

Comment

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The danger of worshipping our country is certainly avoided as long as the element of repentance is not forgotten. Another advantage which the day of prayer has, compared with the first of August, lies in the individual challenge. True enough, a good first of August speaker will not dwell upon Morgarten and Sempach in his speech, but if he brings in critical aspects of modern times, he will be disappointed in realizing that he cannot engage his audience, which is apt to pass the baby on to the authorities: "Why doesn't the Government do anything about it? What do we pay taxes and rates for?" On the Day of Prayer the nation is addressed, but as prayer is something to be done by individuals there is the possibility of a deeper engagement. In this individuality and readiness for repentance, the third Sunday in September could become something of high importance in the life of our nation.

If I were asked to sketch a new form for the National Day of Prayer I would stress the following points:

1. There should only be one preacher for the whole country. The activity of local priests and pastors should be restricted to liturgy and to introducing the subject. The preacher should appear on a screen put up in every church. Those at home could watch their own TV.

2. The subject should be a burning and actual problem such as: foreign labour, protection against water pollution of lakes and rivers, migration from the country (into the towns), development help for the nations undergoing rapid social change, supply of arms, etc.

3. The preacher should be a great christian (not necessarily a clergyman) who by his whole thinking and attitude proves to have his responsibility and authority through the word of God.

A man whose life is rooted in Christ's life. Asked what he thought the life of Jesus was, Vitezslav Gardavsky, the Czech marxist philosopher (!) said: "Christ's life is the model of a life which requests from man a responsible decision, where in fierce spiritual struggle he penetrates to the roots of his very existence, but finds a new future in which he is more than what he used to be". Gardavsky concludes: "The world would be poor without the lives of such christians". If, even according to this extraordinary marxist, christians do have a special task which nobody else can fulfil, we needn't put our light under a bushel (Matth. 5,14). As we are the salt of the earth (Matth. 5, 13), we must be mingled with the soup of this world. Perhaps the very seasoning of this salt is that the shock troops grappling with heavy stumbling blocks are people of great faith, perhaps not so much the church as such, but individual christians carrying on a struggle which very often starts as a solitary battle which later on will mould a nation's public opinion. People have a short memory: they tend to forget that so many principles, now publicly approved, have had to be carried-through by christians first.

Today, nobody wishes a total rupture in personal and cultural contacts between East and West. Everyone realizes that last year's liberal development in Czechoslovakia would have been impossible without confrontation with western thinking. Force has been applied to crush the spirit of liberty and humanity but in truth, it has only postponed, and not extinguished, an inexorable development in that country. The majority of people have understood this and want to maintain the links with the Czechs in order to help them. But hardly five, years ago only very few christians pulled their weight in improving East and West contacts, and they were looked upon as having left wing tendencies. Equally, not so long ago, some "funny" christians were criticizing the Americans in Vietnam, whilst nowadays the whole press takes an altogether different attitude.

By now it should have become clear that the voice, competently to be raised on the National Day of Thanksgiving, Prayer and Repentance should be a prophetic voice. Prophets are by no means fortune tellers, though indeed they may have their views and ideas concerning the future. Their task is not so much revealing the future. Prophets could really be defined as God's holy critics. If you read your Bible you know that they never back present conditions and never leave things as they are. There were never many prophets, neither are there many today, but there are always some. It would be a real day of repentance, if on the third Sunday in September, a prophet were asked to challenge the nation.

Marcel Dietler

COMMENT

A DIFFICULT CHOICE

The Federal Council has approved the Military Department's proposal of retaining the "Corsair" and the "Fiat". out of the nine planes under study for the replacement of the airforce's "Venoms". These planes, 216 of them, were definitely ageing. They had already been considered obsolete in Britain's airforce about a decade ago. That the Swiss have kept them for so long is due to the particular terrain they have to defend which calls for a high degree of manoeuvrability. The "Venoms" were satisfactory in this respect. But they are now finally going to be phased out, and ought to have disappeared by 1975. By that date, they will be distinctly older than their pilots, an indication that they really have been used to the maximum!

