

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.

HELLE GEORGIADIS