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Review Article

Social Justice Ministry and the Philippine Context

VITALIANO R. GOROSPE, S.J.

OUR BEST KEPT SECRET: THE RICH HERITAGE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING. By Michael J. Schultheis, Ed P. DeBerri, Peter Henriot. Washington D.C.: Center of Concern, 1985. 52 pages. Philippine edition reprinted by Cardinal Bea Institute, Ateneo de Manila, Quezon City, 1985.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY: FOUNDATIONS AND CONCERNS. By Paul Steidl-Meier, S.J. New York: Le Jacq Publishing Inc., 1984. xxii, 325 pages. Philippine edition reprinted by Cardinal Bea Institute, 1985.

FAITH ENCOUNTERS IDEOLOGY: CHRISTIAN DISCERNMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE. By Douglas J. Elwood. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985. xvi, 318 pages.

These three books are all deeply concerned with the social justice ministry of the Church and find timely relevance to the heightened social awareness and social justice thrust of the Church in the Philippine context today. The aim of all these books is education and commitment to a Christian faith that does justice. The first can serve as a companion study aid, the second as a scholarly in-depth analysis and reference book, and the third as a textbook for seminary or college theology use. All three can be used for individual or group study and reflection.

THE RICH HERITAGE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The subtitle—*A Primer of Catholic Social Teaching*—is a good description of the contents of this handy study aid. The Introduction (pp. 5-7) gives the purpose of the booklet: to provide an overview of the major

thrust and strengthen the foundations of Catholic Social teaching for further study and reflection. Among the reasons why the Church's social teaching has been "our best kept secret" is the fact that most educated Catholics in general (*a fortiori* Filipino Catholics in particular) are ignorant of the rich heritage of Catholic social teaching in the Papal encyclicals and other Church documents. The first part of the booklet (pp. 8-16) provides a historical overview of the development and changes in attitudes and methodology of the Church's social teaching from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to the Second Vatican Council (1965) as well as a summary of the major lessons of Catholic social teaching.

The second part (pp. 17-46) contains detailed summary outlines in two columns of ten especially selected Church documents which deal exclusively with social justice:

1. The Condition of Labor (*Rerum Novarum*), Leo XIII, 1891.
2. The Reconstruction of the Social Order (*Quadragesimo Anno*), Pius XI, 1931.
3. Christianity and Social Progress (*Mater et Magistra*), John XXIII, 1961.
4. Peace on Earth (*Pacem in Terris*) John XXIII, 1963.
5. Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), Second Vatican Council, 1965.
6. The Development of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*), Paul VI, 1967.
7. A Call to Action (*Octogesima Adveniens*), Paul VI, 1971.
8. Justice in the World, Synod of Bishops, 1971.
9. Evangelization in the Metro World (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), Paul VI, 1975.
10. On Human Work (*Laborem Exercens*), John Paul II, 1981.

The third part (pp. 47-52) gives suggestions for using the booklet, study questions, and a select bibliography (which can be supplemented here in the Philippines with *The Philippine Bishops Speak (1968-1983)*, edited by Richard P. Hardy (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1984). This booklet is recommended as a most useful instrument for individual or group study and reflection on the social doctrine of the Church from a very comprehensive perspective.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

Since 1978 the author of this book, Paul Steidl-Meier, S.J., has been teaching development economics and social ethics at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. His academic background and rich Third World exposure in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, eminently qualify him to write this in-depth and foundational study of the Catholic Church's social justice ministry. The Preface to the Asian edition by Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J. has much

to recommend in this book "to all who are serious about helping to bring about greater social justice in the economic and political life of Asia — and equally serious about being faithful to the perspectives that the Gospel mandates for us Christians." According to Bishop Claver, "three general areas in Steidl-Meier's book should be especially appealing to Asian readers: his in-depth discussions on diagnostic method relational theology and the spirituality of the social ministry." I would like to add that what Steidl-Meier has to say about liberation theology and the inculturation of the Christian faith is not only theologically refreshing and enriching but most relevant to the Philippine context.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part One outlines the problems involved in the social ministry of the Church, and gives an in-depth treatment of five grounding considerations for the social justice ministry, which deserve more attention than this review article can possibly give. Paralleling the topics of the second part of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, Part Two examines the social ministry's principal areas of concern and treats of the Church's teaching on politics, economics, culture, the family, and development. Finally the Afterword concludes with the personal growth of the social justice minister and his integration into all forms of Church ministry as well as the development of the Church community itself as it exercises its pluriform ministry.

In their Reflections on Pope John Paul II's Addresses [*CBCP Monitor* 3 (1982)] the Philippine Bishops in their pastoral guidelines for action, point to the need "to develop a more holistic social analysis that would critique opposing ideologies". Even before the warnings of the 1984 Vatican Instruction against the uncritical use of Marxist analysis, there has been a growing realization in the Philippine Church of the limitations of "structural" analysis which in some cases was too ideological and which ignored cultural analysis and the need of cultural change as a necessary requisite for social change. Steidl-Meier makes much of the necessity of cultural change in his diagnostic method and in Chapter 5 on liberation theology and inculturation, not to mention Chapter 8 on Church, Culture, and Persuasion Systems.

