

constitution, no demonstrations? We cannot accept the present situation, because to do so would be to accept being less than human, and the government has left no peaceful way to change open. The only way a violent dictatorship has left to us is the way of revolution. This is the rightful self-defence of a people desperate under oppression—the right to fight for its life.

Both *Populorum Progressio* and the Medellín Document on Peace affirm that revolutions are no more than the consequence of desperate situations of oppression, and this is particularly true of Latin America. We cannot sit back with our arms folded in the face of the present situation in Brazil: the people have a right to wage a just war on oppression—a right fully recognized by theology. There is no other way out. So, driven by love for our brothers, by our evangelical understanding of truth, justice and freedom, conscious of our mission as a Church and as Christians—whether laymen, priests or religious—we are responding to the need to work with the people for their liberation, running the risks this entails in the climate of terrorism created by our violent military dictatorship. In this, we are following the course mapped out by St Paul: 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5, 1).

The Concilium World Congress: Impressions and Reflections by Cornelius Ernst, O.P.

There had been a derailment ahead of us at Dover, so I was late arriving in Brussels. More delay getting a taxi, because I couldn't quite bring myself to use my elbows like everybody else; the hotel room booked for me, I calculated, would cost about £5 10s. a night, so unless I stopped eating or found another hotel I should have to return home well before the Congress ended. At last the Congress hall itself: the Palais de Congrès, past the illuminated fountains of the Mont des Arts and a small knot of cameramen, timidly into the Salle Albert 1^{er}—and it really hit one then: the long, high swooping hall, with what must have been a thousand people in it, the brilliant glare of the television lights reflected from the huge black and white poster at the back of the stage, bearing the words in English—

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Schillebeeckx was speaking in French from the rostrum; his voice resonated effortlessly from the splendid amplification system, though soon one became aware of a counterpoint of high-pitched chirp and chatter from the badly adjusted earphones of theologians unaccustomed to the use of simultaneous-translation equipment; this was to form an accompaniment throughout the Congress. Photographers crawled and flashed unceasingly over the stage; from time to time the television cameras swivelled and turned their black snouts on the audience. I would return to England the next day, I decided; no, no, not this, not this.

More speeches and addresses (Rahner, Suenens); there must have been three hours of them, though fortunately I had missed the first two. Then the audience erupted into the corridor, recognitions and identifications, an invitation to join a select group of some hundred and fifty people drinking whisky and champagne; I clutched my rich blue folder (provided by Sabena Airways and containing Congress documents) to me nervously. Gossip; a new periodical said to be coming out soon to challenge *Concilium*, under the names of H. U. von Balthasar, Ratzinger and Le Guillou. The process of linguistic devaluation gathered way, as everyone began to speak or to listen to another language than his own.

I could go on endlessly registering these impressions, but let me bring them to an end with an account of my return to England. The Dutch policeman looking at my passport had shouted at me, 'Ah, you have been at the Congress!', laughing uproariously. A still clear dawn at Harwich; London bright, even radiant, as I passed Hyde Park on my way after years of postponement to look at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I cannot describe my refreshment of spirit at finding myself in the presence of such an abundant display of creative human sensibility and vitality, delicate, warm, precisely felt at the craftsman's fingertips; a demonstration of the sense of man's humanity more utterly convincing than the volumes of devalued rhetoric poured out about Man for the six past days. A museum, yes, but a pledge incarnate in stone, ivory, wood, paint, silk, porcelain of the potentiality of the human spirit. A friendly museum, with an excellent, reasonably cheap restaurant and a homely, rather casual quadrangle where one could sit in the soft sun.

