

Brussels Theology Congress Said Little New

The author of this analysis of the international theology congress held in Brussels is a Canadian theologian and ecumenist on the faculty of St. Michael's College, Toronto. He is the author of several theological works and was a special lecturer at the theology congress.

By **FATHER GREGORY BAUM**

Brussels, Belgium —(NC)— The guidelines, or resolutions, approved by the international theological congress held here said nothing that has not been said — sometimes even better — by the Second Vatican Council.

An Analysis

They were rather bland statements of what the great majority of Catholic theologians simply take for granted.

For those who expected the congress to become a major ecclesiastical event, it may well have been a major disappointment.

The theologian congress sponsored by the Dutch-based international journal Concilium, was held here Sept. 12-17, with 250 theologians from all parts of the world attending. Inevitably, Europe and North America were better represented than the East and the Third World.

The congress also was attended by about 600 observers, clerical and lay, and carefully followed by journalists, radio reporters and television crews.

The Congress, entitled "The Future of the Church," studied four subjects:

- The function of theology in the Church;
- What is the Christian message?
- The presence of the Church in tomorrow's society;
- Structures of the Church of the future.

Best known among the special lecturers were Fathers Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Hans Kung, Edward Schillebeeckx, and John B. Metz. The North Americans among the special

lecturers were scripture scholar Father Raymond Brown, sociologist Father Andrew Greeley (a Courier-Journal columnist) and this writer.

Since Vatican II, Catholic theology has undergone considerable development. Important for this development was the journal Concilium, which united many theological authors interested in new thought though of diverse tendencies, and reached out to a vast body of readers in many parts of the Church.

At the congress, theologians associated with this development discussed the change that had taken place in their views, examined the results of their various researches, and looked for a significant theological agreement.

Did the congress achieve its aim?

In a certain sense it did. Unfortunately, the presidency had failed to inform the members beforehand that the main practical purpose of the congress was to elaborate resolutions or points of agreement.

When the theologians arrived in Brussels, they were surprised and disappointed that the major effort of the congress was to be spent on this because they had looked forward to a less structured exchange of ideas.

After four days of intense discussion, study, and reviewing of drafts a set of theological guidelines were proposed to the members of the congress and accepted by the majority. What do these guidelines, or resolutions, say? Nothing that has not been said — sometimes even better — by Vatican II.

While the special lectures given at the congress contained interesting, new and sometimes controversial material and consequently stirred up lively discussions, the final guidelines are rather bland statements.

The propositions approved by the Brussels congress insisted that Catholic theology, although responsibly related to the Church's magisterium (teaching authority) is nonetheless a scientific or scholarly endeavor that must be faithful to its own methods.

In this sense, theology is a

free inquiry. Theology, moreover, must be in dialogue with the human and social sciences. The propositions stressed that the Christian message is in need of being rethought and reformulated.

While the ancient creeds retain significance for the Church of today, there is need to listen anew to God's Word addressing the Church in the present and to reformulate the Christian message as the Good News for the contemporary world.

The resolutions in regard to the Church and her future also demanded greater participation of the Christian community in the decisions made by the ecclesiastical government and asked for a new style in the exercise of authority in the Church.

The concrete suggestions made were the revision of the procedure by which Popes, bishops and pastors are chosen and the acceptance of women in the ministries of the Church.

These points were made, with varying degrees of insistence, at Vatican II. One point made at Brussels, however, was new. It is derived from the lecture given by the German theologian Father John B. Metz.

This point insists that the Church's position in society is never neutral. In fact, the ec-

clesiastical government and the faithful, including theologians, are tied into a political and economic system. Because Christians are not normally conscious of this tie and of the influence of this tie on their thought and action, it is imperative that they become aware of it. They must try to discover the socio-political dimension of

ecclesiastical life. To be responsible as Christians in the political order means to examine the political implications and presuppositions of Church institutions and theological thought. Only as we become aware of this hidden dimension will we be able to deal with it as Christians and possibly try to change it.

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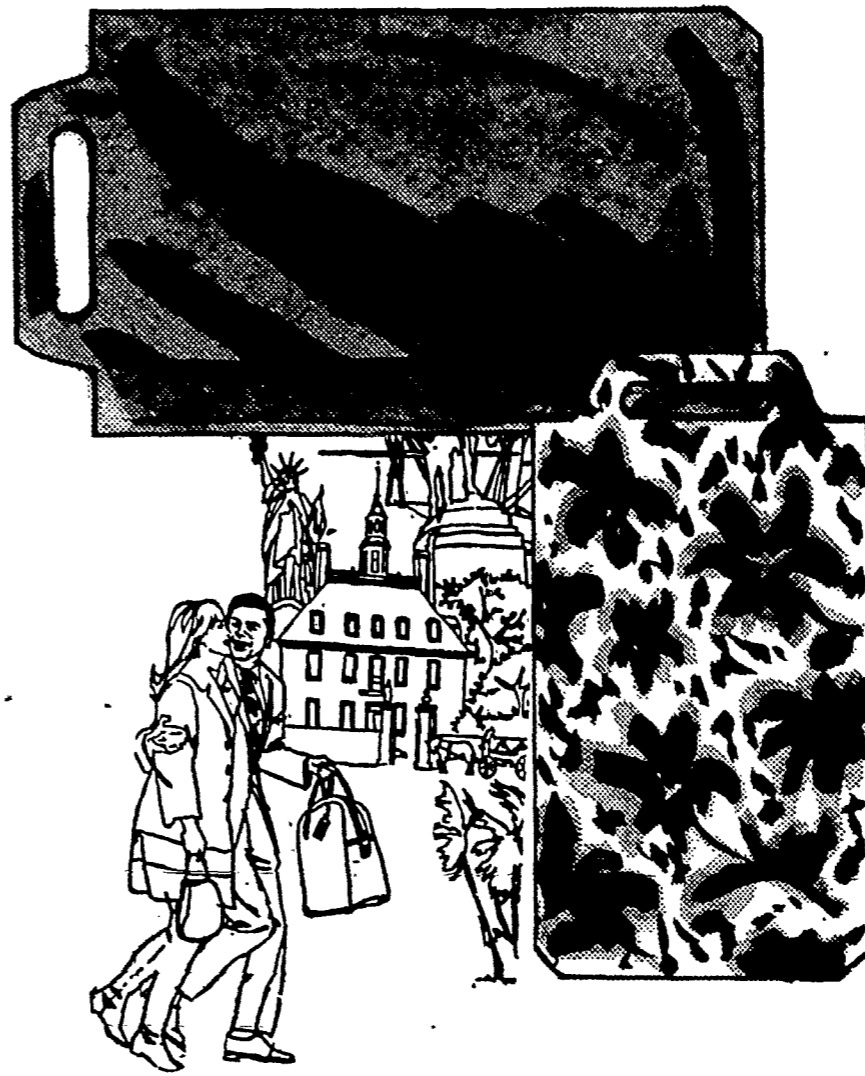
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