

And so we are back at the woodcut, Piers plowing. There'd as well have been another reproduction on the rear cover, since the poem ends with a beginning: a fresh search for Piers. It is not too much to hope that Vatican II will end with *its* doors open and a new search begun.

A Consultation and a Congress

I. RELIGION AND TELEVISION, AT CAMBRIDGE

Last September a Consultation on *Religion in Television* was held at Cambridge under the auspices of the Independent Television Authority. It was the second such consultation, the first having been held in Oxford in the summer of 1961. There were this year at Cambridge over a hundred delegates; they were mostly producers of ITV religious programmes and the numerous ministers of every denomination who act as religious advisers either to the Authority itself or to the various programme companies. The very holding of such a Consultation gives the lie to those who imagine that no serious thought is given to this aspect of television, and who think that somehow religious programmes just happen in a kind of muddled parsonic way. It was more convincing still to have been present and to have seen the energetic desire of all those engaged in the job to do something worth while, and the exacting self-criticism to which they subjected themselves. Why then do the religious programmes leave so much to be desired?

The answer is surely that the problem of communicating religious truth by means of a mass medium to a multi-denominational, and largely pagan, country is a great deal more difficult than the arm-chair critic allows. The Bishop of Woolwich, who read a paper during the proceedings, spoke of the difference between what he called (using Tillich's language) the 'manifest' church and the 'latent' church, by which he meant the 80 per cent of the population who, even when Christian in name, have little or no sympathy with the churches, whose mind is cast in a secularist and humanistic mould, hostile to 'religion', to the metaphysical, the supernatural, the mythological. He suggested that the purpose of religious programmes should be not so much to convert the members of the latent church to the manifest church, which must always be a minority group acting as leaven in the mass, but to speak to the latent church in its own language, and to be content to bring it closer, without conscious commitment to Christ, to the kingdom of God. The formula seems to me to be as full of ambiguities and consequent confusions of thought as *Honest to God*, but it has the merit of

pointing the difficulty I have just mentioned. What can television do with religious programmes when the audience (those five, six or seven amorphous millions who watch the Sunday afternoon religious programmes) is compact of all the ambivalences aptly enough expressed by the Bishop's own ambiguities; and when the ambiguities at a more conscious theological level beset the manifold denominational voices directed into the mike?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in a television interview with Kenneth Harris specially recorded for the Consultation, had a rather different recommendation. Christians must show their faith in an authoritative way, but at the same time they must put themselves alongside of the people who do not share this faith, and make it plain that Christians too find it all very baffling, and suffer doubts and anxieties; only, one has then to remember the millions watching and realise that such remarks may create distress and incomprehension in simpler souls; they must be reassured by the broadcaster's throwing in affirmative assertions of his Christian confidence. The Archbishop's pastoral concern was manifest and proper, but I think his approach did not win much support at the Consultation. There was too much suggestion in it of a kind of make-believe sharing in doubt, a hunting with the dogmatic hounds once a decent gesture had been made of running with the humanist hare. It is just this kind of attempt to have it both ways that makes much religious broadcasting suspect. No doubt the Archbishop's formulation, made in the quick give and take of the interview, did less than justice to the balance he was seeking to keep; but it brings out forcibly enough the dilemma of every broadcaster where serious issues are raised—how to talk turkey for strong digestions, yet mince it small at the same time for weak. There is no easy solution.

Dr Dillistone, in a fascinating paper on the use of symbolism, confronted us with yet another difficulty, the lack of any commonly accepted system of symbols in contemporary society.

Must we then despair of religion on television? That was certainly not the mood of those present. But we must look for ways of a new break-through. Certain things need to be said. If Christianity is to carry conviction it must come from men who are at once deeply convinced of the importance of what they are saying and immensely sensitive to everything in the human condition. Propaganda, in the sense of trying to sell the Church as something you cannot get on without, or as a panacea for pain and distress, is neither useful nor honest; not useful because it fails to do justice to the complexities of human life and human doubt; not honest because it substitutes for real concern for human need a meretricious selling-point by which to recommend wares that have become, all too often, shop-soiled by long storage.

The temptation to propaganda programmes is variously assisted by the privileged position that religion holds in the television scheme of things. By being insulated from the contamination of commercial advertisements (no religious programme may contain, or be immediately preceded or followed by advertisement), religion is automatically put into a world of unreality; for the

bread-and-butter reality of ITV is that it lives by advertisement. By being made the preserve of 'mainstream Christianity' religious programmes, under the patronage of the official churches, are made suspect from the word go of toeing a party line and of making sure that, whatever its showing, the 'Church must win'; indeed the very appearance of a clerical collar on the screen becomes a warning sign of bumbledom to follow. By being 'slotted' into the closed period on Sunday evenings between 6.15 and 7.25 when, to all intents and purposes, no other type of programme may be shown, religious programmes are preserved from the urgency of having to enter into competition with other programmes, and can get away (how often they do!) with murder. All this sheltering of religion (if not in dim Gothic buildings, at least in an ecclesiastical recess of time) was seriously called in question at the Consultation; and, as it seems to me, properly so. It is part of the great debate of our time; whether the Church is to safeguard its inherited possessions and live on in siege, or to risk all by blazing new ways through a hostile world which will accord it no privileges but will respect whatever strength it shows.

The danger that its privileged position puts Christianity into is that we come to confuse genuine religious television with ecclesiastical performances on television. But genuine religious broadcasting should not be confused with clerisy; it need not even be confined to what is specifically Christian. It should deal with the greatest themes of human life, themes of fundamental concern to atheists, agnostics and Christians alike. And in doing this it must observe the conditions proper to the medium in which it is offered so immense an opportunity.

