

Editorial

Another article on the Council? Certainly there has been more than enough information, speculation, comment informed and uninformed in the press this last year. But two articles by Fr Schillebeeckx published in Dutch last January stood out as having a peculiar authority, and were soon being translated into other languages. LIFE OF THE SPIRIT presents them for the first time to English-speaking readers.

They give a theological analysis of what has taken place in terms of the distinction between two attitudes of mind, which the author calls essentialist and existentialist. Abstract or pastoral, we might say. Essentialist terms are the ones in which many of us got taught the faith: logically, it seemed difficult to fault, but what did it have to do with the business of living? What, for that matter, had the first Vatican Council itself, despite its importance to theologians? With the second Council we seem to be breathing a different air. Its concern is above all pastoral. In the long run its effect will be felt in every parish in England—in the world too, but much of the rest of the world has less far to go.

It is highly significant that the first problem to be tackled, the first chapter of a Constitution to be approved, was about the liturgy. The highest authority in the Church is now going to declare that the faithful have their full and proper part to play in this community action; that the action is to show its meaning as clearly as possible—'mysteriousness for its own sake' is gone for ever; that the liturgy is 'the summit toward which all the actions of the Church tend, and the source from which it draws all its strength'. These are not new principles, but in England they have been so far expressed only in periodicals and at conferences, except in a few 'go-ahead' parishes. Sooner or later they will be the norm everywhere. This is the context in which to view the considerable vernacular concessions, the adaptations to particular national requirements now permitted, the promised reform of liturgical books. A great change is taking place before our eyes, which may one day be seen as a new kind of counter-reformation: we can only hope that everything possible is being done to prepare us all for its impact.