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## Devil Wings and Angel Wings

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## Devil Wings and Angel Wings

Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.



**Devil Wings.** By Renato E. Madrid. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996. 262 pages.

*Devil Wings* is described as a novel, although it has a certain amount of theological and psychological analysis. But as the literary critics, Thrall and Hibbard, define it, "the term novel is used in the broadest sense to designate any extended fictional prose narrative." That is a good definition of "Devil Wings." It is a novel in the broadest sense. In its fundamental meaning, the term novel is restricted to a narrative in which the characters appear, either in static and undeveloping condition, or in the process of development as a result of events and actions. As Wellek and Warren state, "a novel is a picture of life and manners." That is what *Devil Wings* is all about—a fictional picture of human life and experience, and of Filipino life and manners.

A reviewer described *Devil Wings* as a "Filipino Catholic Novel, . . . a narrative of human innocence, of guilt, corruption, rebellion, politics, the prevalence of evil and the persistence of sanctity." But it is also a very broadminded novel. He described it as "a psychological thriller, a metaphysical detective story and a spiritual adventure tale." It provides a very profound picture of the positive and negative aspects of human life. Erwin Castillo says that "Renato Madrid writes with concern for our physical and spiritual responsibilities, cloaked in a caul of midnight humor." Another critic says Madrid's novel is "a treasure trove of ideas for critical discussion." Madrid's theme is expressed in the quote from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which is on the dedication page: "Our battle in human life is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers [big shots and politicians!]. Our battle in human life is against the rulers of the world of darkness [the world of sin!] and against forces of evil that is stronger than any human being."

### Filipino Priests

Renato Madrid's novel is really a novel on Filipino priests. They are the main characters in his narrative, but they can also be considered as literary metaphors for all human beings. The main characters are Padre Diaz and Padre La Crava. They are semi-opponents in the sense that they have two very different approaches to priesthood and life. One other character said, "Priests love to stab each other in the back!" There is also the *kwento* of the Philippine Apostolic Nuncio in the Prologue and in the Epilogue of the novel and his views and comments on Philippine priests and culture. One other priest who is a minor character in the narrative is Padre Lorenzo. He is on the edge of leaving the priesthood.

In *Devil Wings* Dr. Macaraeg and his son Joe are the lay characters who bring out the personality of the priests in their relationships with them. In one scene Joe said: "As priests, Diaz and La Crava, are both quite successful, but are they really good? As priests, I mean Diaz is in love with money and La Crava is in love with power. He is against all authority. Sometimes he fights with his own archbishop. These two priests are definitely doomed!" That is a thematic summary of the main idea of the novel as a reflection on these two Filipino priests.

But in Madrid's novel, the Filipino priests are also a symbol for Filipinos and all human beings. An indication that *Devil Wings* is not just a novel of priests, but also a novel of human beings as well, is the character of Joe. Joe himself is a symbol, both of the good and bad priests and of all human beings. It seems he was on the way to priesthood and nicely advised by his priest friends, but he was also sinful. He had two illegitimate children, and in the end he committed suicide. Madrid suggests that Joe, like priests and many human beings, "sang without words" and lived without intelligence and holiness. Moses told all his Jewish people that God wanted them to be priests, That was true of Joe—a lay person with the character of a priest, both good and bad.

Joe's father, Doctor Macaraeg, says that Padre Diaz was "a bumbly idiot. He was a busy bumbling idiot." It is clear through all the stories of the novel that Padre Diaz is traditional and materialistic. He likes to build buildings and follow the rules. Padre La Crava is independent and rebellious. He wants to be a politician. A friend tells him: "It's your squatters and your factory workers that are running you ragged. That's peanuts! Squatters and factory workers are just cheap peanuts. You are wasting your time on peasants! You should be in politics—in our Filipino politics—because it is only from the top in politics that you get things done in our country."

As the publisher's blurb said, Madrid's novel is also Filipino, though its emphasis is on Filipino priests. One very spiritual character in the novel says

that Filipinos and Filipino priests are "loafers, spongers, wasteful, lotus eaters, professional beggars and petty thieves. The country has taken forever to develop. There is too much sin and selfish greed in our country!" Many of Madrid's fictional narratives emphasize the fact that Filipinos and Filipino priests are culturally meal-oriented (greedy?), *kundiman*-oriented (they sing about wounded love), and *bayani*-oriented (hero, political and *malakas* oriented). In the novel, the Apostolic Nuncio in the Philippines says that "Whatever foul things Filipinos do, we have to look the other way, and say nice things about them at all times, even when they dump garbage outside our gate. We need the grace that makes certain individuals glad to be of service to foreigners." That is also true of Filipino priests.

### Theological Narrative

The chapter titles in the novel are an indication that the novel is a theological reflection as well as a narrative of Filipino priests. Part One includes the chapter titles on human life. They are the same topics used by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises, in the first and second week of a spiritual retreat. The chapters are on the "Twelfth Day of Christmas" (human and commercial rather than spiritual love), the "Sins of the Fathers," the "Gifts of the King," "Papaya" (Philippine symbol of Buddhism!), "Night Music" (music of conversion in the life of sin), and "Songs Without Words." These chapter titles are a summary of human life. Both priests and human beings are materialistic and sinful, but they need to choose to follow Christ the King who leads us to holiness. We need to seek forgiveness of our sins, and to sing songs of life with intellectual words and meaning as well as romantic and emotional melodies.

Part Two is the analysis of priestly and human life. The chapter titles deal with "Death and Judgment," "Heaven and Hell," faith and dreams in God's providence that we may end up in the "Land of the Morning." In theological terms these final stages of life—death and judgment, heaven and hell, faith and God's final coming are called eschatological topics. They are the list of the ends of our lives here on earth. Madrid is suggesting that Filipino priests will have to face the goal of life, the eschatology at the end of their lives. As Madrid quoted St. Paul, our battle in life is our preparation for eschatology—for death and resurrection.

### Conclusion

In Part Two of the Novel, Dr. Macaraeg quotes the poem from which Madrid derived the title of his novel. The poem is called "Alas Del Diablo"—Wings of the Devil. The poem says: "Who shall we say you [priests and Filipinos] are? You are God's own hands and feet! It is you who must God's latest thaw [conversion] begin. You must, like fools, rush in where angels

fear to tread. You who heed God's call and fall when flying shall not regain the heights once sought, save in the sphere of thought. The trouble is that often you do not soar. You do not serve others. That is now more secular and more absurd. The good man's cry still rings. But with the sinners, you gave the people Devil Wings!"

Although Madrid's novel is basically about priests, it is also a novel about all Filipinos and all human beings. As Moses said, all people must also be like priests as well. But as Madrid points out, priests are both good and bad, and all of us are both good and bad, too. Like priests all of us hear God's call and sometimes fall. As Madrid's Devil Wings poem says: "We ought to soar. We ought to serve. We ought to sing the song of God and not give others the wings of the devils, but the wings of God's angels." Madrid's novel is a spiritual narrative. It is good for critical discussion and spiritual reflection as well as a very interesting piece of literature.