

REVIEWS

FR VINCENT McNABB, O.P.: *The Portrait of a Great Dominican*. By Fr Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. (Burns and Oates; 21s.)

All who came in contact with Fr Vincent McNabb during his lifetime will be grieved by that great and much-loved figure being presented to a wider public as one suffering from mental maladjustment due to his relationship with his family in early life. No man could be saner or more of one piece than he was, and few have had a better family background than he had.

Why the author's preconceived theories in the realm of psycho-analysis should be pinned on Fr Vincent is a mystery. They cannot be formed from the evidence given in the book; they cannot even be read into it, but only asserted side by side with that evidence without any connection with it.

We are given a number of commonplace terms of psycho-analysis, such as a sense of inadequacy (inferiority complex), over-compensation, lack of will to community, the struggle between the young Joseph McNabb and Fr Vincent (split personality), conversion, etc., but the only evidence of their relation to the subject of the book is the explosive saying of one who was well known to be given to expressing himself in that manner on any subject.

Fr Vincent was a human being with his own share of the effects of original sin. Like every other human being he had his own individual dispositions influenced by an immense number of unknowable factors from the generations which preceded him. The large family into which he was born, with a father, a man of sterling integrity, and a saintly mother, could have had only the best possible influences on the formation of his character. The author quotes Fr Vincent: 'In no family could there be a more striking example of the necessary division and harmonious co-operation of responsibility and capability'; and in another place: 'I was brought up in an atmosphere of love—not sentimental love, but the service of love'. Strictness on the part of the father and awe of the young for a parent may be considered as matter for psycho-analysis these days, but it was not so when Joseph McNabb was born. Then it was perfectly normal, and more the pity it is not so today. The later letters of Fr Vincent to his father show that awe to have developed into admiration and affection. To say that the evidence in the book on his relation to his parents 'seems to suggest that the sibling rivalry which contributed to his undue self-esteem, ostentation, ambition and lack of will to community was not primary but derivative' is meaningless jargon. How angry Fr Vincent would have been if he had read that, especially as it applied to his own

family which he loved so much. He might have told us in his own inimitable way the meaning of 'sibling rivalry'.

So long as it is thought that a good purpose is served by not only showing but emphasizing Fr Vincent's faults and the efforts he made to overcome them, no objection can be raised. There seems to be no doubt that he was at times self-opinionated, intolerant and headstrong, and these faults of character, together with his efforts to overcome them, may have been a partial cause of the external idiosyncrasies which made him what is commonly known as eccentric.

In spite of his theories, the particular application of which is absurd, in the original sense of being without root, we can be grateful to the author for his painstaking collection of letters and personal impressions of Fr Vincent.

The inclusion of personal affairs of other members of the family which had no bearing on the character and work of Fr Vincent distracts the reader and is in questionable taste. It caters only for that prurient curiosity concerning the private affairs of other people which is so marked a feature of our own time.

We can only hope that some day so much that is worth preserving from this book will be enshrined in another book written by someone who knew Fr Vincent McNabb well and who will not use him as a peg on which to hang their own pet theories.

DAVID DONOHUE, O.P.

THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE. By Jean Mouroux. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

Our life is hid with Christ in God, and therefore lies beyond our human apprehension, in God who can be reached only through faith. The Christian life is a life in Christ, and only in him is it found in its true perfection; all we have on this earth is an imperfect sharing in his life, deriving from him but lived in the obscurity of faith and the anticipation of hope; of the three foundation virtues of the Christian life only charity will abide for ever. We are pilgrims on a dark road, for though Christ is the Light of the world, his light cannot be seen but only grasped in faith. How then is a Christian experience possible, in the sense of a conscious experience?

This is the problem Fr Mouroux is concerned with in his book. He begins with a short discussion of terms, and a chapter on the Council of Trent, pointing out that it is not the possibility of a Christian experience but the necessity of a clear-cut infallible knowledge of being saved that the Council rejects. Then he comes to the crucial question of the possibility of a conscious possession of faith. Faith is a