

Editorial

Now that the second sitting of the Council is over, attempts are naturally being made to assess its results. At first sight the actual achievements are less than we might have expected. The decree on liturgy is splendid, but its foundations were laid in the earlier session; apart from that, can we point to much but continued talk? No, but it is this that matters, for it reflects changes of attitude more important than any list of achievements could be. The fact that we can change, can recognise past mistakes and learn from them, is the ground for hope in achievements to come.

How are we best to 'place' this change of attitude? Perhaps in considering the relationship between the Church and the world (which is what is meant by stressing the Council's *pastoral* concern). Once we take seriously the truth that Christianity is delivered to us in history, that instead of being merely the collection of timeless abstractions we have sometimes considered it, it is much more the involvement of men in events which they see as manifesting the work of God, then we can no longer think of Church and world as distinct entities that have to be related. It is like the mistake of thinking that there is a literary culture and a scientific one which have then to be linked up. There is not 'a' culture, or one, or two, in this sense, because culture is not something we can abstract from the whole of life and then stand back from; it is our life, the shaped significant experience of man, rooted in the past, responsive to the present. It is here that the Church must be, for the Church is the community of men whose experience has been enriched, not destroyed, by the recognition that within it they encounter God through Christ—within worldly experience, because the Spirit has been sent into our world to form it and to be manifested by it.

The changes that are taking place in Catholic thought all relate to this new understanding of the Church and the world. There is the return to scripture, to seek understanding in the record of particular events and their inspired interpretation; but there is also the return to tradition, whose roots are deeper than the uncritical 'traditionalism' which sought in a recent past the changeless pattern for all time. Scripture and tradition alike give the theologian a new sensitivity to and awareness of the present world in which he must find the gospel and renew it.

Then there is the realisation that those shared sacramental actions which are the high-points of the community's Christian encounter have in their expression got far away from our contemporary culture, since they have failed to grow in response to the changes of history. Closely connected with each of these new insights is the remarkable change taking place in our relations with other Christians; we are now engaged with them in a search for truth, a deeply human action, instead of attempting to prove them wrong, an activity that sprang from our alienation from the shared human world, with all the consequent sense of insecurity this gave. In the same way we have now begun once more to contribute as Christians to the solution of mankind's common problems, such as those raised by nuclear arms or by racial and class discrimination. It is now the world's misery we are taking on ourselves, rather than just our own.

To prove all that in detail would require a careful study of recent conciliar and papal documents. But how splendidly it has been captured and summarised by a gesture of Pope Paul's worthy of John XXIII himself. The pilgrimage he plans to make is not out of the world's centre to a place apart. It is out of the Vatican's long isolation in the midst of pagan Rome, out of a Church not in the world but merely surrounded by it: it is into the world's centre, to the place where our Lord walked among men and died and rose from death for us all. At such a centre Church and world cease to be opposites, because they can grow and renew themselves within the heart of man.