telling you that you are His.

III

ISAIAH 25:7-9; 46:13; 49:6; 52:7-10

The third of the four figures to whom the account of our Lord's presentation and the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary directs us is St. Simeon the Seer. It would be asking too much of flesh and blood to expect that the devout reflection of succeeding generations of Christians would leave this austerely mysterious figure, who appears here and here alone in the sacred Record, unembroidered by pious fancy.

Thus the fabricators of apologetic but apocryphal gospels, like that ascribed to St. Nicodemus, gave him two sons, Charinus and Leucius, who allegedly were raised from the dead, were summoned before the Sanhedrin, described before Israel's high court their experiences in the underworld at the death of our Lord, and eventually saw their narrative ordered incorporated into the official register of the acts of the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate.

When a few centuries later the veneration of the saints began to find expression in the cult of their relics, the body of St. Simeon was conveniently discovered, translated to Constantinople, and ultimately shared with the Western Roman Emperor Charles the Great. At Aix-la-Chapelle, in consequence, the arm was exhibited against which the holy Child nestled while St. Simeon recited the Nunc Dimittis. Rival relics came into being, a whole body at Zara in Yugoslavia, another whole body in Bavaria, a head in Brussels, and in the words of a distinguished hagiologist of the last century, "numerous other relics, mostly of arms, elsewhere." [2]

A somewhat more sophisticated and scholarly version of the same spirit has ransacked the history of Jewry in the beginning of the Christian era and identified him with the eminent Rabban Simeon, who appears in the Talmudic tractate Shabbath as the president of the Sanhedrin between the administrations of Hillel and Gamaliel, an identification that several commentators justly describe as "precarious."

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[2] Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints,* 3d ed., XI (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914), 165.

The fact is that the person of Simeon remains an enigma, possibly as a providential reminder that the prophecy is more important than the prophet, the message more important than the messenger, and the Word of God more important than the preacher.

Let St. Simeon be remembered for what the sacred page tells us about him. One thing it does not say, and that is that he was old although he may have been. It does characterize him by adjectives that express the ideal of Old Testament piety — devout, righteous, looking for the consolation of Israel. In an exceptional degree he was endowed with and responsive to divine inspiration. Within the span of 29 words in the Greek text of St. Luke 2:25-27 the Holy Spirit is mentioned three times — "the Holy Spirit was upon him," we are told; "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ"; "in the Spirit [RSV margin] he came into the temple" at precisely the moment when the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph brought in Our Lord. To complete the portrait, we have his own self-image in the opening words of the Nunc Dimittis. The term he uses of himself is δοῦλος, slave; the term he uses of God is not κύριε, the usual word that we render with "lord," but δέσποτα, "slave owner," and the indicative verb is ἀπολύεις, that is, "manumit, emancipate, set free." The picture is strikingly that of the petition in the collect for Christmas Day: "Grant that the new birth of Thine only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free, who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin."

St. Simeon's credo finds expression in the hymn that he recites and the oracle that he utters. His God is a God who saves, and the salvation that the Seer affirms is one that God has prepared in the presence of all people as a witness that His plan embraces the whole wide world. The Christ of his faith is one in whom there is no East or West, no North or South. He is the Redeemer not merely of a chosen race but a Redeemer in whom all races become chosen peoples, a light both for the tearing away of the veil that kept the non-Jewish world in dark ignorance of God's will and for the restoration to Israel of the blue radiance of the vanished cloud of glory that once dwelt behind the curtain of God's sanctuary.

Furthermore, St. Simeon's faith is tempered by a sober and holy realism. The Messiah is set forth for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, a prodigy and a phenomenon of such dimensions that Israel could not ignore it, but of such a character that it would scandalize the Messiah's compatriots before imparting to them the power to rise and take their stand upon it. The Messiah is to unfurl a standard that will be a rallying point in the war between God and the prince of evil. But it will also be an ensign which attracts enmity both to itself and, as we have reflected, to those who would stand in its shadow. The Messiah is to be the Touchstone that will reveal the secrets of men's most intimate and ultimate loyalties.

