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Elements of Filipino Ethics

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ELEMENTS OF FILIPINO ETHICS. By Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD.
Tacloban City: Divine Word University, 1979. 111 pages.

Once again, Fr. Mercado has given us a pioneering venture, this time on Filipino ethics. He argues that "if there is a Filipino philosophy then there is also Filipino ethics. If unity in faith and pluralism in theology is accepted today, there is also a Filipino moral theology." (p. 14)

The book is divided into two parts. Part one deals with the foundations of Filipino ethics, and part two with some issues in Filipino ethics like *sakop* and the individual, justice, person, truth and material values, marriage, the family, and ecology. Every chapter contains a set of discussion and review questions and suggested activities at the end. The book is meant to be a textbook.

As a textbook, it has shortcomings. First, it presupposes the author's two previous works, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* and *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, without which the book appears to be too sketchy and too short for a three-unit course in ethics. Second, the methodology used is eclectic — sometimes philosophical, at other times theological, in some parts psychological and sociological. While this approach may have its merit, instructional-wise, it can leave the student confused as to whether he is doing philosophy or theology or science.

Part one of the book attempts to give a foundation of Filipino ethics, striking a middle ground between the classical school and the relational school. Fr. Mercado's distinction between the two schools is rather simplistic, categorizing the classical as a priori and deductive, the relational as a posteriori and inductive. If moral philosophy deserves to be called philosophy, it demands an a priori character, regardless of whether it is classical or relational. The relational school would reject the category of the a posteriori to its name. Even situation ethics claims love as its a priori norm of morality.

Taking the value dimension of the relational school and avoiding the rigidity of the classical school, Fr. Mercado goes on to discuss value. While he gives us negative considerations of value (what it is not), in the end he seems to equate value with needs, the hierarchy of values with hierarchy of needs, particularly Abraham Maslow's classification. He dismisses the relation of value to good taken in the metaphysical sense on the ground that the term "good" is too abstract. Furthermore, objectivity is equated with universality as in the discussion on Hitler's values. Does objectivity necessarily imply universality? On the whole, there is a confusion of value with "goods" as bearers of value and with moral good, thus ending up with the position that the hierarchy of values changes.

The issues discussed in part two are stimulating and provide impetus for

further research and elaboration. Indeed, the Filipino concept of the good is holistic, encompassing the beautiful as well. Fr. Mercado's insights on the *sakop*, justice, and the family are not peculiarly Filipino but Asian. The chapter on person, truth, and material values is the best chapter of this part and deserves further and deeper treatment. If only for this second part, Fr. Mercado's "humble and imperfect beginning" should inspire others to look deeper into the Filipino soul.

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