

from cleveland

A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Arthur Moore

The far-from-new observation that conferences look remarkably different from the inside and from the outside was strongly reinforced in the minds of delegates to the Fifth World Order Study Conference held in Cleveland, Ohio, November 18-21, under the sponsorship of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The six hundred delegates, consultants, and observers spent four days arguing a variety of subjects bearing such resounding names as "The Power Struggle and Security in a Nuclear-Space Age," "Changing Conditions of Human Rights," and "Overseas Areas of Rapid Social Change." And not only arguing but recommending—four thick section reports calling for such specifics as raising foreign economic aid to one per cent of the Gross National Product (about four and one-half billion dollars); U.S. passage of the Genocide Agreement and other Human Rights treaties; freedom of travel for U.S. citizens, particularly newsmen; etc. And on top of all this was a nineteen-page message to the churches.

Out of this welter of studies, reports, recommendations, resolutions and what-have-you, the press (and hence the public) picked one topic and one alone—Red China. As far as a thumbnail summary goes, this was the conference where the Protestants (and Orthodox, although this was one occasion where they were glad enough not to be noticed) came out for the recognition of the People's Republic of China by the United States and its admission to the community of nations—i.e., the United Nations.

The general effect was as of someone yelling suddenly in a silent room. There was startled silence, then angry mutters. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and Dr. Daniel A. Poling, those twin champions of the ancient alliance of Protestantism and Americanism, put in angry demurrs. Representative Walter Judd, former China missionary and present apostle of our China policy, hastened to join them. One of those mysterious anti-Communist organizations that materialize at these times and protest did so and vanished back into the mist. The Secretary of State, to whom this was the unkindest cut of all in view of his having spoken at the Conference and in light of his well-publicized connection with previous World Order Conferences, contented himself with remarking icily at his press conference that matters of specific policy did not fall within the competence of churchmen and that it was his information that the whole matter had not been adequately presented at

the Conference. No one of any note (except participants) rose to the Conference's defense. The general popular impression might have been, "Oh, those woolly-headed, Communist-dupe Protestants. They've done it again."

Such an impression would have been wrong. The very violence of much of this reaction proved sadly, not that the Cleveland delegates were misled (they may or may not have been) but that people are still afraid to talk about our China policy out loud even though it gets harder and harder to find people who agree with this policy privately. Sentimentality over China dies hard and so does the memory of McCarthyism. Perhaps it is difficult for people to realize even yet that all those people like Knowland and Bricker and Jenner really are no longer in the Senate.

All of which does not necessarily prove the wisdom of the Cleveland statement on Red China. In fact, there was not much debate on this passage of the message but this was because there was no strongly-felt difference of opinion. Substitute motions which did not call for recognition were submitted (and defeated) but it was clearly the overall "sense of the meeting" that United States China policy was a shambles and that it was the duty of those present to insist that a change must be made.

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Motives undoubtedly were mixed. As Herman Reissig has pointed out in a letter to the *New York Times*, there are several reasons for favoring recognition—some good and some not-so-good—and probably all of these reasons influenced at least a few of all the people present. If the resolution had gotten down to hard specifics (say, on the allocation of the Security Council seat now occupied by the Chinese Nationalists) then unanimity would have vanished. On these sharp matters, Mr. Dulles' question of competence might be raised. But on the broad question of policy, there was a feeling among the delegates that they were both competent and agreed. Considering the caliber of the delegates, this statement should have presented at least an occasion for significant national debate on what may truly be a life and death issue.

And the caliber of the delegates was high. This was in many ways an extraordinarily well-prepared conference. Six preparatory study commissions worked to prepare background papers. These commissions included such people as Paul Nitze, Paul Hoffman, Ralph Bunche, Wilhelm Pauck, Philip Jessup, Clifford Case, and Thomas K. Finletter. The background papers for discussion were written by such people as John Bennett, Harold Stassen, Wolfgang Stolper, and Richard Fagley.

Nor were glittering names all. The delegates worked hard and were not overawed by the names. Discussion was general and yet orderly, not an easy thing to manage in a group of this size.

There were structural defects in the organization. The idea of having four completely autonomous sub-

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groups within a conference whose actions, once passed by them, are final and not subject to revision by the Conference as a whole, creates as many problems as it solves. The very loose system of assigning delegates to the discussion group they choose can lead to packed groups.

