

framework of Professor Chabod's research. The preface to the volume by Professor d'Entreves is characterized by expected brilliance and by unexpected charm.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY OF THE EASTERN CHURCH, By Vladimir Lossky. (James Clarke; 16s.)

Dr Vladimir Lossky's *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient* was published in Paris in 1944. It is a most admirable introduction to orthodox theology and teaching and we must be grateful to the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius for at last having it translated. It contains some unintentional travesties of Catholic teaching. It often presupposes an antithesis between Catholicism and Greek and Russian orthodoxy where in fact they are in agreement. But that is as often the fault of the poorer kind of Catholic propagandist as of Dr Lossky. Few modern books convey so clearly our common Patristic heritage.

G.M.

GOD'S TREE. ESSAYS ON DANTE AND OTHER MATTERS. By Kenelm Foster, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 10s. 6d.)

Though some of the fourteen essays composing this volume have been previously published we must be grateful to Father Foster for collecting them and adding others to form a single book. They range from six essays on Dante to subjects as diverse as a philosophical examination and correction of Mr Aldous Huxley's distinction between two 'selves' in man, the distinctive characteristic of St Thomas's genius, French seventeenth-century literature, and the lives of Savonarola and Rosmini.

The Dante essays constitute the heart of the book, not only because of their number but because they set the tone, so to speak, for all the others. As a layman in this matter I am not competent to judge the originality and finality of two of these contributions (chapters II and III) to Dante scholarship, but it would be surprising if the particularly difficult allegory and the symbol here discussed have ever been expounded with greater learning, acuteness and lucidity. The general reader should find chapter IV easier to follow and of absorbing interest. He will probably not have realized that despite the extensive discussion of Dante's treatment and classification of sins in the *Inferno*, nobody has really asked what general notion of evil is implied by the poem as a whole. Father Foster supplies a closely reasoned answer: the predominant evil in Dante's hell is injustice, understood as the violation of the natural bond of love between men; when to the violation of reason is added the injury done by the betrayal of the bond of trust between

human minds, evil reaches its maximum destructiveness in ingratitude, pride being rooted in the rejection of another's love. The insight revealed by this masterly essay is not only theological and spiritual but also, if the word may be here allowed, poetic. Insight of this kind enables Father Foster to give in his opening essay the finest and most moving statement known to me of Dante's special quality as a Christian poet. This he traces from the poet's 'innocent in-breathing of the natural world', through a reverence for natural reason upon which moral criticism is based, to the placing of the end of life in an act of knowledge, an integrated vision of 'the mysterious variety-in-unity' of being, a vision in which the poet sees 'the radiance of his own contemplative mind as a mirror of the deity' and, possessed by this radiance, is 'in-Godded'.

This movement from knowledge to contemplation and love unites in Dante the philosopher and the poet, and in Father Foster the philosopher and the literary critic. Father Foster's own practice as a critic reveals the basic requirement of a sensitive response to the written word and an ability to relate the parts to each other and to the whole; but to this he adds, not the assumed superiority of a judge, but something rarer, an essential sympathy based on that capacity to know and to love which in all intellectual beings transcends, as he tells us in a different connection, the limitation of their individual existence, and above all on a sense of the glory of human nature. Ultimately it is reverence for the mystery of human personality that gives Father Foster his strength as a critic—his sympathy for human thoughts, feelings, heroism and artistic creativity. This binds these diverse essays into a unity. In these days of aesthetic, psychological, sociological or 'existentialist' literary criticism it is impressive and heartening to find something different—close intellectual reasoning combined with reverence for the wonder and mystery of being exemplified so fruitfully in the practical task of literary interpretation and understanding.

A. A. PARKER