The impressions as I have recorded them clearly carry a valuation with them, and imply general views of the nature of theology—or at any rate of how it might most profitably be practised—and of the role of theologians in the Church today. The Congress, it became clear by the first morning, had been conceived of as an exercise in ecclesiastical politics, planned as an Event, to put pressure on Church authorities. There was the matter of the Resolutions. As far as I could make out, none of those invited to the Congress had been warned that the main purpose of the Congress was to discuss and

corporately proclaim resolutions which had been prepared in advance by the organizers. As the participants gradually became aware of this design, resistance built up and became vocal; charges of manipulation and even dishonesty were made at the plenary session that evening. At various times some of the chief organizers of the Congress made replies to these charges, replies of extraordinary naivety. There can be no doubt that the affair of the resolutions poisoned the Congress from the start; there was a feeling of resentment at having travelled often considerable distances to a theological congress to find, only after getting there, that casting a vote was supposed to be one's chief contribution. Eventually a vote had to be taken on whether there should be resolutions at all; and this was accepted only on the condition that there should be a qualifying preamble and that the resolutions themselves should be reduced in number and reconstructed by the three speakers appointed for each day. I won't attempt to describe the fantastic muddle and seemingly endless debate over procedure which led to this result. But I had better make it clear at this point that of the twelve 'official' resolutions and the four supplementary resolutions from the floor I voted for all but one official resolution and one supplementary resolution, where I abstained in each case; the latter of these two did not get its required two-thirds majority and so did not become a resolution of the Congress. However, it should be borne in mind that the Congress was not in fact as theologically homogeneous as even the qualifying preamble to the resolution might suggest. Apart from the fairly consistent minority which voted against all the resolutions, many of those who voted in favour did so with some discomfort.

I shall try to give some account of my own discomfort, without pretending that it was representative. There was a theory behind the design of the organizers, a theory which shows itself fairly inconspicuously in the final resolutions. It is a theory about the practical character of theology, that it has an essential function as a critique of society, including the society of the Church. It isn't necessary to share or even be familiar with the views of the Frankfurt school of sociology in order to assent to this view of theology. But a theory of theology which insists on its character as critical praxis has to be judged at least in part by its own actual praxis; and the praxis of this Congress left me deeply dissatisfied. In part the praxis disclosed an assessment of how to insert Christianity critically into common consciousness—by way of the communications media—which seems to me at the very least naive. One's own experience, one's own sense of how the world is, how human consciousness is deeply shifting and taking new shape, is always limited; but I confess that to my sense the world isn't likely to take very seriously a message communicated in such a medium, so glossily packaged. European television viewers might not have

known in detail that the Concilium organizers were paying over ten pounds a night for their hotel bed and breakfast (each organizer's total expenses for the Congress would have paid for another nun from Kerala), but they probably had a sense that they were being offered something 'important'—so important that the organizing secretary had deliberately chosen expensive hotels for the participants.

Another aspect of the praxis needs to be commented on, if it is to be taken seriously at all. Provision was in fact made for worship at this Christian theological congress: a quarter of an hour at the beginning of each week-day session, and a eucharistic celebration on the Sunday. The week-day worship in fact consisted of what might generously be called a homily, less generously just another paper. The eucharistic session, delayed for an hour by the demands of television, was dominated by a choir of Belgian school-children singing bouncy tunes, assisted by a jazz group and rhythmic hand-clapping (with some diffidence or open hostility) from the largely middle-aged congregation-audience of theologians. Perhaps it looked different on the television screens.

Gregory Baum was very much to the point, it seemed to me, when he drew attention in our working group to the difference in social status between theologians at the Congress. Many of the Continental theologians, especially the Germans, enjoyed all the status of established University connections; but this is hardly true of the majority of Catholic theologians today. It is a little quaint that the critico-practical theory of theology is largely a product of German universities; perhaps this is another version of ideological compensation for reality.

But to speak of 'reality' is to point to what in my sense of things was most problematic about this Congress. One of the most interesting disguises in which the problem showed itself was the repeated appeal, especially in my working group, to leave abstractions and concentrate on the concrete. Now 'concrete' of course is one of the most abstract of words; scholastically, it is a *nomen secundae intentionis*, a way of talking about talking, and one can be fairly certain when complaints are being made about abstractness and appeals for concreteness that something has gone wrong with the whole process of communication. As in this case, the people who make the appeals seem to be confident that they know where the concrete is to be found; one of the examples suggested in our group was clerical celibacy. But one of the difficulties about the concrete, as any reader of Coleridge or Leavis will know, is that it cannot be determined in advance: that it needs a patient labour of reflection, suggestion and attentiveness to discover—the concrete can't be pointed to, it has to be constructed. As a matter of fact, the question of clerical celibacy is a particularly good example, as the inadequacies of average discussions show quite painfully. Presumably what is really being expressed in appeals for the concrete is some

sense that what is being said doesn't *connect*, that it doesn't issue from and offer a share in some lived and discriminated experience. What makes things even more difficult is that the people who appeal for concreteness frequently don't want genuine concreteness at all, and resist any attempt to search for it, rejecting it angrily and impatiently as an evasion.

