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The Signs of the Times, by Maximiano

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The Signs of the Times and the Social Doctrine of the Church: An Epistemological Basis. By Fr. Jose Mario B. Maximiano 1991. (No printed place or publisher, 1991). 298 pages.

1991 was the "Year of the Social Doctrine of the Church" as well as of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCPII) whose "Message to the People of God" called attention to the discernment of the "signs of the times" as the starting point of the PCPII. Hence Fr. Maximiano's book is most timely, incorporating as it does the most recent papal encyclicals *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Among many firsts, according to Fr. Pedro de Achutegui, S.J., official censor of the book, Fr. Jose Mario B. Maximiano is one of the first, if not the first Filipino to present the social doctrine of the Church (SDC) and the signs of the times in a systematic way. This revised doctoral dissertation, the author's Introduction states, will not:

... deal with one particular papal, conciliar or synodal document in particular nor will it be an interpretative commentary of any of them. It will not be an in-depth study of each of the permanent elements, the perennial principles and values embodied in the SDC or its themes. The study will not claim to produce a completely new synthesis or manual of the Catholic social teaching where the synopses of magisterial documents that are considered social are given.

The author's distinct contribution is an epistemological approach to the signs of the times and to the SDC; that is, to use the tripartite methodology of "To See, To Judge, and To Act" according to the *Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (1988). The book is divided into three parts: The first treats of the theoretical dimension, the theological essence, the historical dimension of the SDC and the formation of its historical heritage. SDC is a religious or exhortative discourse related to sociology, philosophy, and theology, and is addressed to the concrete man of today. The sources of SDC are the word of God, the natural law, and the historical events taken as *text*. In the task of Evangelization, doing justice to the poor is a constitutive dimension of the social ministry of the Church grounded on the social ministry of Jesus.

The second part deals with the historical and theoretical dimensions of the signs of the times and its doctrinal content and place in the methodology of the SDC. The phrase *signa temporum* since Vatican II (*Gaudium Et Spes*) (1965) has evolved to become part of the official language of the Social Magisterium. From the perspective of *text*, an actual historical event could be the occasion of the presence of God, e.g. the EDSA Revolution. Fr. Maximiano points out that the SDC has two elements: the permanent, deduced

from the SDC, and the contingent, which is inducted from the signs of the times. The third part finally presents the tripartite methodology (to see-to judge-to act) in the theologies of practice. *To see* involves socio-analytical mediation; *to judge*, hermeneutical mediation; *to act*, mediation of praxis. A word of caution: the use of the tripartite method is radically subject to the manipulation and influence of ideologies like Marxist Collectivism or Capitalist Liberalism.

One might object that the need of the Philippine Church is theological reflection and pastoral action, rather than a theory of knowledge to discern the signs of the times and to put into practice the SDC. In response, the author states in his Introduction:

... a solid theoretical bedrock or a well-founded epistemological basis, a "rational verification," can certainly make a difference in relation to assent of the mind and the will. A stable theoretical position may help the SDC to be more universally acceptable to the human intellect (let us remember that it is addressed to "all men of good will"), not to mention its theological profile that makes it acceptable to the faithful.

In short, on the basis of reason, there is in SDC something universally human that appeals to all men, whereas the Christian faith as ultimate basis may not be too welcome to other great religions of the world. The author employs diagrams, tables and literal or non-numerical equations as illustrations to bring the core content of the book to the reader, but, in the opinion of this reviewer, an index to the social teachings of the Church would have been more helpful. The author intended this dissertation to serve as a textbook for philosophy and theology students and as reading for educated Catholics, but this reviewer doubts whether even most bishops and priests would persevere in reading through this difficult Ph.D. dissertation, despite the very complimentary foreword by Jaime Cardinal Sin.

In the context of the Philippine Church envisioned by the PCPII, namely the Church of the poor, pro Filipino, and pro Christ, the reader should expect from the SDC "principles of reflection, and criteria for judgement" rather than "*practical pastoral directives for action*." In other words, those who are pastorally oriented towards social action may be disappointed with the book.

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