Thus St. Simeon's credo becomes a literally improbable faith. A sensitive personality like his could not be unaware either of the general disillusionment and disappointment and secularization that marked the masses of Israel at the beginning of our era or of the tragedy of the proliferating sects that were draining off so much of what enthusiasm and moral earnestness there still remained. He would not have disagreed with the analysis of the situation three decades later that the fourth Gospel was to furnish retrospectively in two damning sentences at the end of the century: "The true Light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. . . . He came to His own home, and His own people refused to receive Him" (St. John 1:9, 11). This was part of the unpromising picture. The other just as unprom-

ising part lay in the fact that the divinely identified salvation was a six-week old Baby whose parents were a have-not artisan and his equally poor bride. The only assurance St. Simeon had was a word of God and enough contact with God to be sure of Him.

We have been told often enough by the social diagnosticians of our time that the confused second half of the 20th century is part of the post-Christian era. Precisely what the post-Christian era will bring is something that not even their prognoses make wholly clear. But whatever it is, it is not a roseate era of reassurance for the church.

These diagnosticians may be right. In any case it would be folly for us blandly to assume that they are wrong because we do not like the idea. But even if they are right, the prognosis is relatively unimportant. What is important is that the faith be carried forward by men and women like Saint Simeon, men and women who have the Word of God and enough contact with God to be sure of Him.

IV

ST. LUKE 2:36-38

Like St. Simeon, St. Anna is something of a mystery. As far as the bare biographical facts are concerned we know just enough about her to whet our curiosity. What is this descendant of the so-called lost tribe of Asher doing in Jerusalem? Was it the prominence of her father Phanuel that makes the evangelist remember his name in describing her while forgetting her late husband's? Had she carried on in her person the tradition of the women of her tribe, uniquely remembered in Israel for their beauty as proverbially fit brides for monarch or high priest?

In a period that acknowledged no male prophet in Jewry and in a culture that tended to minimize the role of women in public, she was revered as a prophetess in the tradition of a Miriam, a Deborah, and a Huldah.

In an era when longevity was a much rarer phenomenon than it has become among us in recent years, she had achieved the venerable age of at least 84, and it may be the intention of the text to tell us that she had passed 100. Thus her lifetime spanned the entire sad epoch of the Roman occupation of Israel, and old Abbot John Bengel of Alpirsbach calculates that she was 24 when Pompey's armies took the Holy City.

In a religious tradition that generally discouraged asceticism, she is remembered for her fasting and prayers in the temple night and day. In a social environment that brought strong pressure on young widows to remarry she had chosen at a relatively youthful age — at most in her early twenties — to defy the pressure and to live in holy widowhood. At the time when the worship of the temple was becoming to a notorious degree self-righteous, self-satisfied, coldly mechanical, and crassly commercialized, she pinned her faith and her hope, and she addressed her worship, to a God who would presently act to accomplish the redemption of Jerusalem by His intervention.

It is this astonishing woman who suddenly appears in the temple at the very hour that St. Simeon takes the holy Child from the arms of the Mother of God. The closing words of St. Simeon's blessing on the Holy Family merge into the anthem of praise with which St. Anna the Seeress gives thanks to God for the coming of the promised Christ. The verb implies no single paean. Instead it indicates that she kept on doing it, just as she kept on speaking of the holy Child to the company of those who were not merely hopeful but expectant about the early advent of Jerusalem's redemption. How great the circle of these waiting and watchful worshipers was we do not know; to justify the word "all" the number must have been considerable. In any case it was a circle whose faith in the God who saves was kept

alive — as our faith is — by mutual witness and by common worship.

Besides the necessity of this mutual worship and witness, St. Anna has one other thing to teach us. Christianity is by nature and by divine design a conservative faith, carefully concerned about transmitting unchanged from one generation to another the unalterable Gospel of a Redeemer who died and rose again for all of humanity in every generation. As long as it does not make our witness irrelevant, this conservatism is not to be confused with conventionalism, that professional disease of the vocationally religious which refuses to recognize the validity of any mode of serving God for which it has no carefully labeled pigeonhole. Conventionalism has no place for St. Annas.

