

he would wish it so: the story of the construction of the housing estates at Pontault-Combault and at Plessis-Tréville is more important than the frail bearded priest whose vision and drive brought them into existence.

But inevitably the story lags behind the development of the Abbé Pierre's thought. His vision is no longer confined by the city boundaries of Paris or by the frontiers of France—it reaches out to embrace the whole world, the world into which every minute come an average of about one hundred and seventy babies while only about ninety leave it. It is a hungry world, and the food resources of the world are not increasing in proportion to the population which, if the present rate continues, will have doubled by the end of the century. This stark fact and other similar ones provided the background for the series of talks and sermons which the Abbé Pierre gave on the French television during the Lent of 1956 and which have been collected in *Vers l'homme*. The five sermons deal successively with familiar themes, the first Great Commandment and the means, the Church, Confession and Holy Communion, which God has given to us to help us to fulfil it. Parallel with these sermons, preached during a televised Mass, are a series of studio talks (interviews rather than talks) on food, health, housing, work and means of communication. These five subjects are dealt with as 'the preliminaries of freedom' and are discussed in a world-wide context—this universal aspect is stressed by the excellently chosen illustrations from Kenya, India, Greece and other trouble-spots of the world of today. One hopes that this book will soon find a translator. It is not perhaps as sensational as the others, but it is more solid.

J.F.

CHILDREN OF THE SUN. By Morris West. (Heinemann; 16s.)

'See Naples and die.' The tourist literature carries a bitter irony, for the lovely city has two hundred thousand unemployed, perhaps the worst slums in Europe and hordes of homeless children for whom there seems no hope. Mr West, an Australian writer, himself a Catholic, has lived among the poor of Naples, has seen the horror and the pitifully feeble attempts to heal it. His book is written in anger: it is an indictment of indifference, corruption and hardness of heart. He would not claim that his book is a detailed analysis of the factors that have created this tragedy, but it is the outcome of close observation and of a deep human sympathy for the exploited.

His principal accusation is that political incompetence (not to use a worse word) has prejudiced any serious attempt at reform. The millions of dollars of American aid have been shamefully wasted and

have often gone into the pockets of the already rich. Administrative inefficiency and the Italian passion for political intrigue have prevented the accomplishment of what might have been done to improve housing, education and the social services. There are of course serious imponderables: a high birth rate, an unstable economy and the international difficulty of adequate emigration. These remain, but even here much more could have been done. The Church, which alone can bring any measure of hope to the miseries of the poor of the South, is conservative in temperament and has as yet found no way to inspire that widespread degree of social service which does something at once to meet the pressing problems. It is one of the mysteries of Mediterranean Catholicism that it seems unable to translate into the order of social responsibility those virtues which it preaches so constantly for the individual's good.

Mr West is principally concerned with the *scugnizzi*, the thousands of boys in their teens who have left home, who live on the edge of the law as pimps and pickpockets. His account of their life is serious and unsensational, and the testimony of the boys themselves makes plain enough the motives that led them to leave homes, which meant no money and no hope and the intolerable overcrowding of the *bassi*. It was to do something for these boys that Don Borelli, a young Neapolitan priest, began his 'House of the Urchins'. First of all, he lived among them as one of themselves, earning their confidence—and then one day revealing himself as a priest who was not just a 'black crow' but as a person with compassion for their plight and the practical enterprise to end it. His House, established in a disused church, provides a home and simple meals for the boys who are now encouraged to go out to school or to honest work. It gets no help from the State and only a small grant from Church sources. But it is, quite obviously, a bold and constructive experiment in teaching these boys how to live as a community. Mr West's account of its work is deeply moving and provides the only note of hope in this disturbing book.

One may hope that *Children of the Sun* may be widely read, not only as a fascinating guide to the 'other side' of Naples but as an appeal to the conscience of Catholics everywhere. It is a grave reproach that, where the Church's opportunities are greatest, it is there she should seem most unable to intervene. It is perhaps too much to hope that such a book as this should affect the hearts of politicians, but in a Europe that, whether we will it or not, is becoming every day a closer unity, the affairs of Southern Italy are ours. And neglect of this scandal is wide-open invitation to Communism, with its millenary hope and its only too well grounded attack on social injustice.

I.E.