

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

A Theology of Progress: Maturing in Christ

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Philippine Studies vol. 13, no. 2 (1965): 404–407

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Miss Leech's biography of McKinley is a superlative account and evaluation of the man and the political context in which he thought and acted. For an understanding of external developments regarding the Philippines at the turn of the century, and particularly for an understanding of subsequent American policies in the Philippines, this book is a must.

THOMAS R. MCHALE

A THEOLOGY OF PROGRESS

MATURING IN CHRIST: Saint Paul's Program for Christian Growth. By George T. Montague, S.M. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1964. x, 244 pp.

Like other well-worn words, progress is a much-abused term; yet in the Anglo-Saxon idiosyncrasy it has stood in good stead for almost anything worthy of emulation in the sense that what is worthy of emulation must be capable of being marshalled to the idea of progress. One might, perhaps, also observe that, to a certain extent, it connotes a few of the more affirmative implications of the existential mood that pervades modern thought, as e.g. the dynamics of movement and the always modern preoccupation with progression towards unification, both, in the realm both of thought and reality.

The various and vibrant textures underlying the idea of progress are excellently brought into focus if one goes back to its ideological and historical moorings. This is what Father G. Montague does for the modern reader. While achieving a re-evaluation of the idea of progress from its specifically Christian background, he straightway engages the reader in his proper and more intense task: an interpretation of the theology of St. Paul from the viewpoint of growth. Aimed at inviting a wider reading public to "concentrate attention on the Apostle's ideas", this book, originally a doctoral dissertation under Father Spicq, O.P., responds on the practical level to the needs of those "who hope for a living, existentialist theology, capable of fully satisfying the deepest aspirations."¹

Starting from the different conceptions of time and history prevalent in pagan antiquity on one hand and among the biblical Hebrews on the other, Father Montague shows that true progress as well as its appreciation can be associated only with the linear notion of time which the Jews cherished as opposed to the cyclic concept of the pre-Christian gentile world. Progress, being closely bound up with

¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *New Testament Today* (Herder and Herder, 1963).

the Judaeo-Christian conception of history, is essentially a growth. Contrary to some modern tendencies, this growth is to be interpreted in terms of greater intensity and interiorization rather than of expansion and external progress. It is the kind of growth brought into relief by a study of the Pauline epistles: "Growing is one of Paul's most technical terms for progress: The gospel 'grows', faith 'grows', Christians 'grow'" (p. 209); and because St. Paul not only teaches the manifold facets of Christian growth, but "there appears to be a true evolution in Paul's thought [in the area] of the noetic functions, particularly in the area of... epignosis" (p. 193); therefore, the epistles are presented in chronological order, with Thessalonians at the outset.

An initial examination of relevant texts, chiefly from I and II Thessalonians, Philipppians, and Romans, leads to the conclusion that in them, "progress is presented not as an advance on a road or as a climbing heights, but as an abiding, a more profound attachment, a deeper rooting and solidification, a growth in strength and virility" (p. 57). Understanding progress thus, it "can be reduced to a growth in and by faith, hope, and charity" (p. 185). This is shown in specie by pointing up their intrinsic dynamics towards the ultimate and unifying goal of all Christian progress. This goal reveals itself in the noetic dimensions of progress as understood in the Pauline context, particularly in Ephesians and Colossians: "Advance in faith and love... bears fruit in a knowledge" (p. 172). The knowledge of which St. Paul speaks is twofold; it is "gnosis" and "epignosis", the former being contemplative love, "lost in an unfathomable sea of love" (cf. p. 192). This kind of knowledge is the fruit of 'epignosis' which is "properly the awakening of Christian consciousness to the precise nature of the riches embraced by the faith" (*ibid.*). Epignosis has a markedly dynamic and existential character: Rooted in the Old Testament concept of knowledge, it stands for "intimate communion with the person or thing known" (p. 191). As such, therefore, epignosis implies commitment and consequently, it involves the will. Thus it has its own dynamics: Lack of the will's activity in this knowledge is, according to the Bible, both a sin and a mistake (cf. p. 191). Because epignosis is "the realization of what one may know already obscurely", it follows upon faith, and it is consequent upon charity because it is "the recognition of a beloved" (p. 191). Father Montague not only adduces numerous Pauline texts to corroborate his interpretation, but he also elaborates on the etymology and use of the word 'epignosis' and related terms.