In analyzing and reflecting on the Philippine situation of poverty and injustice in the light of the Christian gospel, Steidl-Meier's "diagnostic" method, borrowed from Lonergan, and his "relational" theology, influenced by Rahner, is perhaps the author's most valuable contribution to the ongoing efforts of the Philippine Church to develop a more holistic social analysis of the Philippine situation in the light of a more adequate post-Vatican II theology of social justice ministry. In understanding social reality, the author proposes an adequate method which is (1) diagnostic, (2) dialogic, and (3) comprehensive including the behavioral-empirical, narrative-historical, and critical-rational modes of thinking.

Steidl-Meier proposes a Christian anthropology and a Christological

viewpoint which he names "relational theology." First, this theology is called "relational" because its anthropological starting point is that relatedness—the social and political—are constitutive and distinctive aspects of the human person. Secondly, it is a theology that not only liberates from sinful relations but creates or enculturates the presence of *I Am* (Steidl-Meier's Christological viewpoint) in a given cultural and temporal context. Thirdly, although it is related or includes liberation and political theology and the human rights tradition, this relational theology provides a more extensive and coherent framework than other theological models for exposing the social justice ministry of the Church. According to Steidl-Meier "relational theology is profoundly biblical in origin (in terms of the covenant) and is also, in terms of structure, content, and method, an approach open to dialogue with the major theological traditions extant today" (p. 52), not only European but also Asian and African traditions.

In the past few years there has been a felt need in the Philippine Church for an authentic Christian spirituality for those directly engaged in the apostolate of social justice and social development. This is the age-old problem of integrating contemplation and social action. Christians cannot persevere as Christians in the apostolate of social justice without prayer and a solid spiritual life. This is another merit of Steidl-Meier's book. It provides the solid grounding in the Gospel and in Christian tradition of a spirituality that is absolutely necessary for the social justice ministry in the Church. After discussing the origins of social ministry and its focus, spirituality traditions, and the difficulties encountered by social justice ministers—the twin problem of discernment and growth on the one hand and of contradictions and failures on the other—the author concludes with general characteristics of social ministry spirituality. These characteristics provide criteria for discerning whether one's social ministry is grounded in a genuine Gospel following of Christ.

Steidl-Meier's chapter on History and Social Praxis gives a thorough, balanced and finely nuanced treatment of the Christian theology of history and the elements of authentic Christian social praxis. Today the Christian who is committed to the social praxis of justice need not choose between, on the one hand, a popularized but fatalistic and privatized notion of providence and, on the other hand, a one-sided ideological, if not Marxist, model of current liberation and political theologies. The author presents an orthodox understanding of the theology of providence, critiques its traditional and popular version which is challenged by liberation theology, and then clarifies the religious meaning of hope and freedom based on an authentic Christian eschatology that begins here and now. He incisively points out the challenges and strengths of contemporary models of liberation and political theologies as well as their weaknesses and limitations in accounting for the tension between human freedom and God's grace of salvation, not to mention the mystery of evil and suffering. The Christian

theology of providence and liberation roots evil in sin — original, personal and social. Without rejecting the theology of providence, in the author's view, one can correct its dualisms, by firmly grounding both notions of providence and liberation in the transforming Paschal Mystery or new covenant.

It is in the area of social justice and the inculturation of the faith that Steidl-Meier's historical-narrative and critical methods make a distinct contribution. According to the author, "in a theology of social praxis, the Christian notions of justice and enculturation of the faith interpenetrate one another" (p. 114). Faith and justice have different meanings in different cultures. As Steidl-Meier puts it, "justice can only become 'just' in a historical context, that is, in terms of a culture's end states and associated primary symbols and stories." Symbols and stories find a local habitation in Filipino thought and the meaning of Filipino symbols and stories can only be understood through the historical-narrative and critical methods. The author concludes that

the process of the enculturation of the faith is the celebration of the coming of the Kingdom of God in his people. As such it is a process of conversion and liberation from symbols that imprison, from power that exploits, and from resources that limit. It evokes a new solidarity in the face of suffering in the face of evils present in a culture it creates a new story of human possibilities grounded in the subversive memory of Jesus Christ (p. 116)

To put it simply, the author is saying that the faith that does justice can only be understood and practiced in a cultural context and that the Christian faith—the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ—does not destroy but rather purifies and enriches Filipino culture.

Chapters 5 and 10 on cultural change will appeal to Asian readers. Steidl-Meier is convinced that no change in authority or exchange systems is possible without some sort of cultural change. Taking the two principles of Vatican II on the right and free access of all peoples to cultural development, the author discusses values and the purveyors of values; namely, the three general systems of cultural expression: the knowledge system (education, science, and technology), the moral system (values and attitudes), and the expressive system (language and arts).

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, IDEOLOGIES, AND NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE

The above heading neatly sums up the contents of this study whose underlying basic conviction is that the Christian struggle for justice "should be grounded on Christian sources of inspiration such as are found in the radical social teaching of Jesus" (p. xv).

