

THE SECOND SESSION by Xavier Rynne; *Faber and Faber, 30s.*

OBSERVER IN ROME by Robert McAfee Brown; *Methuen, 30s.*

These two books cover the same ground from different angles: one Catholic, the other Protestant. The second Session of Vatican II lasted from Michaelmas to early December 1963. Its summons was Pope Paul's answer to those who sought to discover his attitude to the great undertaking of his predecessors. In the inaugural speech he reaffirmed the whole Johannine programme regarding the renewal of the Church's life, and in December, he promulgated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the Decree on Communications. He then set out on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In spite of these points, there are those who have shown disappointment in the achievement of the second Session. Neither of these books, however, underestimates its significance and both stress the importance of the procedural development of the fifth week. Indeed, in the light of the third session, we can see how well the ground was prepared for the votes on collegiality and ecumenism.

Xavier Rynne's book (and we still by-pass the question: Who *is* Xavier Rynne?) is a continuation of his account of the first session. It is a valuable documentary, apart from its sensitive human appeal, because it includes useful summaries of speeches, lists all the speakers, and gives a vivid day-to-day account of things as well as providing much detailed background information. If it is 'progressive' in sympathy, it thereby reflects most of the things that the Council has come to be. Both the Rynne books are probably the most balanced serious view of the first two sessions and we hope that he or they will continue and complete the series.

Dr McAfee Brown's book, as well as being non-Catholic in approach, gives vignettes and reactions in diary form and does not claim in any sense to be a documentary. Altogether, it is a very delightful tribute to Vatican II and exudes that

spirit of appraisal *in veritate et in caritate* which is characteristic of the observers in general. The author has a very 'Catholic' sense of humour and shows a surprising appreciation of those sorts of jokes which we would categorize as 'family' jokes and which convey so delightfully that human aspect of things to be found in the Roman *ben trovato*. Throughout he shows the candour for which Cardinal Bea asked when he said: 'We want you to grant us complete confidence and consequently to tell us frankly . . . everything you dislike, to share with us your positive criticisms, your suggestions, your desires'. Although the observers are constitutionally no part of the Council, it is clear that they have been regularly consulted at every turn. Consequently, they have come to feel themselves very much a part of it, and indeed it would be difficult to think of Vatican II without them. As Pope John originally promised, everything under discussion is seen in the light of our Lord's prayer.

In their different ways, these two books help to give a very complete picture of the second session. And whilst we may feel fairly certain that Xavier Rynne was in the *aula* for the third session, it is a matter for regret that Dr Brown was not there.

The picture of the ground they cover can never be quite complete until it is seen in the fuller context of the completed Council. And for this assessment we shall have to wait. Already, as we have indeed indicated, the importance of certain aspects of the second session is stressed by the development of the third. It is certain that there will also be a fourth. One cannot imagine, therefore, that either book will have more than an ephemeral importance, except of course for those who subsequently compile the full relation. When this is done their perspicacity or blindness will emerge. Meanwhile they assuredly contribute to our enjoyment.

✠ Gordon Wheeler