

taining commentary on the philosopher's autobiography. The second essay with the title 'Avicenna's Place in Arabic Philosophy' is not the historical study one might expect portraying the philosopher against the general background of Arabic thought. Professor Teiler is concerned to show us in Avicenna the forerunner of modern philosophy and to interpret his thought in terms of Kant's antinomies and Bergson's creative evolution. There is a gap here, one feels, which however is partly filled by Professor Wickens' admirable essay, 'Some Aspects of Avicenna's Work', which gives us a good idea of his originality as a thinker and explains some of the more fundamental positions he reached both in theology and philosophy. This, together with Fr Kenelm Foster's treatment of Avicenna's influence on Western thought in the thirteenth century, and in particular on St Thomas Aquinas, is perhaps the most profound and inspiring part of the book. In showing the influence which the Arab philosopher had on Jewish thought Professor Rosenthal brings out in particular what Maimonides owes to his predecessor, thus showing from a new angle his influence on the middle ages through this Jewish thinker. There is also an essay by Professor Crombie describing Avicenna's achievement as a scientist and stressing the place he occupies in the medieval scientific tradition. A useful index of names concludes the volume.

P.M.

RELIGIOUS DANCES, IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND IN POPULAR MEDICINE. By E. Louis Backman. (Allen and Unwin; 35s.)

When Nietzsche said that 'God is dead' he was saying something most significant—not about God, but about humanity. For when human beings get themselves into a sufficiently desperate psychological mess they become almost incapable of encountering the living God; the blockage at the human level is so fixed that only the most sincere surrender can remove it. By that time the mysteries of religion have begun to seem absurd. For instance, if a human being has never loved another human person so much as to want to cherish every object that the other has touched or handled, then the cult of relics of the saints is bound to strike them as odd—even superstitious. Similarly, anyone who has never jumped for joy, or wished to dance out of sheer gladness, will fail to understand why human beings throughout the ages have danced their religion. It is true, of course, that they will also be spared the disappointment of hearing the priest announcing '*et circumdabo altare tuum, Domine*' and then doing nothing of the sort! But that is little consolation for being cut off from the time-old human tradition of dancing one's faith and hopes. It is this tradition which forms the subject of Professor Backman's extremely interesting study.

His work is a documentary, rather than an inspired, account of the place occupied by the dance in Judaism, in the early Church and through-

out the Middle Ages. And although one feels that much of it is rather superficial as compared with Hugo Rahner's *Eranos* essay, which goes to the theological roots of the dance, there are many illuminating quotations from the Fathers to gladden the hearts of those who feel moved to join in the Dance of the Angels, that notion so dear to the heart of St Ambrose. As a supplement to Rahner's essay, Backman's book, however, is most welcome. And the descriptions and analyses of the epidemics of dancing madness will attract the student of medieval society (though he may be slightly disconcerted to discover how often it was due to eating ergot).

In one respect, nevertheless, the book proves somewhat disappointing. Backman constantly stresses the connection between the dances and the shrines of saints who were noted for healing people, especially the mentally sick. And he also notes the frequent identification of the priest with the healer, where the dance is equally appropriate to either office. Yet he has scarcely anything to say about the therapeutic effects of dancing as it may still be applied at the present day. In view of the discoveries made by deep-psychology along these lines it would seem that the documents he has collected on the subject of dancing could be made to yield a much richer harvest. Once that harvest has been garnered it will seem less strange that a paralytic should learn to dance again before recovering her ability to walk (cf. MacMillan's *The Reluctant Healer*. Gollancz, 1952); and perhaps some of those who feel paralysed in the twentieth-century church will learn again to walk with God when once they are allowed to dance there.

DONALD NICHOLL

VISION AND ACTION: THE PROBLEM OF ECUMENISM. By Professor L. A. Zander. (Gollancz; 18s.)

The position of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement is of the greatest interest to Catholics. Looking upon their church as they do, as the only authentic Church, and in principle refusing all compromise in this respect, might they not be a valuable example for us? Might this not be proof that positive presence in the movement does not exclude intransigence in doctrine? It is with this preoccupation of mind that Professor Zander's book is to be read, wondering at the same time whether many of the Orthodox would really go as far as he in accepting the fact of ecumenism. The interest of the subject is increased by the author's abundant knowledge, his evident open-mindedness and his Christian sympathy for every type of thought and expression. Catholicism is constantly studied, and the position he takes up with regard to the these of eminent Catholics—Fr Congar, Abbé Couturier and Monsieur Journet—enables us to settle the point with uncommon clarity and precision. A whole series of questions arising from the Orthodox conception of ecclesiology are admirably put in unequivocal terms. But there is a quick transition to ideas