

BOOK REVIEWS

DIALOGUES. by P. R. P. Danielou, S.J. (Le Portulan, Paris 1948)

The reader of P. Danielou's latest work is constrained to ask 'What is so fresh in the doctrine of this book when its foundations are so old?' His philosophy of history is, after all, that of St Paul or St Irenaeus. It is, I believe, the contemporaneity with which the themes are treated. The 'Dialogues' are held with Marxists, Existentialists, Protestants, Jews, and those influenced by Hindu thought, in his own France of today. With all of them he has personal contacts, and he handles their ideas with respect, as a man does when he loves his fellows. Some of them he is answering in their published works, others from letters to himself printed here. He starts like St Thomas, on their ground; asks their questions, gets their replies in their own words: gives them the primary Thomist assent, due to the natural dignity of their structures. . . . 'et videtur quod sic.'

He might have started, logically, with the Jews, for their problems and difficulties are essentially those of all the others. But he is writing to men (ourselves) for whom their own time is 'la donée', which gives them even unconsciously their attitude, and involves the rich affective side of their natures. Thus about one third of the book is a dialogue with the Marxists. Here the Messianic promise which educated the progress of Israel, is transferred to become an endowment of human nature operating in society, and discovered in analysing the operations of history. Such a nature cannot abide the anomalous situation in which it exists, which a certain sort of 'Christianisme' seems to lie about, and even to thrive on. For it is against all mystification that Marxists and Israelites react. Where is the connection between the New Jerusalem promised here and now to converts, and the fact that some Christians grow fat, and some starve? Or where does a Lion lie down with a Lamb? Or where is Messiah king, even within the limits of the Tora, let alone as its fulfilment? How does the unity of the Mystical Body give an account of the wars of the churches? The myth is retained by puffing clouds of incense around the acts of believers. When these are penetrated by the analysis of Marx they reveal the tension of opposites which must be fought out until the proletariat suffers no longer, but comes into its own, and resolves all classes in perfected social human nature. Or M. Edmond Fleg quotes from Maimonides to show the value of the nonsense of religions since Jesus. 'Some affirm that the Commandments are true but of no more worth: others give them a hidden meaning, and say that their content is already realised. But when the true Messiah comes all shall be converted and recognise their error.' At least they await that advent of Messiah when all shall be made manifest, and in this they do no more than the Jews, albeit in the meantime they do much less.

Now, says Père Danielou, these views are not remote from the Church. They are fundamentally human and sincere. They are courageous, if proud, attempts to solve at an incomplete level the difficulties which confront Christians. Moreover they are seen sometimes more clearly than Christians, bound up in an anachronistic bourgeois structure, are seeing them.

What account, then, of ourselves do we give ourselves, that we have a duty to give these others? Do not let us render it in their terms because we must offer

their reply also. They are not misled in this degree. If they set us a pseudo-problem then their true problem is contained within ours. We too are concerned in the tension of classes and we help to make it. We must look to and work for an end in which it shall be resolved, not in the destruction of the flesh by the spirit, but in its total renewal by the spirit. And yet we hold too that the end is here and now. It is accomplished in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ despite all appearances.

For the Church is at once in history, because of the Incarnation, and history is in the Church because it has prophetically prefigured the Mystical Body of Christ from the beginning of time. The fact of the incarnation of the Church in the social structure of the day is a necessary one. It always gave rise to sanctity in persons. It does still. But society changes faster than its institutions, and the Church herself is institutionalised for her operation. Thence grows the tension: persons and mechanisms confused: old familiar affections built around habitual regularity of life as if it existed for itself, and not for a further end. And then this change in society. It is late in the process when it becomes widely evident. It is later still when the new formations are apparent. There is then inevitable pain, in whatever degree it comes, which is the sign and healthy response of the organism to the wound. Then in the nature of Christian progress incarnation anew begins.

Christians in holding possessively to their old affections, in rejecting the pain offered them, do but increase the pain of others and scandalise their chances of salvation. Their simplification is as gross and unsympathetic as the Communists'. To them is given the reality, all their lives, of the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit the Comforter is here giving them understanding and hope. Pain and weakness can make them only more pliable in accepting the grace which brings them into the company of their deprived fellows, and, through them, restores a society which by itself is lost.

The personal letters to Père Danielou make it clear how far he has entered into such relationships, under what stress, and that he has lost nothing of the truth while discovering it for others. '*Ce cri d'angoisse, cet appel jailli de votre âme souffrante et croyante m'ont atteint au coeur*', writes Pastor Westphal. These are the depths and riches which our separated brethren know. They must know them in Catholics too.

PAUL OLSEN

EXISTENTIALISM AND HUMANISM. By J. P. Sartre. (Methuen; 5s.)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DECADENTISM—A Study of Existentialism. By N. Bobbio. (Blackwell; 5s.)

Yet another pair of little books on Existentialism, each of them costing the usual convenient price of five shillings, each translated into readable English and both offering the hope that here at last is Existentialism without tears—in so far as one can have Existentialism without tears. Sartre's work is a development of the ideas which he put forward in a lecture at the Club Maintenant in 1945. One meets the customary Sartrean incision and vigour applied to a series of topics such as morals, Christianity, Marxism and modern politics, a series which derives its unity in Sartre's discourse from the skilful way in which he scrutinizes it beneath the burning arc-lamps of 'freedom'. Although the general reader will find few better expositions of atheistic existentialism within such a short compass he would do well