

Questions for Living, Dom Helder Camara, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987, ISBN 0883445581, pp. 100, US\$8.95, paperback.

Among the current top 15 bestsellers of Orbis Books is this slim volume by the Brazilian Bishop Camara. The original French text dates back to 1984, and is – as J. de Broucker explains in the forward – the result of the prelate’s pastoral tour in Brittany during the previous year. The replies he gave during the question time, after his well-attended talks, have here been revised, and grouped in twenty short chapters. They deal with the Archbishop’s personal background, his place in his home church, and his relationship with the world church, in particular, with the present Pope John II. We learn about his religion and prayer life, his expectations and hopes, but mainly about “his position on politics, economics, pacifism, or non-violence, and on to concrete inquires about how individuals can actually conform their lives to all the lovely ideas, about which Dom Helder Camara speaks” (p. viii).

Although the questions were raised in a European context, and are somewhat different from those directed to the Bishop, when, in 1974, he visited Papua New Guinea, and, although the answers are given by a Catholic Archbishop from South America, who does not shy away from making his stand clear on Mary and the saints, his priesthood and the Vatican billions, etc., his message has a universal ring. This is because he acknowledges that the Spirit of God breathes even where missionaries have not yet set foot (p. 20). Camara does not provide ready answers, and would not agree that “young Latin America has lessons to teach its old parent, Europe” (p. 39); instead, he sees the benefits of informing one another, and of stirring one another up, to be, or become, true Christians. His words, illustrated with some twenty well-chosen photographs, are substantial food for thought and action. They contain the highlights of a biography, and the main points of the man’s vision, in a language accessible for all.

Theodor Aerts.