

'Slant' and the Language of Revolution

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'The distinctive character of Western European Marxism since 1918 has been its co-emergence and colloquy with various currents of idealism—Dilthey, Croce, Husserl, etc. The same pattern is likely to be repeated in Britain, should an 'Anglo-Marxism' ever finally emerge. The precondition for a transcendence of this dialectic is the reunification of theory and practice in a mass socialist movement. This has not yet been achieved anywhere in Europe' (Perry Anderson, *New Left Review*, 35).

Slant, the journal of the Catholic left in Britain in the 1960s, began publication in 1964 and ended in 1970. Its formation and development were the result of factors both within and outside the Catholic Church. The development of the 'New Left' in Britain seemed to open up an area of potential middle-class radicalisation. After Hungary and Suez in 1956 what appeared to be required was a de-Stalinised, socialist humanism, responsive to the specific conditions of welfare-state capitalism whilst being at the same time internationalist in its perspectives. In the early 1960s the New Left was a political tendency—with all the vagueness which that term implies. It represented a hesitant, exploratory analysis, which was only later to refine its insights into a more rigorous critique of contemporary capitalism.

The early '60s also saw the opening of Vatican *II*, with all the atmosphere of liberalising hopefulness those words are still able to suggest. The Church, so the story goes, was opening its windows for a breath of fresh air. Even those soon to discover that it was the windows not the doors which had been opened, were still caught up in this movement of events which, for a while, promised so much. *Slant* set out to find if it were possible to effect a fusion of these two tendencies. It sought, in its highly intellectualised manner, to capture a minority—a minority which could, perhaps, become a vanguard of sorts.

In Search of an Audience

The minority to which *Slant* addressed itself was the progressive Catholic middle class, the kind of movement which was expressing itself in such organisations as the Newman Association. Vatican *II*, like all such long-awaited revaluations, raised more questions than it answered, but it provoked an air of liberal doubt which *Slant* obviously thought it could make political capital from. The basic theory was that there had never before been a Catholic liberal middle class in England,

it had arisen slowly throughout this century and was now susceptible to a leftward push. The possibilities opened up by the 'new theology' were too far from any proletarian Catholic consciousness to make an endeavour in that direction worthwhile. So the movement, were it to emerge, would be an 'intellectual' one, aimed moreover at a frighteningly amorphous audience. From its beginnings, *Slant* was in danger of succumbing to a spurious ethical agreement, a unity of political intention closetted in the womb of its goodwill, both political and moral. The magazine in fact became more self-critical as it developed, less happy with its early assertions of synthesis. But there is very often a note of cheerful eclecticism in *Slant*, as diverse figures and works are appropriated into this new theoretical amalgam without so much as an apologetic footnote. There is to some extent a parallel here with *New Left Review*: in both cases the very vagueness of the audience aided the use of an uncritical, assimilative style and a self-insulating hermeneutic.

In the issue for February/March 1966, the first issue to reach a wide national audience, the conflicts inherent in the *Slant* enterprise can be seen. I will analyse this issue at length, partly because it was the first 'public' *Slant* and partly because I wish to give some sense of the total impact of at least one issue. The editorial expresses concern that revolution within the Catholic Church may take the form of simply converting it into one huge Liberal Party, 'full of progressive modern efficiency and youthful energy, moving round itself in rapid and increasingly irrelevant circles, cut loose from the real, harder issues of capitalism and the Third World, nuclear violence and brutal cultural impoverishment'. This concern points to a real threat which the spirit of *aggiornamento* within the Church at that time focussed. The editorial then goes on to state the double function which *Slant* has attempted: firstly, a mediation of the ideas of the political left into the Church, and secondly an attempt to constitute itself as an area of exploration of the relations between a theological and a political radicalism. It is at the point where it states the ideas which *Slant* is attempting to mediate that the editorial becomes worrying:

