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The Human and the Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology

Review Author: Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J.

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Finally, the author's narrative and descriptive talents are often hamstrung by annoying mannerisms ("in a trice"; "a richly sum"; "a goodly distance"), clichés ("the founts of love"), and various verbal oddities ("she passed the chance"; "he loosed his cravat"; "she occasioned to stand beside him"), not to mention the tautologies, dangling modifiers, vague or missing antecedents, and subject-verb disagreements which give her writing an amateurish quality. Philippine literature which displays such awkward and ineffective handling of English raises with even more urgency the very basic issue of choice of language which the contemporary Filipino writer must grapple with.

Ma. Eloisa N. Francisco

THE HUMAN AND THE HOLY: ASIAN PERSPECTIVES IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY. Edited by Emerito P. Nakpil and Douglas J. Elwood, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1978. x, 367 pages.

The present volume contains the papers, workshop reports, and addresses of the Consultation on Theological Education for Christian Ministry in Asia held in Makati, Metro Manila, in March 1977. The purpose of the Consultation was to find some answers to three major questions: (a) is there an emergence in the Asian scene of some consensus on the nature and agenda of the theological task in Asia?; (b) what forms of Christian ministry must be developed to carry out this task?; and (c) what kind of theological formation is needed to do it?

To answer these questions, the organizers of the Consultation brought together some 100 participants, speakers, and consultants from 14 Asian countries. While the majority of the participants were from theological schools, the various ministries of the Churches were also represented. The problems raised in the Consultation were therefore considered from the different perspectives of Church ministries — a fact that definitely contributed to the copious and rich insights brought out in the Consultation.

The central focus of the Consultation was on the human and the holy; what it means to be authentically human, and to discern the "sacredness" or the "holiness" of the human. This is an important and urgent question for man today, but perhaps especially for Asians. The participants addressed themselves to the question, not so much as an academic exercise as a wrestling, as it were, with the Asian historical realities today on the one hand, and with the reality of God in Christ encountered in the Scriptures and in the living faith of Christian communities on the other.

The participants — who were theological educators, Church leaders, frontier-ministries workers, and theological students — were determined to find and confront specifically Asian issues and to consider how these issues may be illumined by the rich insights of the Christian traditions. But they

also saw very clearly that there is not one single Asian reality. One must talk rather of Asian realities, and very complex ones at that. Without exception, Asian societies are in a state of transition; having seen the end of the colonial era, they have yet to truly "find" themselves. These are societies possessing rich ancient traditions in religion and culture; to bring about the necessary and desired development of the human without at the same time losing the richness of their cultures made the searching and wrestling of these Asian theologians all the more urgent.

The three subthemes of the Consultation – "Man and the Holy," "Man and Nature," and "Man in History and Society" – show how wide a field it tried to cover. Yet the magnitude of the problems in these areas, especially as they arise in Asia, makes it imperative that the questions be raised and confronted. Compared to the teeming millions of Asia, the Asian Christians form a very tiny community. How can the Christians then address themselves in a meaningful way to Asian sufferings and hopes and aspirations?

Each of the subthemes is introduced by two short papers presenting the biblical viewpoints, from the Old Testament by Dr. Preman Niles (Sri Lanka), and from the New Testament by the Rev. Benjamin Dominguez (Philippines). Then there is a "major" paper for each subtheme which seeks to reflect and "theologize" on the subject from within an Asian context. Dr. Kosuke Koyama, who has already given us *Waterbuffalo Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974) and *No Handle on the Cross* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977) gives us his reflections on the man who creates meaning in his environment in his paper "Adam in Deep Sleep." Dr. Chung Choon Kim (Korea) and Fr. Catalino Arevalo, S.J., present the other two major papers – Dr. Kim on the "man-nature relationship," and Fr. Arevalo on the issues that emerge out of the "impact of change on the traditional concepts, attitudes and relationship about man (specifically, "Asian man") in society and history." The volume contains other papers which were distributed ahead of time to the participants. Finally there are reports from the different workshops.

Flowing inevitably from the nature of the Consultation, but also by explicit choice, the Consultation became decidedly an "exercise in theological conversation." Hence, together with the results that it achieved, the process that it generated must also be taken into account in evaluating this book. The fact that it contains the result of this theological conversation accounts for its strong points (as well as the inevitable shortcomings). Contained in the volume is the rich harvest of ideas, issues and viewpoints that surfaced in the discussions. One can almost feel in the workshop reports the urgency and concern with which many of the issues were raised and confronted: the problems of poverty and alienation; of cultures, ideologies and religions; of human rights and human hopes; of multinational corporations and the problems of development; of the Church in sufferings and pain.

Much harder to recapture and to reproduce in the printed book is the

dynamics and tone that accompanied the process of this theological conversation. We can presume that the process included intensive preparation through the study of preparatory documents, addresses and discussions, sharing of insights and viewpoints, and the production of reports. But alas, what could have been an exciting, colorful discussion comes to us in a sober, unemotional, "objective" report.

Worthy of note also in the present volume are a number of previously published articles which were sent ahead of time to the participants as background papers. Notable among these are the article of Dr. James Veitch, "Is an Asian Theology Possible?", that of Dr. M.M. Thomas, "Modern Man and the New Humanity in Jesus Christ," and two from the editors themselves, Dr. Elwood and Dr. Nakpil. The background paper prepared by Dr. Elwood, "Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking," is especially helpful since it is largely a summary of selected emphases in the writings of Asian Christian theologians as already found in two published works, *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975) and *What Asian Christians are Thinking* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1976).

Whatever adverse criticisms may be brought against the book stem largely from the nature of the publication — the "proceedings" of a theological conversation. Perhaps one "shortcoming" worth noting is that the Consultation tried to cover a very extensive field of concerns so that the list of topics brought up in the workshops ranged far and wide. (But then, what conversation does not regularly wander far afield?) The discussions remained rather general and not pointed enough; important issues were brought up, discussed briefly and then dropped. Precisely because the issues and questions are urgent ones, should they not be discussed with more theological depth and solid grounding in Scripture and in our traditions?

All in all, however, the strengths of the present volume far outweigh whatever criticisms may be leveled against it. The Christian communities of Asia owe a debt of gratitude to the editors for putting this book together and making the fruits of their consultation available to a wider group of Church people. To the various sectors of the Christian churches in Asia, but especially to their theologians, this book should be valuable for the exciting and forceful presentation of the theological tasks before them.

Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J.

A PHILIPPINE RURAL SCHOOL: ITS CULTURAL DIMENSION. By Priscila S. Manalang. Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 1977. 235 pages.

Although the title of the book might well lead the reader to anticipate a more or less radical approach to education along lines developed, perhaps,