Of the three books under review, this third one vis-a-vis the Philippine context is the most contextualized. The author, Rev. Douglas J. Elwood a theology and ethics professor, has spent most of his twenty-one years in Asia here in the Philippines and is most familiar with the Philippine scene before and during Martial Law. Moreover, he is quite conversant with the problems of the Philippine Church (not only the Catholic Church but also other Christian ecumenical Churches). Although the author is writing from a Christian ecumenical perspective, his familiarity with Catholic social teaching, both universal and local, and his selection of local Catholic authors is admirable.

All the chapters in the book were originally papers or class lectures presented to Filipino audiences, and many of the author's sources are Filipino authors, mostly theologians. Furthermore, applications to the Philippine situation abound. Elwood requested Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J. to read and criticize the book manuscript and Fr. Jose C. Blanco S.J., Philippine Secretary for International Fellowship of Reconciliation, to write the Foreword. Elwood considers both Bishop Claver and Fr. Blanco as leaders of the movement for active nonviolence.

Chapter 1 on Faith and Ideology is a key chapter. After defining exactly what he means by "Christian faith" and "ideology", Elwood presents the dilemma of today's Christian who cannot avoid ideological choice but must discern and choose of the basis of his Christian faith which competing secular ideology will bring about social change according to the Christian vision of man and society. As the subtitle of the book—"Christian Discernment and Social Change"—suggests, the author provides Christian principles, guidelines, and criteria for avoiding the pitfalls of ideological thinking and subjecting the various current ideologies to Christian criticism.

In the search for Christian viable alternatives, Elwood in Chapters 2 & 3 offers an extended review of Philip J. Wogaman's *Christians and the Great Economic Debate* which presents four current major economic ideologies—Marxist socialism, *laissezfaire* capitalism, social market capitalism, and democratic socialism. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each economic ideology in the light of contemporary thought, the author endorses Wogaman's fivefold Christian criteria for evaluating competing ideologies. As an experienced teacher, Elwood provides students with a very helpful diagram of Wogaman's ideological spectrum and a summary outline (pp. 69-71) of the merits and demerits of the ideologies discussed in Wogaman's book.

Chapters 4 & 5 are devoted to Christianity and Marxism. The author rightly questions the stand of the so-called "Christian Marxists" or "Christians for Marxism." For him this is a fallacy or a contradiction in terms. In the Philippine Church, some of the clergy, religious, and laity have taken ideological options that range from full espousal of Marxist ideology to critical collaboration with left-identified groups. A few have compromised

their Christian faith as either irrelevant or unnecessary for national liberation. Elwood shows on both intellectual and practical grounds that one cannot be an authentic Christian and at the same time be a thoroughgoing Marxist. The author quotes significant critics of Marxist ideology and practice to warn those who are tempted into a dangerous alliance with the Marxists to consider seriously the three most basic problems of Marxism; namely, the Marxist Critique of Religion (Ch. 4), Marxist Analysis and Christian Faith, and the Totalitarian Temptation (Ch. 5).

The second part of the book is concerned with the Christian dilemma of violence or nonviolence. Once again the exposition of the author has in mind by way of background and intent the Philippine situation, and he quotes local sources or authorities like Bishop Claver and the CBCP to back up his arguments. An increasing number of Church people have gone over to the left or joined the NPA and many more have lost hope in peaceful means of social change. In the face of the strong temptation to resort to violence in the struggle for justice, between the extremes of armed violence and passive acquiescence, the author presents a strong case for a third alternative of nonviolent action as a neglected Christian option based on the Gospel ideal and pattern of action. Nonviolent action is concretized in the lives and struggles of Ghandi and Martin Luther King. The methods for radical change espoused by Helder Camara and Camilo Torres are contrasted. The author also points to contemporary models like Bishop Claver and Ninoy Aquino who stand for nonviolent action.

Those who do not have the time to read the three-volume work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, by sociologist Gene Sharp will welcome the author's extended review of Sharp's important book in Chapter 10. The purpose of the author's review is to highlight nonviolent struggle as an effective mode of action on merely rational and pragmatic grounds. But when all is said and done, nonviolent action cannot be justified on the basis of reason and pragmatic grounds alone. For the Christian, the only adequate basis and justification for nonviolent struggle is his faith.

The appendices provide students with references that are not easily available in one handy volume. The first one is a collection of verbatim statements on Marxism as "Scientific Socialism" from various social scientists and theologians. The second are selected excerpts from the United Nations Code of Conduct on Transnational Corporations. The third is a listing of the five categories of nonviolent action drawn from Gene Sharp's *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*.

Although in his book Elwood is very critical of Christians today who in their concern for justice are acquiescing to Marxist thought and practice, the author is equally critical of the "silent Christian majority" who often remain uncritical defenders of the unjust status quo, who are socially and politically unaware and uncommitted, and who in their thinking and acting are other-worldly and privatistic. This timely and contextualized book is highly recommended to Filipino Christians whose Christian faith has committed them to the promotion of justice through nonviolent means.