'The ideas of Marx and Sartre, the related insights of existential psychologists like R. D. Laing, the work of Heidegger and Wittgenstein in language and community, of Raymond Williams in communications and culture, unite to form one particular area where the theological contribution can be integral'. In what particular form the ideas of Sartre, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Williams can be said to unite is a question the writer does not broach—he appears to assume a general consensus that the unity has already been effected. 'From this', he says (and we can only assume that the demonstrative pronoun refers to the theoretical unity just mentioned), 'we hope to see emerging the full implications of a Christian radicalism: to show that the Church's commitment to the creation of a fraternal society, its function as the sacrament of a human community, the relations between its liturgy and a common culture, imply a revolutionary socialism'.

Given the unmediated abstraction of the terms the implication could mean anything at all. The 'creation of a fraternal society' is pure rhetoric

here, and the Church's 'function as the sacrament of a human community' conflates too readily the historical and the eschatological.

The use of these phrases points to *Slant's* most debilitating characteristic—a characteristic particularly evident in the earlier issues: a verbal substitutionism often found in theories that articulate an absent movement. Catholic-Marxism was by its own definition a theory without a movement, regarding itself as a depth within the existing socialist movements. Any synthesis which actually resulted would, inevitably, be as much a theoretical area of recruitment as a viable theologico-political position.

Following the editorial there are four substantial articles, along with a few smaller pieces. The first of the articles is 'Charity and commitment' by Brian Wicker. It is a good example of a noticeable tendency of many of the magazine's contributors: the use of 'creative literature' as a starting-point (and often finishing-point for that matter) for analyses of political, moral and theological issues. Wicker is concerned here with the tension implicit in the relationship between, on the one hand, the Christian imperative of charity, and, on the other, the socialist's need for a commitment which will do more than just dissipate its energies in a kindly personalism. He focuses his analysis through a consideration of, among others, Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and George Orwell. I would add that the article is not as long as this list of citations might suggest. The statements which Wicker teases out of his literary referents are a result of a mode of enquiry which clearly owes a great deal to the criticism of F. R. Leavis, although they lack the early Leavis's rigorous insistence upon a detailed and close examination of texts. This is in part inevitable given the kind of point Wicker wishes to make and the space he has in which to make it. But the tendency to accumulate disparate literary figures as a way of demonstrating one's arguments points to that glib appropriative urge which I mentioned earlier.

If Wicker lacks Leavis's textual rigour, he certainly doesn't lack his moralism. Tentative, even shy, as the moralism is, it expresses a deep personal unease with his own theoretical ability to express his Christian commitment politically. His rather shaky position is made no firmer by the use to which he puts Dickens. Since we are not allowed to judge people subjectively, he says, we will have to judge them objectively—in terms of social roles—just as Dickens judges his characters in terms of their action in the public world, rather than in terms of their own internal drama. Leaving aside the particular literary point being made here (which I think is questionable if not quite simply wrong) we are left with what sounds like a dubious, if sincere, theorisation. The conflict between charity and commitment is by no means the exclusive realm of Christians, of course: it was a problem which preoccupied Brecht artistically all his life and which he never resolved. One issue which it pin-points in this context is the individualised notion of charity which Christians have usually held—a point elaborated very tellingly

elsewhere by Adrian Cunningham, after an apposite quotation from Rosa Luxemburg.¹

The second article in the issue I have been discussing is 'The Glory has departed' by Geoffrey Preston, and whilst being as tentative as Brian Wicker's, it is, if anything, even more apologetic. Preston rightfully scorns the uses to which the idea of the 'anonymous Christian' has been put, but the central movement of his article is an insistence that the Christian has very few certainties left :

'Certainly there are situations to which God has promised his presence, particularly the celebration of the sacraments, over and above his presence in "the least of the brethren", but there can be no certainty that other approved, well-trying avenues of approach to him will in fact give us his presence . . . the crucifixion has put an end to the special holiness of a temple shrine and released God's holiness into the whole world'.