Happily, an unconventional church, with nothing but St. Luke's account to go on, reserved a place for her in the *Martyrology* — the church's chronicle of her witnessing members — for Sept. 1: "At Jerusalem, Blessed Anna, prophetess, whose sanctity is revealed in the Gospel." With the church, not only on Sept. 1 or on Feb. 2, but at all times and in all places, we give thanks to God for St. Anna and for all who, conventional or not, are bound to the service of our Lord by the ties of the same faith and the same hope and the same love that bind *us* to Him. ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

THE FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NCCC

A Review

Observing the 10th anniversary of its formation, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. met in San Francisco, Calif., Dec. 4—9, 1960, for its fifth general assembly.

The person who attends the meeting of this organization for the first time cannot help above all to be impressed by its magnitude and the far-flung complexity of its activities. The 531 voting delegates, assembled at this convention, represent 34 Protestant and Orthodox churches with a total membership of about 40 million. The largest group holding membership is The Methodist Church (9 million members), the smallest, the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference (5,965).

The spectrum of denominational and doctrinal positions represented by the National Council is equally wide. There were present and active in full membership churches of such divergent form and theological orientation as the Five Year Meeting of Friends and the Orthodox churches (Romanian Orthodox Episcopate — 50,000; Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America — 755,000; Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church — 150,000; Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church — 110,000; Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America — 44,350; Greek Archdiocese of North and South America — 1,500,000).

On the roster of full membership are also the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, and The United Lutheran Church of America.

The business before this assembly indicated the comprehensive as well as the intensive program of the National Council. Its administrative organization makes provision for every type and phase of church work at home and abroad. Between assemblies its directives are administered by a General Board, a General Secretary, and a host of associate and assistant secretaries. The program is implemented by four major divisions: the Division of Christian Education, of Christians Life and Work, of Foreign Missions, and of Home Missions. Each of these divisions has special departments. The Foreign Missions Division, for example, has the following subcommittees:

Africa Committee
Associated Mission Medical Office
Christian Medical Council for Overseas Work
Committee on Co-operation in Latin America

Committee on Missionary Personnel
Department of Overseas Union Churches
Far Eastern Office
Joint Office of Southern Asia and the Near East
Radio, Visual Education, and Mass Communication
Rural Missions Co-operating Committee

In hearing the reports on this variegated and complex program and its discussion in the general assembly and in divisional meetings, an observer could not escape the conviction that the council's business is conducted by a host of highly competent and expertly trained men and women. It was also evident that the National Council was able to render effective and immediate service, particularly in times and areas of crisis, because it could marshal the combined and co-ordinated resources and offices of its member churches. One furthermore becomes convinced of the consecrated zeal on the part of all concerned to respond in obedience to the theme selected for the assembly: "Jesus Christ, Living Lord of All Life."

The desire to implement and put into effect this motto was spurred by the conviction that the churches of today could succeed only if efforts and resources were combined and unified. Conditions at home and the world over were often and impressively cited as demanding united action if Christianity is to survive and be able to cope with the threats that it faces: the wholesale surrender of our culture to the inroads of secularism and materialism; the world in revolution — politically, socially, ideologically; the worldwide threat of Communism; the rise of militant religions such as Mohammedanism; the new space age, with its purely scientific orientation.

No one can gainsay the serious consequences of these critical issues nor the advantage of a common front and united action in dealing with them. The question naturally arises therefore whether there are valid reasons for withholding support and co-operation from an organization that has such high ideals and meets such an urgent need. This question was fashioned into a sharp shaft aimed at the Christian conscience by the oft-voiced warning against "the sin of separateness." "The Message to the Member Churches," officially adopted by the assembly, makes this charge in unequivocal language: "Not the churches' diversity but their separation from one another is the heart of this sinfulness."

In arriving at a God-pleasing answer, other questions thrust themselves upon an observer whose conscience seeks to be bound by the Word of God. Is the divided state of the church the only, or even the foremost, reason for the failure of Christianity to evangelize the world? Do the outward circumstances of a critical situation warrant disregard of divinely established principles that govern the proclamation of the Gospel? Is every and any means legitimate to meet a crisis? Are there in the will of God any restrictions how and when unity is to be manifested? Besides the command to preach, do we not have from the same Lord the injunction to be concerned that we teach men to observe all things that He has commanded? Does the preaching of a garbled or emasculated gospel become less sinful by making it a joint effort? Has not God in the past sent catastrophes by evil men and sinister forces to call the church to repentance for unfaithfulness and disregard of His good and gracious will? May God not be using new Assyrians and Babylonians for a new "exile" to purify His people? Granted that faith must also express itself in a genuine concern for the physical welfare of all men, is the church's foremost mission to be the amelioration of the social and economic evils of the world?

