

VATICAN II, THE STRUGGLE OF MINDS, by E. H. Schillebeeckx, O.P.; Gill and Son, 6s.

THE JOHANNINE COUNCIL: WITNESS TO UNITY, by Bernard Häring; Gill and Son, 10s. 6d.

After the first session of the Council, there was rather a sense of anti-climax. Was the eagerly awaited *Aggiornamento* to prove abortive? Even now, after the second session, some of this disappointment remains, crystallized in the rather puzzled question, 'But what has the Council actually *done*?' If the questioner is a non-Catholic the answer often calls for lengthy explanation. Out come all the clichés—'progressives and conservatives', 'fresh air through the Church', 'ecumenical-minded' (and, of course, 'pastoral-, liturgical- and biblical-minded' too). Yet the 'with-it' phrases rarely add up to an answer. The reason is at least partly that the reports in which such jargon so often occurs (by far the greater proportion of all the available information) have a political slant which does scant justice to the Council or its debates.

For this reason one can only welcome Fr Schillebeeckx's short essay, *Vatican II, the Struggle of Minds*. Of the other two essays which make up the book space forbids little more than a mention though both are extremely stimulating, as we have come to expect from their learned author. *The Layman in the Church* is the best of the three and is of great relevance to the Council. *The Death of a Christian* while well worth reading has very little connection to the Council theme and appears to have been included simply to bring the volume up to publishable dimensions. In passing I might add that the book suffers from rather more typographic errors than is justifiable. In his essay on the struggles in the Council, however, Fr Schillebeeckx does great service by undermining many false interpretations, especially the tendency to see it simply as a battle between progressiveness and conservatism. That there are divisions in the Council is obvious but there are not clearly defined lines. There is no three-line Whip. Many bishops are 'un-committed'. Many, too, might think 'progressively' on one issue and be found in the ranks of the conservatives on another. The author prefers the terms 'existentialist' and 'essentialist'. The existentialist sees the faith as the truth-which-saves and hence to be communicated in a way which the world can understand. The essentialist sees it as truth committed to us and hence to be preserved and defended. I suspect that as labels they should be used very carefully—indeed, Fr Schillebeeckx is at pains to point this out. Still, as the basis of a real concept of what the Council is doing they are immensely more valuable than more popular ones.

One can, however, doubt whether such accounts, valuable as they are, are what is most needed. The real question, surely, is not so much what the Council is doing as what the Council is. To that question there are at present few better answers available than *The Johannine Council: Witness to Unity*, a brilliant and often lovely essay by Fr Häring. It is set in the perspective of what Pope John

called 'the great mystery of unity'. This is the Johannine theme. For the Council was the work of John XXIII to 'make straight the way of the Lord' like the precursor and to teach his 'little children' to love one another like the beloved disciple. In this perspective the unity of the Church is seen as the sign and reflection of the unity of God, a unity of love in which Christians share by their love of the Father in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is this love, poured out by each of us on the brethren who share the life and love of God with us, that constitutes our unity. Hence it is that Christian unity is not something for which we must work simply because of the scandal of disunity; it is something we must pray God to show forth in us, for it is the efficacious sign of the redemptive love of God for the world.

In this light Fr Häring discusses many of the details of the Council's work. By it, too, he penetrates through the debates about unity among Christians to the idea of the conversion of *all* Christians to unity. It is a provocative book; it really does provoke thought about the issues involved and leaves one wishing that the author had himself taken the discussion further along the lines he indicates. It is a book to be thoroughly recommended.

SEBASTIAN BROOKS, O.F.M.

THE SECULAR MEANING OF THE GOSPEL, by Professor Van Buren; S.C.M., 25s.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the attempts of Anglo-Saxon theologians to come to terms with contemporary philosophy is the complete amateurishness they show in their understanding of what a philosophical problem is, and what the philosopher is attempting to do. Coupled with this is an extraordinary willingness to regard what the philosopher says as sacrosanct, even if it is necessary to reduce the gospel to utter triviality in order to square it with the concerns of philosophy. Both of these features are present to the full in this book by Professor Van Buren. He is concerned to analyse the meaning of theological assertions in terms acceptable to 'linguistic analysis'. This term is left almost unexplained beyond reference to a wide variety of authors, such as Wittgenstein, Flew, Ramsey and Braithwaite, who seem to have little or nothing in common. They are all represented as agreeing that the meaning of a word is its use in language, which is interpreted as a 'modified verification principle' that the meaning of an assertion is given by what would count for or against it. (It is not made clear what kind of thing is envisaged by this obscure phrase—for instance, it is clearly not intended that I should be allowed to say that the existence of God counts for the assertion that God exists.) The movement from the meaning of a word to the meaning of an assertion coupled with the introduction of 'an empirical attitude' shows how far we have come from Wittgenstein, who it appears to me was not very interested in the issues implicit in the opposition, empiricism or transcendentalism. But apparently despite the hurried genuflections to Wittgenstein throughout this book, no serious attempt has been made to come to terms with his thought.

Leaving on one side the lack of philosophical sophistication, there is a lesson