Our military experts have been making their choice for a new jet since 1966. Out of an initial spread of 22 aircraft, they kept only nine and submitted them to the most rigorous evaluation. The choice of the "Corsair" and the "Fiat" emerged as a result of these studies, which are henceforth going to be concentrated on these sole two planes. The final choice will be made in the first semester of next year. M. Gnaegi, head of the Federal Military Department, has however not completely ruled out the chances of adoption of the Anglo-French "Jaguar" or the French "Milan", the latter plane being a derived version of the "Mirage V", the plane embargoed by the French and claimed by the Israelis for two years.

The "Corsair" is an American-built aircraft. It is subsonic and designed for ground support missions. Over two hundred of them have already been built and used conclusively in Vietnam. They can defend themselves, with air-to-air missiles against faster interceptors. The "Fiat" is a similar type of aircraft, a little less sophisticated but cheaper. It flies slowly, carries a heavy load of bombs and is also intended for ground support.

Choosing the plane on which the country's air defence will rely for the next decade appears to be a complicated job — at any rate, more so than choosing a family car! The weight and cost of such a choice means that it must be, to the highest possible degree of probability, the "right one". This means that, in total unreliance of their feelings, the experts compile the manifold characteristics of an aircraft as well as all the specifications of our airforce, quantify this information, process it, feed it in computers and get the answers printed on rolls of computer paper.

The choice is particularly difficult in the case of the Swiss airforce because there is to date no single plane which

satisfies entirely its specifications. This has nothing to do with Swiss perfectionism. All planes must be modified in one way or another, in order to satisfy the particular conditions in which they will operate. Our airfields, for instance, are all very short and hemmed in deep valleys. This calls for steep descents and this means sturdy undercarriages and powerful brakes. Caverns have been hewn out of the Alps to protect the airforce's fleet from any surprise attacks. This means that the planes need the dimensions and the "peripherals" allowing them to be maintained in these caverns. In all cases, elements must be changed on a model. These modifications lead to others which not only can lead to considerable costs but actually change the flying characteristics of an aircraft. If strengthening the undercarriage of a particular version calls for an enlarged wheel-housing which cannot be achieved without displacing the petrol tank, which in turn involves a change of the shape of the wing or the weight distribution with corresponding changes in flying behaviour, then our experts might want to examine another aircraft.

Similar problems led to drastic and unexpected increases in the cost of the Swiss-built "Mirages". 828 million francs were initially voted for the construction under licence of a 100 of these planes, now 1,200 million are to be spent for only 57.

The Swiss government has been very careful in preventing a similar occurrence with the new projected planes. A motion by National Councillor Fulgrer had initially been adopted. It separated the process of "acquisition" of an aircraft (or its licence) from its evaluation, modification and development. In order to be absolutely sure of the costs involved in the necessary modifications performed on an acquired version, M. Fulgrer suggested that two units of each of the two selected versions be bought, modified in Swiss workshops, evaluated and be definitely bought in quantity only at this stage.

The trouble with this course, which now has been abandoned, was that it took rather too long. An estimated three years would have been needed to adapt the individual planes to Swiss requirements. Then only could a series have been launched and the airforce would have been only supplied with its new plane in the early '80s.

The need is for a new aircraft by 1974-75; this precludes home-developments such as those undertaken on the "Mirage 111 S". Although no firm decision has yet been made as to whether the "Corsairs" or "Fiats" are going to be bought ready-made or built under license, the most probable course is going to be, in view of the airforce's hurry to be re-equipped, to submit the modifications to the constructors. Both "Corsairs" and "Fiats" are now going to be intensively

tested, the changes rigorously evaluated, so that the Federal Council will be voting the 1,300 million francs set aside for new aircraft equipment between 1970 and 1974 with a stronger assurance that money is not going to be wasted through unforeseen expenses or technical incompetence as could have been possible in 1961, when the "Mirages" came into the scene.