There were indications at San Francisco that some of these questions were not disregarded in the passionate plea for unity of action. There was witness to the fact that

sinful men can be united with God only through the sacrificial life and death of His only Son and His victorious resurrection. Attention was also called to this essential Gospel truth as the only motivating power for Christian living and conduct. This basic message was heard particularly in the worship periods conducted by Dr. Joseph Sittler Jr., and Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of India. A caution against indiscriminate co-operation was sounded by Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in a message read to the assembly by his representative stating:

> 1) that there must be unity on the fundamentals of faith, going hand in hand with freedom in what does not affect faith — crowned with love — a quality so vital and the sole quality which can bind Christians together in all matters and at all times;
>
> 2) that Christian tradition is that term which identifies the conduct which at all times, by all Christians, everywhere, is practiced and believed.

But this observer came away with the impression that these expressions of concern were exceptional rather than general. It pained him to notice what appeared to be a studied reluctance to mention the vicarious atonement, or its equivalent in other terms, as necessary for the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Could it be that this foundation for all discipleship was suppressed out of consideration for members who might be offended by a "religion of blood"? Or was it merely presupposed?

The official literature does not allay these misgivings. The preamble to the constitution reads as follows:

> In the Providence of God, the time has come when it seems fitting more fully to manifest the oneness in Jesus Christ, by the creation of an inclusive co-operative agency of the Christian churches of the United States of America. . . .

Where "The Message to the Member Churches" touches on the basis of a common allegiance to the Lord, an explicit reference to His atoning sacrifice is conspicuously absent. The opening paragraphs have this to say:

> On the tenth anniversary of the formation of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, we are met to testify to our faith in Jesus Christ, the living Lord of all life.
>
> We desire to proclaim that not only individual souls but all societies, all cultures, all civilizations must finally acknowledge his rule. *By his teaching and embodiment of the Law of Love* (italics not in the original) he is the One to whom every person must ultimately give account of his life. He is equally the standard by which every corporate activity must be appraised.

The protestation at this point that the National Council "has no theology of its own" hardly seems convincing. A number of the resolutions adopted by the assembly make unequivocal pronouncements on religious and moral issues confronting the Christian today that require a very definite theological basis to justify their validity. This is to say that the National Council must indeed have a theology to enable it to take a position and pass judgment on various questions that involve a doctrinal interpretation and application of Christian truths set forth in Scripture. Other equally sincere Christians may view these issues from a different theological position. And not the least controverted among these is the question of "the sin of separateness." It can, therefore, hardly be unfair to ask why the council hesitates to speak more clearly on the basic presupposition of its obedience to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

These observations of course do not imply that there were no delegates at the assembly, representing hosts of Christians, who accept

and believe in Christ Crucified as their Savior from sin and *therefore* the Lord of their lives. It is a disconcerting fact, however, that after 10 years their witness within the council apparently has proved to be so ineffective.

At the same time there appears to be a lack of clarity within the council as to its goals. In a panel discussion Bishop Arthur Lichtenberger of the Protestant Episcopal Church referred to the interpretation of the council's purpose as an unresolved issue and listed three objectives that various groups envision: (1) It is to be an agency of cooperation for the member churches; (2) It is to be a means to achieve the union of all churches; (3) It is to be a rallying point for a solid study of the role of the church in the world. He favored the last interpretation. The "Message" also calls attention to the need of clarification when it states:

> We look to the National Council's new studies on the significance of councils of churches to enable the churches to discover, in obedience to Christ, both the nature and forms of the unity we seek. Special attention should be given to the extent to which church councils partake of the nature of the church. The National Council is not the church. But it calls men to the worship of God and seeks to make its corporate life an instrument of the Holy Spirit. It summons men to Christian obedience and helps them discern the conditions of such obedience. In it we have found rich, free, and vital fellowship. And the council bears witness to the fundamental solidarity of all Christians and thus points toward the church in its full unity.

In view of these uncertainties regarding the basis as well as the goal of the National Council it would appear to be charitable — to say the least — to recognize the scruples of such as hesitate to be identified by full membership in this organization.

WALTER R. ROEHRS