

Reviews

TOWARDS VATICAN III: THE WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE edited by David Tracy with Hans Kung and Johann B. Metz. *Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1978. pp. 238 £7.50.*

Twenty years ago, when the bishops were asked to say what they wanted from the proposed Second Vatican Council, about one in five of them proposed a new dogmatic definition of some Marian doctrine (Our Lady as Mediatrix of all graces, spiritual Mother, Co-redemptrix or perhaps as Queen of heaven). That seems a far distant Church from the one we live in today. The distance we have travelled may be measured by the proposals for the *next* Vatican Council that are made in this book. It is the record of a meeting of some seventy Catholic theologians and social scientists held at Notre Dame University (Indiana) in 1977. The ethos is predominantly that associated with the periodical *Concilium*. As Pohier and Geffré say, in their plea for pluralism, "What meaning can any one, non-differentiated theological discourse have, whether it is the discourse of Roman circles, or whether it is the unique and identical discourse that *Concilium* distributes in nine languages, according to the theory that it is identically valid and significant for a Christian of Brazil, Holland, Italy, Poland or Japan"? In Oxford, at any rate, *Concilium* is not easy to find; even the Theology Faculty library has stopped taking it, because it is so expensive.

The most radical proposal here, by Giuseppe Alberigo, a scholar at Bologna whose work on the history of Roman canon law has immense importance for ecclesiology and ecumenism, is simply that there should be *no* Vatican III at all. He calls for a "true ecumenical council", instead of another general council of the Roman Church. His view is shared by René Laurentin, who cites the official document (a letter dated October 5, 1974) in which Paul VI spoke of the Second Council of Lyons, held in 1274 with Orthodox representatives present, not as the 14th Ecumenical Council (as Catholics have hitherto said) but as the 6th Synod of the West. We need a more serious idea of what an

ecumenical council is than the potty and totally unhistorical picture contained in the Codex of Canon Law. The work that needs to be done, then, in Alberigo's view, is to push through the implications of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism so that, over a period of time that cannot be limited in advance, there may be such convergence on doctrine and church order that the risk might be taken of holding a representative assembly of the Orthodox Church and Roman Catholics (at least *these*), to prepare the way for a true ecumenical council. Rome seems unlikely to be the acceptable venue (though you never know: the alternative sites, unless by then the moon would be possible, offer very considerable difficulties also, and anyway would it be possible to hold a council on the moon without the help of whatever military power is then controlling the earth?). The most important suggestion of all, in Alberigo's paper, is that the problem of who should take the chair at an eventual ecumenical council should simply be left open, not as a renunciation of papal prerogatives on the one hand nor as indifference on the other, but in a real spirit of searching, fidelity and penance.

Few of the contributors seem to share this vision of the true ecumenical council that might take place instead of Vatican III. This is because they do not have Alberigo's picture of a council, or of the papacy, or of the place of the Orthodox: in short they do not have his ecclesiology. On the whole they display a markedly western and essentially Tridentine Roman Catholicism—none more so than Hans Küng, whose typically vigorous and urgent set of proposals bears almost entirely on reconciliation between Rome and Geneva—which, for him, means the World Council of Churches but in its most Protestant aspect. The interesting essays on such matters as 'narrative theology', the 'belief process', human fertility, intimacy and 'marital satisfaction' becoming a nice

old person (p. 279: "People raised with androgynous role models will be able to bring more of their personality resources into play at each of these stages than those raised in stereotypical sex roles"), and so forth, not that my mind has always been able to absorb some of the only too non-differentiated *Concilium* discourse, refer constantly to what "we" think—and here "we" are usually middle-aged, middle-class, very western-civilized Roman Catholics.

Avery Dulles suggests in his contribution that if Vatican III is necessary it would be to bring us back to Vatican II and to make us pass through that experience, on the grounds that most of us have

never done so. It certainly does seem, in Britain anyway, that many Catholics, clergy and people, have by-passed Vatican II and gone off into theological modernism and ecclesiological liberalism (ready to ordain women priests, practising intercommunion and so on), while many others have retreated from Vatican II, back into that far distant world, twenty years ago, when Catholics were Catholics, with no meat on Fridays, contraception a sin and "intrinsically evil" at that, and every prospect of another demonstration of Marian devotion. But it is too late for *Concilium* discourse to heal this bifurcation of Catholic consciousness.

FERGUS KERR O.P.

THE WISDOM OF THE ENGLISH MYSTICS by Robert Way. *Sheldon Press*. 1978. pp. 86. £1.75.

THE WISDOM OF ST FRANCIS AND HIS COMPANIONS by Stephen Clissold. *Sheldon Press*. 1978. pp. 90. £1.95.

These two volumes in the "Wisdom" series follow the usual pattern: after a fairly short introduction, we are given a collection of snippets.

The English mystics, in the traditional sense of the phrase, do not lend themselves to this kind of treatment—indeed, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* expressly forbids it; and anyone wanting a serious introduction to their teaching will be disappointed by Way's volume. But then that is not what Way is trying to offer. He has taken English mystics in a much wider sense, including Aelred at one end, and writers like T. S. Eliot and Rupert Brooke at the other end, with, believe it or not, even one poem by Augusta Drane (Mother Margaret's successor at Stone). From this wide range of material he has culled a variety of more or less spiritual messages. There is little or nothing which is, in any strict sense, mystical. Nor can I discern any very deliberate pattern of doctrine implicit in the selection. But there is good fun to be had from browsing through, and it would be a hard heart that was not touched and edified by at least one or two of the 149 texts.

The introduction, though brief, is useful. The author rather exaggerates the importance of "darkness" mysticism, as if it alone constituted the authentic mystical tradition of Christendom. His own anthology does not really bear him out on this. And it seems unduly sceptical to claim that it has not yet been proved that the pseudo-Dionysius was not in fact St Paul's disciple; and unduly unsceptical to say that "it is generally accepted that he was a fourth-century monk". At the very earliest he cannot be dated before the end of the fifth century. But these are minor nuisances.

St Francis definitely lends himself to this kind of selection; most of the original material is anecdotal in any case. Stephen Clissold's anthology is quite delightful. There are a few historical mistakes in his introduction, however. It is now established fairly certainly that St Francis did not found a Third Order; it has also come to be appreciated that the Albigensians were more of an evangelical movement than Clissold would suggest. It is also now generally accepted that the founder of the Waldensians was called Waldes, not Peter Waldo, and it has, to my mind, been shown that preaching was always an integral part of their programme. But, again, these are only minor nuisances.

SIMON TUGWELL O.P.