

Editorial

The Council has just begun its second session. By now most of us have some idea of what went on at the first: at least two books about it have been published in England, and if the evident bias of one of them considerably reduces its usefulness, the other (Xavier Rynne's) gives an impression of greater responsibility: we can be reasonably sure of the facts it reports. Something more important than particular conclusions, doctrinal decisions, has, it would seem, been achieved. The bishops have reached a sense of common purpose, of what the Church needs from them and what they can give, of where to go and how to get there, far more quickly than would have been thought possible a year ago. Extremely frank speech quickly became normal: we may hope that it will extend to areas in the Church where up to now it has not been much encouraged. Of even greater importance has been the development of natural groupings among those taking part; bishops of a particular language group or other cultural unit have acquired the habit of working together to thrash out theological problems. This has continued during the period of intensive work between the sessions. In this way a basis is being established for that effective decentralisation which may ultimately be seen to be the Council's greatest achievement. It will no longer be possible to maintain that unity of the Church implies an imposed uniformity. She exists at many levels, and each must do its proper work, not leave it to those 'higher up'.

Such a policy of decentralisation could not, then, be restricted to the apostolic college alone. If the bishops are to have greater control in matters that concern their own cultural units, they will naturally look for a greater degree of collaboration from their own priests and from the laity than seemed necessary in the past. The need for a theologically informed clergy and laity is thus ever more urgent in the world of Vatican II. This surely is why the reform and fostering of liturgy has been the Council's first concern. For in these great common actions God is teaching priest and people how to work together for their common needs, the needs of the Church. The parish liturgy forms the parish into the unit of evangelisation which brings Christ to the world. As an instrument it has got a little blunt. That it has now to be made new is the Council's message to us all.