Both of these problems were dramatically in evidence in the old-fashioned bayonet charge put on by the pacifists in the group on "The Power Struggle and Security in a Nuclear-Space Age." Clashes within this discussion group and in the plenary sessions discussing its report were much more severe and deep-rooted than any difference of opinion over Communist China.

A pacifist-nonpacifist fight might have seemed a subject good only for a nostalgic twinge to many people who assume that, if the Thirties and Forties settled anything, they showed that the leadership consensus in American Protestantism was not pacifistic. This statement is still true but each new advance in rocketry and nuclear warfare causes new uneasiness. Under these circumstances, there is a certain tidy coziness about pure pacifism that has great appeal. In an almost unendurably complex world, pacifism is (or seems) an easy and honorable way out.

This is not to say that there is a great swing in American Protestantism toward real pacifism. Real pacifism, after all, is not an easy way out. But there is an unsureness of position; an uncertainty born of anguish and despair.

Emotionally, this uneasiness can arouse only sympathy. Who today does not feel profoundly ill at ease as ICBM succeeds bomber and God-alone-knows-what succeeds ICBM? But the pain of the situation can cause a profound wish to be rid of awkward and difficult decisions that easily becomes dangerously irresponsible.

It would have seemed that this danger has begun to recede somewhat. How far away the shrill clamor of last winter and spring with their "marches" to halt nuclear testing seems, even though, alas, we now have both nuclear testing and bad excuses. The emotional tide seems to have turned.

How strong a tide it was became apparent at Cleveland in the before-mentioned section on "The Power Struggle." The pacifist concentration in this group was strong and succeeded in including in the section report such statements as an unqualified repudiation of nuclear retaliation, an assertion that "if military force is to be used it should be sanctioned by, and under the control of, the United Nations" (again, no qualifications), and a simultaneous repudiation of nuclear warfare and the conscription system which would amount to unilateral disarmament in the opinion of many.

Reaction to these statements was strong on the floor of the Conference. Here the Conference procedure showed its awkwardness. For, having been adopted by the section, the Conference was powerless to change the report in any way. (Any account of

how the section adopted the report must be hearsay on my part but it was said that the section was aptly titled "The Power Struggle" and that many formulations were passed by a small majority vote.) All the Conference could do was to pass a resolution expressing its disagreement with certain sentences and implications in the section report. This the Conference did and by a substantial margin. But the section report, unchanged, will be part of the Conference material to be used in study by the churches.

This was the large controversy. (And that controversy was more indicative than really substantive, for the report of section two had in its fourteen pages only one or two items about which there was argument.) About the non-controversial resolutions and reports, where is one to start? By and large, they were sound and sensible.

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Whatever reservations one might have about a conference such as this are more a question of tone and of mood rather than of substance. Still peeking slyly around corners was the old Protestant idealism which deplores "politics" and sums up its philosophy in cleaving to the good and shunning the bad. An admirable philosophy, provided one has a clear means of telling which is which. "We are a Christian nation," said one dear lady, "why don't we act like one?"

Fortunately, the majority of the delegates at this conference knew better and pronouncements trailing clouds of glory and containing very little substance were not the order of the day. If one personality may be said to typify the Fifth World Order Study Conference at its best, that man would be John C. Bennett. Dr. Bennett, an extremely busy man, took time to write the background paper on "Theological and Moral Considerations in International Affairs" that provided a sound framework in which discussion could creatively operate. Not satisfied, he wrote a supplementary paper on "Some Presuppositions of the Cold War," participated largely in group discussions, and served as chairman of the committee that drafted the Conference message.

The tendency of Protestant gatherings when they address themselves to political affairs is to be irrelevant. This is by now a cliché. The day before the Cleveland Conference began, a luncheon meeting of the Division of Christian Life and Work of the National Council of Churches was warned once more by William Lee Miller of the perils confronting Protestants in politics who see everything in terms of black-and-white "morality." When the World Order Study Conference began, there were many ready to mount their chargers and follow the gleam. And yet, the Conference by and large settled down to a serious consideration of problems and a search for solutions. The solutions they found may not be the final ones but at least their examination of the problems sought to be honest and relevant. How relevant they are may be partially indicated by the loud cries of the critics.