Whilst admiring the candour and self-criticism of this, one is forced to wonder what concrete results will be gained from this new uncertainty. Does the presence of Christ in 'the least of the brethren' actually have a hold upon any meaning here, or is it rather a rhetorical gesture towards undefined community? Given the context in which the phrase occurs, it has a hollow sound to it, echoing previous certainties which have become problematical.

Up to this point of the issue, we have not really been offered anything except good faith, tortured consciences and a hint of better things to come. The analysis is circular, leading back to the need for change rather than forward into suggestions as to what that change might actually be. Adrian Cunningham's article, 'The Continuity of Marx', comes then as an improvement. In his analysis of Marx's account of religion Cunningham is closely concerned with the actual social determinants of religious expression, belief and institutionalised life. What I find noticeable about Cunningham's article at this early stage is his readiness to question the validity of Christianity itself; to enter into Marx's early analysis of religion as a mode of critical enquiry, rather than simply appropriating that analysis into a radical Christian syncretism. By actually raising the issue of, for example, Christianity and the abstract human being, Cunningham at least avoids the casual assumptions made elsewhere that these issues are somehow mysteriously resolved into a

¹See 'The Failure of the Christian Revolution', *Catholics and the Left*, p. 83. The issue of the political quality of Christian charity has also been dealt with, and again in a literary context, by Walter Stein, in articles which appeared in the pages of *New Blackfriars* and *Slant*, and were later to be elaborated in his book *Criticism as Dialogue*. The book takes as its starting-point the socialist version of a tragic perspective as presented by Raymond Williams in *Modern Tragedy*. Stein argues that Williams confuses absolute conditions with irreparable ones, thereby evading the fact that situations of an exploitative or destructive character may be overcome but never obliterated, whether in individual or communal terms. They are an absolute as lived experience.

Stein's attempt at a version of tragedy which will set out from a Christian perspective is both convincing and important. It is a pity that I do not have time to deal with it at greater length, since it demonstrates the dependence of this kind of analysis upon socialist humanism, at the same time that it proves the potential worth of the idea of a depth within existing movements at which Christianity can make a radical contribution.

Catholic-Marxism none too preoccupied with showing us either its social or epistemological base. He develops the analysis further in a later article in an examination of idolatry and the fall as possible areas of a meeting between Christianity and Marxism, a meeting based upon a seeming similarity between the two alternative accounts of man's history.

The other major article is by John Cumming and is entitled 'Garden or wilderness: Georg Lukacs and the novel'.² It is a curious piece of writing in many ways. It is partly a brief explanation of Lukacs's importance, his analysis of the novel and its significance as a *genre*; and partly an apparent explanation of the reasons for Lukacs's relevance to any Catholic-Marxist dialogue. Cumming mentions Lukacs's idealism but seems to assume that it was his major virtue, giving him an edge over the crude Stalinist logic of 'socialist realism'. There is no criticism of Lukacs's schematism, no mention of his tendency to dissolve away specific situations into an absolute totality, no worrying over the potentially frightening consequences of a notion like 'imputed consciousness'. There is an important point at issue here. One would have thought that a Christian would be particularly worried about the way Lukacs's idealism expresses itself, and would have seen how his use of a word like 'totality' can cover, literally, a multitude of sins. Instead we have this:

'However faintly this call for "an adequate presentation of the complete human personality" reflects the ideal of human dignity revealed in the sermon on the mount; however many retrenchments and intellectual crimes there may have been; however tortuous and turgid the means of expression may seem; compassion for the multitude is, in Marxism, the basis of a dialogue into which we cannot refuse to enter'.

If the phraseology of 'compassion for the multitude' takes us back a few centuries, the cleverly loaded syntax is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's tone of weary civic virtue. The passivity of 'cannot refuse to enter' is perhaps the most telling touch.