Let me suggest some of these conditions. The first is that it should respect the essentially visual character of the medium. And if the objection is raised that Christianity is the doctrine of the Word, we must remember that the Word was made flesh and is manifest sacramentally in the people of God. But then, it may be further objected, the Christian sacraments, at their sharpest focus, should be subject to the rule of the *arcantum*; they are not to be divulged to wholesale pagan audiences. Certainly, let us reply, their inner reality is hidden; but that is sufficiently masked already by the 'mystery' of the outward gesture, nor are we to forget that the mystery gesture is intended not only to conceal, but also to reveal. To those to whom God gives it to penetrate let it not be denied by God's ministers. Or shall it be objected that the Christian religion demands participation, the very antithesis to the detached viewing of the television public? Surely we have lost sight of the full dimensions of the Body of Christ if we restrict it to the possibilities of spatial contact, and deny that men may be reached in every corner of the universe by every thread, even the most electronic, of its fabric. Yes, but, the objection goes on, participation is to be personal, an encounter of person with person; and the television box eliminates just this encounter. This is the queerest objection of all, for it confuses persons with their physical embodiment. I believe that television, used to the maximum of its visual impact, can serve as an enlargement of a person's projectional range in a way no less limited (and as limited) as any other humanly limited embodiment of person—

the voice, the caress, the physical presence.

The second condition of religious television is that it should be technically well produced. The question arose, at the Consultation, whether the producer must necessarily be a committed Christian (some of them are not). And surely the right answer was given; that providing he handles his material with sympathy and honesty, providing he is not hostile and biassed, it is enough that he should be master of his trade. The parallel springs to mind of Matisse and Le Corbusier who by their artistic integrity have been able to build better churches to the glory of God than many of their most Christianly conformist contemporaries.

The third condition is that religious broadcasting should address itself to everything in a man. So much of it is comforting and exhortatory. There is room for that; but if it becomes only that, as if religion were only for hospitals and approved schools, it becomes a blasphemy against God in his creation. The attitude of many who listen to religious broadcasts has recently been described as follows: 'Many of them are anticlerical because they identify clerisy with authoritarianism. They are ready to accept the responsibility of their own search for meaning and truth . . . In Jung's words, "they have heard enough about guilt and sin . . . and want to learn to reconcile themselves with their own nature and to love the enemy in their own hearts". They want to say "yes" to life as a whole.' (*The Honest to God Debate*, by John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards, p. 42.) Religious television has indeed the need to remind men of their guilt and limitation; but does it often enough take account of men's achievements and thank God for man's being in the image of his Creator? Does it say 'Yes' to life as a whole?

In practice the most effective television is found not in discussions that form so large a part of the present religious TV diet, discussions that are never allowed to become convincingly controversial, nor to press beyond the easiest question and reply; it is found in dramatic constructions that communicate far more than they say. Of course the difficulty is that dramatic productions are immensely costly, and discussion is cheap. And the difficulty about discussions, at any worth-while level, is that they are too abstract for a mass audience. These are practical restrictions that one has to accept, but a practical answer seems to be: spend less time on specifically religious programmes in the 'slot'; they only serve to bring religion into disrepute; concentrate upon finding Christians who will provide (as script writers, actors, producers) ordinary programmes throughout the week shot through with religious and Christian values; confine the majority of discussions to educational hours where they can be developed at reasonable depth for a selective audience. As for Church services and even Epilogues, let them continue but with far more attention to their visual presentation; not so much as substitute acts of worship for those who cannot go to Church (though this is a useful function) but as introducing the outsider to the worshipping activity of the people of God; nor should the ecumenical value of these programmes be forgotten; by them separated Christians are learning

to discover in one another not enemies and rivals but separated brothers with a common heritage to which they have brought their own human enrichments.

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II. CATHOLIC SOCIAL WORKERS, AT NIJMEGEN

The Tenth World Congress of the Catholic International Union for Social Service was held at Nijmegen from August 23rd to 31st 1963. Preparations for the Congress had continued over the preceding two years, so that it was with long-stretched but eager anticipation that the participants arrived at Nijmegen on the Friday. The Congress opened on the Saturday morning with a splendid gathering of social workers and administrators, and teachers in schools of social work from forty-two nations. A telegram of good wishes was received from the Holy Father, to whom the Congress united in sending a message of affection and loyal greetings. The Dutch hierarchy, Government and the Municipality of Nijmegen were represented on the platform and welcomed by Professor Georges Hahn, the President of C.I.U.S.S.

The theme of the Congress was 'Social Service and Human Equilibrium' and an impressive programme had been planned to view this subject from many angles. Eight lectures were given in the plenary sessions and participants were divided into twelve main study groups, to work on the different aspects of the contribution social work could make to human equilibrium. These aspects fell into three main categories: social work and the problems of rapidly developing countries; social work and personal equilibrium; and the problems of specialised social work. As there were about 1200 participants, each main group had to be divided into sub-groups to facilitate discussion. The work of preparing material had been allotted to various different national groups. The British Guild of Catholic Professional Social Workers, which is affiliated to C.I.U.S.S., had been responsible for the material on medical social work, and Miss Z. T. Butrym, an English medical social worker and lecturer in social casework in the Applied Social Studies course at the London School of Economics, was leader for the study group on medical social work. A small but active group of Guild members were at the Congress and were spread among several different study groups, as well as the medical social work group.

The preparation and organisation of an international congress of this size is a formidable task. The Dutch Committee of C.I.U.S.S. are to be warmly congratulated on the way they accepted this challenge and saw it through. The language problem alone would have baffled a less enthusiastic and multilingual group than the Dutch. We were told that, although English and French were to have been the working languages (and were to a certain extent), the Dutch members had pleaded to widen the language range so as to make it possible for a more truly international group to meet together. Simultaneous translation into five languages (Dutch, French, English, Spanish and German) was provided