Again it is awareness of shades of meaning that makes the author dwell on the remarkable Greek expression 'aletheueins' which defies literal translation (cf. Eph. IV, 15; Gal. IV, 16 *et al.*). It is what the Vulgate calls "faciens veritatem"—do the truth, in other words, "embody the truth in love". Here, according to Pauline teaching "lies the key

for the universal growth of Christians" (p. 21). From the context of Ep. IV, 15 it becomes clear that embodying the truth in love implies corporate growth tending towards an ultimate unifying goal. (Eph. II, 20-22): "The theme of upbuilding is the principal witness to the corporate dimensions of the Apostle's thought" (p. 197), all themes regarding corporate growth being grouped around 'oikodome'. How intimately this theme of upbuilding is interlaced with the previous ones of faith, hope, and charity is made evident from a reference taken from Jeremias XII:12. "Here the prophet indicates that God's building powers... are made to depend on a confession of faith" (p. 198).

With the elaboration of the ultimate goal of corporate growth, the interpretation of "St. Paul's program for Christian growth" reaches its climax. Accordingly, pertinent texts are selected chiefly from Ephesians and Colossians. The goal of corporate progress is "the perfect man", *añer teleios*. To this expression corresponds that of "new man" in Col. III, 10 and II, 2. This perfect man is Christ building up His Body, the Church (Eph. IV, 16). Consequently, Christians must "embody in their lives the mystery of unity worked in them" (p. 201). When Paul therefore uses the terms 'new man,' 'perfect man,' he expresses a corporate reality primarily, i.e. the whole Christ" (p. 207). In this direction points also the term "pleroma" in the phrase 'the mature measure of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. IV, 13). The pleroma of Christ is the Church, His Body which is "pure capacity for Christ" (p. 207). The Christian life is a continual progress towards this ideal. It is corporate growth towards this unifying goal which, according to Father Montague, makes all individual striving for perfection meaningful. The state of "infancy", that is, of immaturity, consists basically in an exaggerated and selfish individualism and singularity as diametrically opposed to the 'aner teleiós', the perfect man. Since, moreover, the ideal of unity has its source and principle in Christ, it assumes cosmic dimensions: The cosmic Christ, "running the circuit of the universe from base to summit, thus filling it with his presence and conquering it as his kingdom..." (cf. Eph. I, 20-22; Phil., II, 8-10 p. 202).

Thus, the ultimate goal of perfect unity in the Christology of St. Paul attains to proportions which not only are all-embracing, but which also give poignant meaning and significance to all human history in its individual and collective unfolding. By thus tracing for us an outstanding feature in the theology of St. Paul, Father Montague's book has the merit of furnishing an authentic answer to the present-day quest for a new and deeper grasp of the dignity of man and his relationship, not only to the totality of men, but to the whole material universe. In this connection, it may be in place to call attention to the remarkable coordination of Pauline texts that have been brought together by way of *loci theologici*, one might say, to prove

some rather enlightening propositions, as e.g. the observation that the link between Christ and Cosmos is always the Church (p. 226). On pages 94-95 is found an impressive enumeration of parallel texts bearing on the static and dynamic elements in a variety of Pauline themes.

That at the conclusion of such a treatise dialectical idealism, dialectical materialism, and Darwin's theory of evolution should have to be invoked for recalling the linear concept of history is regrettable; these 'isms fit into the picture somewhat like junk into a new house; and long before the author hastens to add that "there is however, a difference" (p. 229), one has already judged that history involves freedom, while all three theories are determinist on various levels. But then the theme of freedom seems altogether somewhat relegated to the background in this program for Christian growth.

The book has a fine index of references from the Old and New Testaments. In a second edition, one would eventually like to see the exact sources of the quotations from St. Thomas, and perhaps, some others.

The taking into account of Greek etymology is very fascinating for those who are acquainted with the Greek New Testament. Those who read the New Testament in the vernacular—and they will always be the majority—might feel it to be just a trifle too much for them to go through with it. The book deserves a wide clientele of readers.

SISTER MARIA BRUNO, O.S.B.

A RETREAT FOR HOUSEWIVES

HALO FOR A HOUSEWIFE: A RETREAT AT HOME. By Jean Kelleher Porter. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1962. xiii, 136 pp.

Halo for a Housewife was conceived for the busy wife and mother who wishes to "get away" and make a spiritual retreat but because of the pressures of household duties finds it difficult to do so. It is designed to provide such women with a plan which would make it possible for them to "go on retreat"—on their own—without disrupting the daily schedule of housework, needing little else but cooperative understanding from family members. The book is so prepared that it becomes a spiritual companion and guide for three days.

The book is made up of three sections: the first deals with the Theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity); the second, with the