In fact, the most difficult point to understand is why Cumming assumes that the other side should wish to enter into a dialogue with him, since he is engaged in extracting nuggets from a Marxist tradition, rather than adding anything theoretically to that tradition. 'Compassion for the multitude' suggests a point of dialogue with many organisations that one can think of, but hardly with any Marxist tradition, however authoritarian in character.

Transcending a liberal perspective

An article by Fergus Kerr, entitled 'Christianity and the Liberal Vision', in the June-July 1966 issue, states in a pleasantly lucid form one of the major problems with which *Slant* had to cope:

'The medieval-theological and the liberal-capitalist theories of man are built into whole structures, into institutions and ways of doing things, which shape our lives; but we have reached the stage of being aware of some alternative way of doing things, we have in fact the glimmerings of some alternative understanding of man and society. Perhaps for the

²At this point it is important to note that almost half of the issue has been predominantly literary, either directly or indirectly.

first time we are in a position to shape our institutions to correspond to our theory of man rather than merely to concoct theories to explain and justify societies which have simply “emerged”’.

Kerr bases a great deal of his article on the work of C. B. Macpherson, who had shown how integral possessive individualism was to the liberal vision. Kerr’s suggested alternative is a result of the theoretical admixture of the work of Heidegger and Sartre: the emphasis upon man as relationship, as a process of becoming, as a form of concern. This emphasis is clearly preferable to the liberal one from which Kerr is attempting to direct us; but it is far from adequate in itself.

It is worth remembering here that the article I have been discussing was written at a time when there was a shift in the intellectual universe both of the social sciences and of literary studies away from positivistic and quantitative approaches, a disenchantment with the empirical, Anglo-Saxon tradition fused with an expansion in the use of linguistics in literature and ‘cultural studies’ to produce a heady new climate of cultural analysis. Phenomenologists, Structuralists and Marxists were too often lumped together as a conglomerate ‘revolutionary’ mode of analysis, seldom sifted for idealist or quietistic elements.

If Fergus Kerr’s article is too modestly self-limiting to be accused of these tendencies, Terry Eagleton’s invigoratingly churlish onslaught on the ceremony of benediction certainly is not. ‘Politics and Benediction’ has assumed a near-mythic quality over the years. For those who were watching the progress of *Slant* with annoyed or benevolent contempt, this article was erected into a sort of theoretical totem, marking the spot where the assassination attempt had taken place. Edmund Hill’s outraged defence of benediction was only the tip of the iceberg but it was significant in its tone:

‘I doubt’, said Father Hill, ‘if Mr Eagleton really claims to be speaking with magisterial authority. My basic criticism of him is that he writes with an assertiveness which is only proper to one who does’. Assertive the article certainly was, but then the assimilative capacity of the Church had to be attacked somehow. ‘Politics and Benediction’ at least provoked a real polarisation: most of the Catholics I knew who read it either stopped going to benediction altogether, or started to go twice as often, as a protest against the schematic unfairness of it all.

What the article in fact consists of is a phenomenological description of the significance of mass and benediction. In the mass, Eagleton claims, the bread is symbol and centre of a meaningful human praxis, whereas in benediction it is a reified commodity, alienating as it dominates. A parallel is then drawn between benediction and imperialism on the one hand and the mass and socialism on the other. The word that comes most readily to mind in a description of the article is ‘ingenious’ (that curious adjective which should really be a compliment, yet always manages to sound vaguely insulting). As someone who fell under the spell of both the argument and the rhetoric, I will attempt to define what I now regard as its most dangerous characteristic.

At the end of the article the connection between ‘genuine’ eucharistic experience and socialist society is made explicit:

‘... in eating the bread, I am appropriating the whole community to myself as the source of personal identity... and what my life is for me as reflected in the bread is also what it is for others as located there. The bread, like the material world produced in a truly socialist society, becomes the articulation of genuine interpersonal identity, without distortion. It is towards a political community of this kind that a renewed theology of the eucharist must eventually lead us’.