The Federal Council started by being almost neurotically careful at not repeating the "Mirage-Affair" in adopting the proposals of the Fulgrer report. Now, hard-pressed by time it is prepared to take the risk of a paper evaluation. A diminutive risk in any case.

SWISS NEWS

(Unless otherwise stated, all the following news items have been received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

JACQUES PICCARD'S SUBMARINE GLIDE

Jacques Piccard, the Swiss submarine expert after having drifted in a mesoscaph of his design along the Gulf Stream for a month, made the following report to the "Agence Télégraphique Suisse".

"The Grumman-Piccard expedition has come to an end at the expected time. The mesoscaph submerged south of Florida and reappeared on the surface off the coast of Nova Scotia, some 2,700 kilometres to the North and thirty days later. Average speed was 2 knots and peak speed was 4 knots. The craft cruised at a mean depth of 250 metres, making five trial dives of 570 metres and reaching the sea-bed five times. It was pushed out of the Gulf Stream by currents on only one occasion.

Over five million measurements have been performed. These included recordings of the temperature of the Gulf Stream, the salinity of its waters, their depth and the generation of submarine noises. Over a million explosions were detonated by the accompanying ship on the surface and their shock waves recorded on tape. The gravitational pull of the earth was measured continuously over 100 kilometres and the intensity of submarine light traced for 500 kilometres. Water was sampled several times a day for its chlorophyll and mineral content.

Hundred of hours were spent by the crew in observing what was happening outside. The crew discovered numerous kinds of unknown planktons. It took thousands of stereoscopic and normal snapshots which will be analysed in the oceanographical laboratories of the Grumman Corporation and the U.S. Navy during the next months.

A number of "deep scattering layers" were directly observed. The fauna was not as rich as expected,

although a number of large sharks were seen, as well as numerous banks of tunas and planktons. The craft glided in ideal conditions close above the sea-bed and the crew could observe its usual indwellers, sea-urchins, anemones, shrimps, crabs (some of them of impressive size) rays and many kinds of fish.

The crew of six consisted of one NASA engineer, one U.S. Navy, one Royal Navy and one Grumman Corp. oceanographer, Jacques Piccard from Lausanne and Erwin Aebersold from Geneva. It lived through those thirty days in complete harmony and isolation from the outside world, their only link with it being half-hourly routine messages with the accompanying ship above".

THE APRICOTS OF VALAIS

Valais' overabundant apricot production is one of Switzerland's ever-recurring problems. This year's pick was plethoric: total production amounted to ten thousand tons of apricots! Three thousand tons had to be picked in a single week, because a sudden heat-wave had precipitated the fruits' ripening. However fond of these golden fruits the Swiss might be, they could not absorb them in such quantities in good time. Fifteen hundred tons had therefore to be stored in refrigerated installations. The villagers of Valais set up stalls on the Canton's main roads to sell apricots to motorists. Their price was 10 centimes a kilogram cheaper than what the shops had to offer, first picks costing 1 franc 85 a kilogram and apricots for making jam, 1 franc a kilogram.

The apricot producers decided to storm the country's number 1 market, Zurich. A hundred pretty girls dressed in lively costumes arrived in Zurich, toting a huge red arrow decorated with apricots, and were warmly greeted by brass bands, representatives of consumer organisations and the Mayor, Dr. S. Widmer. The colourful heralds of Valais' golden fruits dispersed along the Bahnhofstrasse and, dipping in their bounteous baskets, distributed 3 tons of apricots to the glutinous crowd. This generosity was accompanied by the flourishes of the brass bands. When the operation was over, Bahnhofstrasse was covered by a thick layer of apricot stones. A banquet was offered to the apricot delegation. The president of the Great Council was among the official guests, so were the president of the Fruit Union of Valais and the director of propaganda for Valais' agricultural products.

RING OUT WILD BELLS — LATER

Church bells in Zurich may not be rung before seven o'clock in the morning, under an amendment made by the city council to its noise regulations.