

Commentary

THE COUNCIL RE-OPENS. The group of dramatists, producers and actors who met in Edinburgh to discuss the future of the drama were treated to a demonstration of the theatre of chance—microphones gurgled, dark figures appeared at windows and an actress climbed wildly through the audience to the back of the hall. The theatre of chance is an experimental method in which, not a play is written, but a 'happening' is arranged. In the literary theatre, a play is written, produced and, if it pleases, repeated many times: from one point of view, the play goes dead, it loses the life and freshness it originally had; from another, no repetition is exactly the same as the rest, the audience changes, and if it participates as it should must change the performance. The theatre of chance is an attempt to sharpen up the living freshness of the dramatic image by reducing the preconceived and stressing the spontaneous. If it succeeds the impact may be tremendous, if it fails the result is a piece of boring chaos. St Peter's is of course much more than a theatre—we are engaged and affected by the Council in a way very different to the audience of a play. But the effect of the first session was so dramatic that the analogy may perhaps pass. The Curia had written and attempted to stagemanage a piece of literary theatre, but Pope John had arranged a 'happening'. The Curia failed and the Pope succeeded.

The 'happening' has been described for the English-reading public in two recent books, Robert Kaiser's *Inside the Council*¹ and Xavier Rynne's *Letters from Vatican City*,² of which the first is more readable but somewhat melodramatic, the second less readable but more useful for reference. But the outline as given by each is the same and is now well-known; first the reluctance of the curialists to accept the actuality of the coming council, the attack on the Biblical Institute, the rejection of the Dutch pastoral, the tactics of the pre-conciliar commissions, the obfuscation of the press coverage; then the striking reversal at the first general congregation, the rising tension of the debate on the sources of revelation, and the interventions of Pope John, then and later, to set on foot a revision of the schemata and to restore the pastoral impetus which was his intention and the intention of the majority of the conciliar fathers.

For nine months—interrupted by the death of Pope John and the election of his successor—the overall co-ordinating committee, the

¹Burns and Oates, 25s.

²Faber and Faber, 30s.

mixed commissions, and conferences of bishops and theologians throughout the world have been at work reducing the number of the schemata—it should have been evident from the beginning that the fathers could not be expected to discuss three different schemata on the unity of the church prepared by three different commissions—and rewriting the earlier drafts where it seemed advisable—not all the schemata were marred by the juridicism of that on the Church. In all this perhaps the most significant fact is that the Theological Commission and the Secretariate for the Promotion of Christian Unity have had to work together on equal terms over the schema on the source of revelation. The Theological Commission represents within the Council the mind of the Holy Office. Whatever the outcome, this conjunction on a dogmatic question is epochal, for although ‘intellectual terrorism’ is too strong an expression for the methods of the Holy Office, it cannot be denied that, however apostolic its members are as individuals, as an institution it stands for the closed and defensive and that the Secretariate for Unity stands for the open and generous. The schema on the source of revelation may leave open the vexed question of the relation between Scripture and Tradition, if so the mixed commission will still be of the greatest importance for what it signifies.

One fault which can be found with the black-versus-white simplification of the history of the first session is the fact that it fails to distinguish between, and do justice to, the richness and variety of the theological traditions on the progressive side. (The labels do mean something though they need much further explaining.) It may be that the theologians on the conservative side represent one tradition only, the Roman one (Roman theology, that is, not Roman faith), but the rest represent several different traditions. Compare for instance only two, Hans Kung and Karl Rahner. Fr Kung comes from the background of the German universities, the tradition which goes back to Moehler and includes men such as Karl Adam and Romano Guardini. Fr Rahner on the other hand is the most thoroughly scholastic (or neo-scholastic?) of modern theologians; despite his understanding of Heidegger, he seems a technologist of theology. It is devoutly to be hoped that something of this richness and diversity may appear among the sources of the new schemata. If so the second session of the Council may not present itself as such a dramatic ‘happening’ but it will surely be possible to see the effect of Pope John’s beginning to mature.