The obvious point to be made about this analysis is the absence of any objective structure to delimit the *self-generative theorisations*. These *theorisations* can work, on an abstract level, in terms of the mass, because that particular movable ‘community’ might have been tailor-made to fit a Sartrean analysis of inter-relationship. But the analogies go awry, because they take over the unmediated notion of inter-relationship into the socio-economic field. A material world which will become ‘the articulation of genuine interpersonal identity, *without distortion*’ is a post-historical or millennialist dream. Dream, as John Goode has shown in an essay on William Morris,³ can be an integral part of a socialist vision, but only if it is critically aware of itself, and I do not find this awareness in *Politics and benediction*. ‘In a truly socialist society’ is a phrase which ushers in once again a conflated image of historical and eschatological community.

Politics as language

The definition of politics as the ‘grammar of human relationships’⁴ performs a useful function in attempting to move away from the idea of politics simply as a system of control, or as a faction of a pluralist bureaucratic society. At the same time, however, it tends to emphasise inter-relationship at the expense of politico-economic structures, often dovetailing into the position of the Lukacs of *History and Class Consciousness*, where the socialist struggle is viewed as an opposition between the disintegrative rationalism of bourgeois society, on the one hand, and the standpoint on the totality of the proletariat, on the other. The relationship between this position and a reductive idealism needs no emphasis.⁵ Neil Middleton says in the Introduction to the *Manifesto* :

‘The radical feels that what is needed is a fundamental change in the bases of his society—that reform will not cure the ills, but merely smother them until they burst out with new virulence in some other way. He is offering a new society, and it is here that we have to make a careful distinction’.

The seemingly unconscious organicism of that phrase—‘cure the ills’—and the dangerous vagueness of ‘offering a new society’ point once again to an undisciplined appropriation of revolutionary traditions, an over-emphasis upon society as the locus of meanings, at the expense of an equally important emphasis upon the brute, material struggles of

³‘William Morris and the Dream of Revolution’ in *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, Methuen, 1971.

⁴*Catholics and the Left*, p. ix.

⁵But see Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘The Marxism of the Early Lukacs’, *New Left Review*, 70.

the revolutionary movement in its fight against the bourgeois state in all its manifestations, material and ideological.

Later, in the much-praised Part 1, *Christians Against Capitalism*, there is this broad statement of the meaning of politics :

‘Politics is the language in which we discuss the way men live together, in society. . . . Politics is not only discussion of certain aspects of human behaviour—it is discussion of the structures and institutions which make a man what he is, for a man only comes into being through his society’.

Politics here is language and discussion : in effect it is an abstract teleology, heavily dependent upon the Marx of the *Paris Manuscripts*. This is clearly a definition formulated under strong pressure from that ‘public’, extraneous definition of politics, where the word is a hold-all term for the machinations of employees of the state. All the same, there is a leaning-over-backwards towards the anthropological definition of politics as that matrix constitutive of human identity, and often unmediated by material and ideological structures. This emphasis is confirmed a little later when personal consciousness is described as being ‘shaped by the culture and language and institutions of our society, and will change as these change. Our consciousness also creates and changes these institutions, of course, so the process is two-way, a mutual shaping’. In fact, ‘of course’, consciousness, unmediated by a revolutionary theoretical practice, will tend to remain either hegemonic or corporate (or in a subject position excluded even from these realms), fixated by the inertia of the material and ideological framework.

The power of the word

If politics is language, then the same holds true the other way around : language is politics. And here we come back to what I termed earlier in the paper *Slant*’s tendency towards a verbal substitutionism : the creation of a dense verbal, theoretical construct which disguises the absence of any meaningful praxis. St John and Wittgenstein fuse in a preoccupation with the word.

