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【書評】

Review of:

Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi: *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: A New Testament Perspective*, trans. Brother John of Taizé, Minnesota: Collegeville, Liturgical Press Academic, 2020, i-xii and 1-200pp.

Rejimon VARGHESE

Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi structures the book *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: A New Testament Perspective* as follows: It begins with an “Introduction” (pp. ix-xii), followed by two parts. Each part consists of three chapters apiece. “Part One: The Theoretical Framework of Christian Ethics” contains the chapters “Broadening Ethical Reflection” (pp. 1-21), “Configured by Christ” (pp. 22-54), and “A Grammar of Ethics” (pp. 55-81). “Part Two: The Christian Life in the Light of Happiness, Virtue and Love” has the chapters “Happiness” (pp. 83-115), “Virtue” (pp. 116-156), and “Love” (pp.157-189). The book concludes with an “Epilogue” (pp.190-194). “An Annotated Bibliography” list (pp. 195-200) is offered at the end of the book for further reading.

In the “Introduction,” Kaminouchi clearly states the intent in writing this book. “This book is an attempt to investigate the circular process established in

the New Testament between faith and action, between God's revelation and the response of the believer" (p. ix).

According to the author, Christian life is a process of transformation. This change occurs only when Christians accept and act on the teachings of Jesus revealed in the revelation and cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit (p. x). In order to establish this transformation, the author begins by delineating the disadvantage inherent in the moral theology that was in force in the period between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He uses Aristotelian philosophical ethics as a suitable model to house a moral theology drawn from the New Testament perspective for the modern world. This moral theology describes the dynamics of transformation proper to Christian life.

In Part One, the author basically sets the theological stage/foundation for Part Two. He does this by laying out the theoretical framework of Christian ethics for Christian life (action).

In chapter one, the author describes the birth of moral theology, which, according to him, assumed the nature of a *casuistic morality* that was prevalent since the Council of Trent until the Second Vatican Council. This morality focused solely on the law. (This reminds me of the prevalent theology of this period known as "manual theology," which postulated a set of questions about God/theology and provided fixed answers as well. Such nature of the theology was the manner in which the Catholic Church responded to the Reformation at that time). This casuistic morality was linked to the sacrament of confession because, by applying the confirmed moral laws, it helped the penitent to identify

his/her sins and to confess them. Moral theology of this time, thus, became basically all about applying moral norms to each concrete case. At the same time, these moral norms were orientated to avoiding sins and the circumstances that lead to sins. In other words, casuistic morality was not properly theological, for God had no place in it because it was all about what not to do. So, in this morality one could lose sight of God, who calls us to live a life of love. In this regard, it was far removed from the reality of how early Christians of the first centuries lived their life of faith. The post-Second Vatican conciliar theology, on the other hand, emphasizes the relationship between God and the believer, and Christian life as a grateful response to the gift of God given to them in the revelation.

In chapter two, the author emphasizes the need to be configured by Christ to make this proper response to the gift of God offered in the revelation. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did everything in his humanity while he was on the earth. His humanity was a privileged *locus* in which he responded to God. Of all his responses, the cross was the supreme revelation of his love. In the revelation of the incarnated Jesus, God not only comes to us but also invites us to respond to him, of course without forcing us to do so. Accepting this call from God will transform us into the image of Christ, a form of Christian being. Christian ethics, then, becomes about how we participate in this process of transformation through our humanity — in our life and actions.

In chapter three, the author delineates the three philosophical concepts of Aristotelian ethics as a guide: happiness, virtue, and friendship. For Aristotle, these three concepts are philosophical, for he was not a Christian. But for Christians, these concepts become theological because they are understood from

the inseparable relationship that exists between God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the Christian life as a response to this revelation.

In Part Two, the author gives Christian meanings to the concepts of happiness, virtue, and love. He thus sets Christian morality in action, which is about practicing the Beatitudes taught by Christ and makes one a true Christian.

In chapter four, the author claims that happiness is not attached to its external meanings, which name, fame, power, or money can bring, as commonly understood. When applied to Christianity, this happiness assumes a purpose of life which gives internal meaning to Christians. For a Christian, this purpose of life is to participate in the saving plan revealed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Happiness consists in beginning to experience this goal, which Christ called "the Kingdom of God."

In chapter five, the author explains that practicing virtue leads to the internal meaning of happiness, which is a form of being, a state of Christian life. For Christians, being happy is to become like Jesus (or to live by imitating him). And for this purpose, the Beatitudes of Christ are given to us for practice or to imitate him.

In chapter six, the author deals with love. He links the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as inseparable from the acts of love that we should extend to all of our brothers and sisters. Being a Christian does not mean just assenting to certain dogmas alone, but it also means taking part in the inclusive acts of love for all, for God excludes none.

In the end, the author forcefully establishes the inseparable relationship that should exist between the two facets of a true Christian life: faith and works

(acting/living what one believes) in the process of configuration by Christ. This, to me, echoes the maxim *lex credendi-lex vivendi*. The author thus brings his thesis of moral theology to full circle: Christian happiness (a state of being or the goal of life or a participation in the divine plan of God) is achieved by practicing virtue (the Beatitudes of Christ) for the love (friendship) of others.

Both the structuring and presenting of the subject of Christian ethics from the New Testament perspective in this book are akin to storytelling and that makes it easy to read. Reading this book is surely a spiritual engagement, for it is not just about general ethics/morality, which may be purely philosophical in nature, but it also is about moral theology (Christian ethics) in which God is involved. Anyone who has read this book in its entirety will not only remark with an impressive "WOW!" but also will benefit from the answer given to the question on how to be a Christian in the world. Yet, to properly grasp the argumentation, integration, and interrelation of both philosophical and theological thoughts/concepts that the author makes in this book requires attentive reading precisely because this is a thoroughly-scholarly investigated book. Presenting Christian ethics with persuasive arguments and connections made from both philosophical and theological concepts shows the author's command over the subject, which is really commendable.

In the book, the author argues that Christian ethics is not about following a set of rules, though strictly speaking, his proposal to practice virtue (the Beatitudes of Christ) is also about following certain guidelines. The difference is that this has got a broader theological reflection than that of mere casuistic morality.