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-- Overlook On Life --

By WARREN S. REEVE

The idea of "Overlook" is taken from the Overlooks provided for viewing panoramas along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Last week I wrote a descriptive account of Friends' (Quaker) Meeting that I attended the Sunday when I was in Orlando, Florida. That, and other experiences, induce certain reflections in my mind that I would like to give expression to in today's columns.

I am aware of what a variety there is within the circle of Christian and religious practices. On the one extreme, I think of the elaborate and ornate ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. An opposite extreme is the loose and informal way things are done, for example, in a country chapel where, oftentimes, there is little previous planning as to how a meeting should be conducted, or where anybody might interrupt at any time and recommend his idea as a substitute for what the leader is trying to do. In such gatherings there is often quite a bit of confusion, and nobody thinks much of it. The Friends' Service I described last week is still another extreme, in which quietness, silence, are the most noteworthy feature.

Then, when it comes to preaching, what a variety there is! There are preachers who try to be oratorical; there are some who strive chiefly to stir people's emotions and who feel that the measure of the success of their sermon is in the degree of weeping that they can effect among the people to whom they are preaching. At the other extreme are preachers who appeal mostly to the minds of their hearers, ignoring the emotions. They hope that their congregation will do some thinking, and their sermons are designed to stimulate thought. Most preachers, I suppose, endeavor to make a good mixture of food for thought with fermenting extract for the emotions and something over and above both these that might move the will to action.

Again, among the various churches and denominations there is a significant diversity of doctrine and belief. What are we to say to all this mystifying variety among the religious groups that all profess they are sprung from

the same Jesus Christ?

My first observation is that because of the complexity of the human mind and spirit it is inevitable that there would be many different kinds of reaction to the same original message. (Any great philosophical or artistic representation of truth lends itself to several diverging interpretations.) Human beings will not all think alike, neither can human tastes be compressed into one mould. We are bound to think individually, and this brings multiplicity instead of uniformity.

It is not such a serious matter that denominations fail to agree on one single creed in all details as it is in those cases where groups fight, one against the other, and where they disparage one another or engage in uncharitable rivalry and competition. Disagreements are inevitable, but where there is humility and charity, the evil of them is overcome and the disadvantage of them is transcended. Strong convictions are imperative but they need not be synonymous with bigotry.

In our attitude toward other individuals we know that having a dominantly positive, rather than a dominantly negative attitude is wholesome. Similarly, we do well when we try to see the good points in other denominations rather than to dwell too exclusively on what we think is wrong or mistaken in them.

In this vein I would like to declare the sense of indebtedness I personally feel to various denominations. Although I am a Presbyterian, I feel that enrichment has come to me through more channels than just the Presbyterian tradition alone.

To begin with, all of us Christians should hold on to the glory of the New Testament writers forever felt towards the Hebrew oracles and revelation and towards the history and calling of the Jewish people. I could, if there were time and space, elaborate on what I think and feel on this subject. But let me go on to speak of the Roman Catholic Church. I am mindful that for fifteen hundred years after the

time of Christ there was (speaking perhaps in a loose sense) no protestant church, and that you were a Catholic or you were no Christian at all. Thus, we protestants would well admit that in a sense we are all children of the Catholic tradition. Many of us have scarcely any idea of how much of what we now thoughtlessly accept as protestant came to us the Roman Catholic way. Out of the more than a thousand years of history before Protestantism got on to the scene there can be culled a wealth of Christian thought and practice that we still would do well to study and make our own. For undoubtedly a great fraction of Catholic faith and life is genuine and valid for any of us any time.

Perhaps the Episcopalians and Lutherans have held on to a larger amount of the good that is in the Catholic tradition than the rest of us. I have been profoundly moved at times by the messages I have heard and by the atmosphere in which they were given in churches of these two persuasions. Both of these communions have a heightened sense of worship that should be a rebuke to the shoddiness with which protestant services are sometimes conducted.

If, on the one hand, their greater formality in worship has a power within it to carry the soul to the gates of heaven, so, on the other hand, those who are more mystically inclined also show us a way that is most revealing. The Friends are one such group. The Pietistic and Anabaptist groups are another. All my life long I shall be thankful for having been taught that God is to be found in the way of silence, and that in silence the fabric of the soul is to be built.

The Methodist Movement has brought blessings to me in one way and another from time to time. The warm evangelic tone, the down-to-earth practicality, the brotherliness of Methodist fellowship have been mediated to me through various individuals and groups and literature. The idea of opening hearts mutually in trustful frankness to one another and of praying for one another — the genius of the old class meetings — this is something perennially essential. I feel, for the maintenance of vital, personal faith.

I once heard an eminent Roman Catholic professor declare that any heresy that lasted for any length of time couldn't be all wrong. It must have some kernel of truth concealed in it, or it would have perished after short duration. I believe he was right in saying that.

While I consider that there is a philosophy underlying Christian Science which I cannot subscribe to, yet the Christian Scientists have possessed themselves of a kernel of truth. I would say, and in that respect, we may learn from them. Gratefully, I testify that I have learned from them.

Thus, the full-rounded glory of Christ is greater than that pos-

2nd LT. ELIZABETH JEAN YELTON AT WALTER REED

Second Lieutenant Elizabeth Jean Yelton, a member of the 1957-58 dietetic intern class at Walter Reed Army Hospital, D. C., is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Rex Yelton, Rt. 3, Burnsville, N. C.

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After entering the Army Medical Specialist Corps in August 1957, she attended a one-month orientation course at Ft. Sam Houston, Tex., and was then assigned as a dietetic intern at Walter Reed.

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We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to our many friends for the many acts of kindness, expressions of sympathy and for the beautiful flowers during the illness and death of our loved one Mr. and Mrs. Euster Fender and Family

essed by any single one of our ecclesiastical bodies, and in the day when the consummation of God's Kingdom comes, each denomination will have poured in its own unique contribution.

In the meantime, we have to go along in our denominational grooves, for neither tastes nor convictions can be pressed into one monolithic form, but if, adhering to our divergences, we may do so in magnanimity of spirit and with Christian humility, the diversity may yet speak with some eloquence of unity, and beneath the many-faced figure of total Christendom discerning eyes may yet descry a surpassing singularity — which would be, shall we say, the features of "One like the Son of Man".

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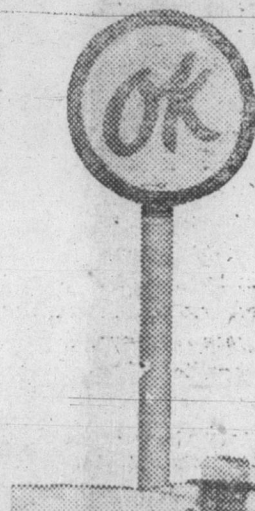
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