Language then replaces the productive forces as the generating motor of society. This achieves two things : firstly, it helps define politics as the search for ‘meanings’ ; secondly, it makes any sort of scientific precision next to impossible. What we have instead is a flux of mutual shaping, the endlessly fluid communal creations of Sartre’s inter-relationships.

It would like to discuss at this point an article published in the April May issue of 1968. It is by Terry Eagleton and is entitled ‘Politics and the Sacred’—it was later to be incorporated into Eagleton’s book, *The Body as Language*. I have chosen this article because I see Eagleton as being both highly distinctive, yet at the same time central to anything which might be termed the *Slant* enterprise.⁶ He is in many ways easier to deal with, simply because he pushed to its limits the intellectual Catholic-Marxist position—a task made possible only by his skilfully eclectic theologico-literary style.

⁶I realise that I am in danger of slipping into idealism myself here, but can see no way of avoiding the problem. The ‘*Slant* Enterprise’, of course, always contained its own critical and negative elements.

'Politics and the Sacred' draws very heavily, as had Brian Wicker's book, *Culture and Theology*, upon the work of Gerard van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade. Basically Eagleton is at pains to point out that it is the sacralising power of our structuring ability which makes us distinctively human. The withdrawal from human structures is then not an act of individual liberation but a leap into absurdity. Or as he put it, succinctly enough, in his earlier book, *The New Left Church*: 'To sin is to be a tramp, not a revolutionary'. The first point I'd like to make about the article is that it relies upon two concepts which take on the potent rigidity of philosophical essences—the concepts are 'communal meaning' and 'absurdity'. They both precede the argument and loiter away undefined at the end of it. My use of the word 'rigidity' was not accidental for the arguments in the article move around freely between these two firmly-established, *a priori* concepts: dislodge either one of them and the structure would crumble. Take for instance a statement such as this one:

'Authentic humanity, then, involves movement within a created world of meaning—within the confines of the order which man generates by his body, work and language, by all the modes of his personal and political presence to others. The area which is created by these interlocking modes of interpersonal and political presence is the arena of the authentically human: outside this, man can have significance or identity only in illusion'.

The statements hold water, but only for as long as we accept the unquestioned essentialism and abstraction of the nouns: 'humanity', 'movement', 'meaning', 'order', 'language', 'presence', 'authenticity', 'significance'. The confidence of Eagleton's tone almost convinces us that we can take these meanings straight, undiluted and unmediated. But when the argument crystallises its themes into a political analogy its inadequacies become self-evident:

'For the Christian', says Eagleton, 'the oppressed and exploited are signs of the kingdom of Christ, not merely because they point to an eschatological reversal which will bring them to power at the end of history, but because they symbolise what is now still to be done—what areas of life are still unstructured by human institutions, what orders of experience fall outside our constructed worlds of meaning'.

Take note of the syntax there: 'they (i.e. the oppressed and exploited) are signs . . . because they symbolise . . .'. The identification is being made between the *anawim* and the proletariat, echoing presumably the statement that the poor are always with us, but failing to take note of the fact that they change in their historical size, shape and class position. In fact some of those being bracketed as poor here—for the sake of the analogy—are not poor in any literal sense at all. The point is that the proletariat is not really seen, except through the focus of a scriptural identification: they have dissolved, by an unseen intellectual saturation, into the unitary neutrality of symbol. And the fact that Eagleton can make such capital at this point out of the famous quotation from Marx's *A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where Marx speaks of the proletariat as a class within society which is 'the dissolution of all classes',

should only alert us to the degree of Marx's own dependence, at this early stage, upon these dubiously a-historical Judaeo-Christian analogies.

The title of the book into which this article was to be incorporated, *The Body as Language*, is emblematic of this intense desire to overcome the unresponsiveness of material structures; to make them as undefinable and fluid as language itself. The book is extraordinary, riddled with provocative metaphors and analogies. Its achievement, I think, lies precisely in the fruitfulness of those explosive metaphors and analogies, which criss-cross to form a dazzling and brilliant pattern. Much of the text looks, upon theoretical analysis, like a self-referential and self-delighting tapestry of ideas, sitting very loosely to material realities.

