

It starts from oral gospel (Acts discourses) and then intersperses epistles with gospels (not chronologically) in what I think is likely to be the best possible way of overcoming the 'can't-get-through-it' feeling that chokes off many perfectly willing people who are simply not much used to serious reading. By the end, the student will have read the greater part of the New Testament, though there will still be a great deal of St Paul awaiting his efforts; but by that time, he will probably be very willing to go ahead on his own.

C. HASTINGS

THE RIGHT TO LIFE, by Norman St John-Stevas; Hodder and Stoughton, 2s. 6d.

This small paperback is concerned largely with the legal-cum-Christian attitude to killing people that forms the general current of opinion in the West about this problem. Murder, suicide, euthanasia, warfare and abortion are all dealt with simply and clearly. The trouble is that 'dealt with' seems to be the right phrase. Traditional Christian moral positions are stated with admirable clarity, and those who were in any doubt as to what Christians in general thought about killing will no doubt find the book valuable. But the whole work reads rather like a digest of a text-book of moral theology. Mr St John-Stevas' legal preoccupations show through on every page. It would be absurd to deny the truth of much of what he is saying, but equally the negative way in which it is said robs a Christian statement of its charity, and almost of its validity. The moral theologian of the recent past having produced his network of prohibitions, proceeds to evolve a highly complex casuistry to allow for the 'hard cases'. That this is a truncated and malformed approach to the whole question of Christian morality is now being widely accepted. It is therefore unfortunate that *The Right to Life* gives no glimmering of this in its discussion of acute moral difficulties. Here the Christian has it all cut and very dried.

There is the customary tired defence of nuclear weapons as deterrents, together with the accompanying condemnation of actually using them. This is no place to enter into that discussion again, but it is worth pointing out that Mr St John-Stevas accepts Pius XII's condemnation of indiscriminate killing (p. 120) and John XXIII's attack on war (p. 125) as an instrument of justice, but appears to regard the dropping of atomic bombs 'on enemy cities only' (p. 119) as a legitimate use of nuclear weapons. Here is morality gone badly astray.

In the chapter on warfare there is a truly astonishing passage on non-violent resistance, in which the author describes this policy as a counsel of perfection which men are 'not bound to emulate'. (p. 115). It seems we are commanded to be 'perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect' but counsels of perfection do not have any binding force. Here again is an example of the confused thinking of the moral text-book writers.

I have been disappointed in this book because the author is too eminent and too capable to produce anything as sad as this. I suspect it was written with only

half his attention. I do not want to mislead readers into thinking that it is any way a dull book. It is well written, clear and very direct, but it is simply mistaken as well.

NEIL MIDDLETON

SAINTS OF THE EAST, by Donald Attwater; Harvill Press, 25s.

Eastern spirituality as portrayed in recent books by Orthodox writers has tended to emphasise the hesychastic tradition and to present it as the characteristic form of piety and asceticism among the holy men of the Eastern Churches. Its popularity derives from Gregory Palamas and his followers and it is linked with a theology which appears to lay little stress on the Incarnation.

Donald Attwater's *Saints of the East* is a welcome corrective to such a one-sided view. His selection of saints includes sixteen of the great saints of the east, from St Ignatius of Antioch to St Sava of Serbia. Although these biographies cover a wide variety of vocations one is struck by the essential unity in the type of holiness of these saints: the robust simplicity of their faith in the person of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, their remarkable activity in practical affairs and their down-to-earth common sense. Inevitably the best sketches are those deriving from contemporary writings, but Mr Attwater's shrewd and kindly judgement has dealt skilfully with the overgrowth of hagiography which obscures our view of so many of the early saints.

The book concludes with six less well known eastern holy men from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, all of whom were in communion with Rome. These sketches are particularly welcome because the west knows very little about the saints and holy men venerated by contemporary eastern Catholics. The Venerable Mekhitar of Sivas was an Armenian who, after a troubled career in the Near East, founded the Armenian monastery in Venice which has done such valuable work through its polyglot printing press. Blessed Gabra Michael, an Ethiopian, was beatified as a martyr in 1926 for his courageous witness for the faith. He died in 1855. Matthew Gregory Nakkar, who had been the metropolitan of Mosul, was a convert from the Syrian Jacobite Church. The three Maronite religious all lived in the nineteenth century. They are much venerated by the Maronite Church and their causes have been introduced at Rome. Father Sharbel is the best known outside the Lebanon. In the past thirty years many healings have been reported and the number of pilgrims flocking to his tomb has caused a special road to be built.

*Saints of the East* is a fascinating and rewarding book. The reader is left hoping for more and it is perhaps a measure of the impact of the book that one regrets the absence of a bibliography. There are fifteen photographs, mostly of icons, including three from the new Byzantine chapel at the Benedictine monastery at Chevetogne.

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