In one of the resolutions or 'guide-lines' in their final form there appears a comprehensive (so comprehensive as to be almost empty) enumeration of the factors in 'society' which theology must take into account: 'sciences, arts, literature and religions'. Sweeping though this enumeration may be, I like to take some credit for it, since it does represent some advance over the original restriction to 'human sciences'. The point to be made is that the sort of concreteness achieved and disclosed by a poem or a novel is often disconcerting, shocking—'scandalous'—in ways which theology needs to be too. It provides a convenient point of reference for discussions about the character of theology as critique of society; since these discussions often display a marked similarity to discussions about commitment in literature or even 'socialist realism'. If I say I am dubious of the value of a theological critique of society which isn't enforced by the discriminated pressure of a felt and lived experience, I doubtless lay myself open to charges of élitism; but I should, I think, be in good company, among those whose connexion with their fellowmen needn't always be mediated, and is sometimes restricted, by the schematisms of categorical pronouncement, 'science' in the sense of *Wissenschaft*.

If this will have to do as a rather hesitant reflection on some of the presuppositions about theology active at the Congress, something must finally be said about the sort of pressures which brought the Congress into being at all. Even if one didn't care for the style in which affairs were conducted, should one complain about an assembly of theologians meeting to claim a special place in the life of the Church? Most theologians who have at any time been described as 'progressive' have had to face at least once intervention from ecclesiastical authority in a style far more depressing than anything even the Congress was guilty of—suspicious, ill-informed, clandestine, threatening. Of course this kind of intervention doesn't characterize every relationship between authority and theologians everywhere; but instances of it are common enough to make it impossible to shrug them off as merely exceptional. Isn't there a case to be made for something like a Trades Union of theologians, which might protect their legitimate interests and even issue a collective manifesto?

It seems to me that something of this sort, however distasteful it may be from some points of view, may have to be accepted so long as theologians and ecclesiastical authorities live in worlds so far apart from each other as they now do, worlds of human and

Christian experience apart. It is still possible for a bishop to define his ecclesial consciousness by an *a priori* which excludes from it ingredients felt to be part of the ordinary texture of human life by many lay people and theologians; it is perfectly possible for a theologian to put an exaggerated value on such ingredients and make them part of his working definition of the *humanum* (to use Schillebeeckx's term), a *humanum* endorsed in Jesus Christ. While this continues to be the case, presuppositions, perspectives, the whole feel and texture of life, must continue to differ and conflicts must arise; perhaps these conflicts need to be institutionalized and ritualized. I confess that I do not find this prospect pleasing, in part at least because I cannot take theologians (as distinct from their theology) all that seriously. Certainly if theologians are to form associations to promote 'openness' in the Church, they will have to do so on behalf of the Church as a whole and not just on their own behalf. What I should regret would be if such ritualized conflict merely intensified an obsession with authority in the Church which has marked Roman Catholicism for centuries: a mystique of the monarchical principle countered by a mystique of the democratic principle. I do not believe Christianity is about authority.

A Contribution to Christian Materialism

by John Allcock

The debate between Christians and Marxists has been under way now for more than a decade. Christians are admitting that they have in the past been too wrapped up in the institutional forms of religion, and that they have perhaps been seduced from the Gospel by the success of the institutional Church. Marxists, in similar vein, admit that they have in turn been too ready to castigate the outward forms of religious organization, and too little prepared to give consideration to the central message of the Gospels and the prophets. Here too the exigencies of party organization have brought about the same displacement of goals found in the Church. Each declares that the other has far more to offer than they had previously either suspected or been prepared to admit.¹ The unhappy feature of the Christian/Marxist dialogue is that in ten years or so

¹Examples of this kind of interchange are readily available in a number of sources. See, for example, J. Klugmann and P. Oestreicher (eds.), *What Kind of Revolution? A Christian-Communist Dialogue*, Panther Books, 1968.