Self-analysis . . .

There was a gradually noticeable change of composition in *Slant* from 1967 onwards: a greater inclusion of factual reports and closer empirical (though not empiricist) studies of political situations not directly connected with *Slant's* immediate concerns. It was also noticeable that Raymond Williams ceased to be the identifiable mentor of the group.

There was also a growing movement of self-criticism dating from around this time. If I don't deal with these criticisms at length it is for the obvious reason that they were largely negative definitions, against the grain of what they themselves identified as *Slant's* main tendency. But it is worth mentioning 'More Questions for the Catholic Left' (December 1966/January 1967) in which Angela and Adrian Cunningham raised in summary form many of the criticisms I have made here.

In 1968 Martin Shaw, who resigned his editorship, wrote an article entitled 'Christianity and Marxism' in which he claimed, to paraphrase him rather crudely, that Christian Marxists were really wasting their time since they were operating in 'one of the most remote corners of history'. There was a reply to this by Martin Redfern which effectively demonstrated Shaw's over-dependence upon the ideas of the *International Socialist Group*. But Redfern's defence ended by lamely asserting that there was nothing wrong with being in one of the most remote corners of history. Not a very optimistic note to sound on the viability of Christian Marxism.

In the final issue in 1970 there is a prevailing note of pessimism about the Church—though to be fair to *Slant* its contributors had never been over-optimistic about *that* particular structure. The right intersection-point between theology and politics was still being sought, and there is a deep unsureness now about what connections there are between eschatology and revolution, an issue raised in July, 1969 by Herbert McCabe in an article entitled 'God The Future'—an article I take to be an oblique, though very telling, accusation of Pelagianism, directed at no one in particular, but suggesting, that there were plenty of targets around if you cared to look. I think too at this point of the crucial note of ambiguity at the end of Adrian Cunningham's book, *Adam*, where there seems to be a real doubt as to whether one should carry on talking

about eschatology at all, or just dovetail that concern into human history at the level of specific, political event and development. In the last issue of *Slant* Cunningham says: 'Clearly for some time to come the crucial question here (i.e. the working out of a theology of the world) will continue to be the understanding of eschatology'. And Terry Eagleton cautiously suggests that the main function of Christian Marxists in the future will be simply recruitment within the Church. Since Christianity in England is growing less important ideologically, there is more chance of socialist propaganda reaching Christians, but less chance of any significant structural intersection between Church and society.

Slant's function, then, was largely as a theoretical breeding-ground, an area of transition, much needed, however small the number of people it actually reached. Risking platitude I'll say that it raised vital issues—issues of a lasting importance for anyone still concerned with the relationship between theology and politics. In the touchingly antiseptic and passionless words of the valedictory address which *Sheed and Ward* appended to the last issue, it succeeded 'in stimulating discussion of many important and previously neglected questions'.

Its tendencies to verbalism and idealism—tendencies I've discussed at length—are understandable if you take into account the extent to which it was trying to actually *create* a theoretical tradition for itself. A tradition which would be directed to an unenviable task, for as one of *Slant's* editors plaintively pointed out to me, life's no joke when you are trying to mediate an idealist deformation of Marxism by intellectual argument alone through to a non-proletarian group within a reactionary institution. The wholesale borrowing from other traditions, the rampant eclecticism, have to be seen in this light as a mode of survival; the tenuously held connection between Christianity and Marxism did a great deal at least for the political consciousness of the Christian, even though it often failed to provide any enlightenment for bewildered, onlooking Marxists.

Christian Relationships

H F Woodhouse

This article is an attempt to sketch some salient features of the relationship between Christians. The Christian church is not a crowd, not even a crowd made up of devotees of a particular football club to take an example. It is a community and yet the persons who compose