

Book Review

Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya

**José de Mesa, Estela P. Padilla, Levy L. Lanaria,
Rebecca G. Cacho, Yuri D. Cipriano,
George N. Capaque, Timoteo D. Gener**

Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Communications Foundation
Inc., 2017, 126 pages.

Openness to learning is the best posture of the heart in approaching the book “*Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya*” [The Beautiful in Theology].¹ Such receptivity to the seven authors who present the novelty of *Mabathalang aral* reaps the benefit of new realizations and fresh ways of approaching Theological method and content. Perhaps to better facilitate the initiation to the newness of *Mabathalang Pag-aaral*, the title page reflected *Teolohiya* [Theology]. Clarity of understanding the pages of the book is knowing that for the writers, these two are spoken of interchangeably, that is, the book may well be equally titled as “*Ang Maganda sa*

¹ All translations in square brackets are by the Review Editor, Preciosa de Joya.

Mabathalang Pag-aaral’ [The Beautiful in *Mabathalang Pag-aaral*].²

Learning from Professor Jose de Mesa, the recognized mentor and teacher of all of the other writers, “*Kapag ang ‘Ganda’ ang Pag-uusapan: Mungkahi para sa Dulog at Paraan ng Mabathalang Pag-aaral*” [“When ‘Beauty’ is the Topic of Discussion: Suggestions for an Approach and Method to *Mabathalang Pag-aaral*] presents the unspoken novelty of a theology that is mediated by the sociological discipline of learning about the Filipino indigenous culture. That is, while on the one hand orthodox theology may have been mediated by philosophical abstractions that are global in scale and reach, famous is the insertion of *ousia* into the traditional theological reflection on the persons of God the Father and God the Son; “Kuya Joe” De Mesa on the other hand explores the ushering of a new age of reflection from particularity, that is, from the ground up and he asks, “*paano nga ba mag-isip ang mga Pilipino tungkol sa buhay, pamumuhay at pakikipamuhay?*”³ (How do Filipinos think about life, living and life sharing?)

Such an open question may, on occasion, bring wariness to the mind of readers. Hence, De Mesa quickly adds, in the

² *Mabathalang pag-aaral* is the study (*pag-aaral*) that imbibes or is inspired by the character and traits of Bathala. According to the indigenous religious beliefs of the Tagalogs, Bathala is the supreme deity, creator, and conserver of the entire universe.

³ *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Communications Foundation Inc., 2017), 1.

next breath, the focus on “teolohiya,” and gives a presentation of the cultural baggage implicit in the term. Wariness, however, is not out of place. The newness of the approach, specifically applied to the discipline of theology, necessitates fine tuning and exhaustive discussion, which can only be widely approximated, given the hundred and quarter pages that makeup the entirety of the present book. Readers, therefore, can look forward to a clear and precise relationship that is true of the mediation between theology and culture. Is the relationship that only of inspiration or similarly asymptotic? Is it juxtaposition or sublation?

Historically, the couple ‘reason and religion’ has given cause for different relationships: conjunction or disjunction, alliance or irreducible contrast, faith in search of understanding or religion within the limits of simple reason. The danger, then, that most threatened the existence and conceptual appreciation of “theology and culture,” in this case, is undoubtedly the trap of an opposition of the rational and irrational, into which theology, as a discipline, falls in recent times. This also gives cause for either absorption of faith in culture considered as an absolute standard, or to the exclusion of culture from the field of faith seen as a sector “sui generis” of human life, which theology can neither establish nor enlighten.

Clearly, to start reflection, given the two differing disciplines of culture and theology, can hardly reach the depth of relations that is true of John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio*.

Appreciating the relationship as analogical, imaged by a circle in which one presupposes the other, or conceive the enterprise as a bird with two wings—thinkers like Maurice Blondel already coined for us “reciprocal priority” as a viable way of maintaining the sound mediation between faith and reason. Is such a relationship also true of culture and theology? Is culture methodologically prior for theology and is theology a priority of such a cultural study?

Given the novel character of the approach, there are presentations that come across as lacking in theology and leaning heavily on cultural studies. Estela Padilla’s “Ganda: Isang Pagtinging Kultural” [Beauty: A Cultural View], being truthful to its title, gave more of its pages to socio-cultural research. Around fifteen pages of sociological musings, however, hardly balance out with a single page titled “Ganda: Ubod ng Pagkatao at PagkaDiyos” [Beauty: The Core of Personhood and Godliness] for disciplined theology. Yuri Cipriano manifestly declares, “*mas magiging maganda sigurado ang samahan kung ang pinakabatayan at pinakadabilan din ng ating pagiging tapat sa asawa, mga anak at kaanak ay ang katapatan ni Hesus sa kanyang ekklesia*”⁴ [“partnership could surely be more beautiful if the ultimate foundation and reason of our fidelity to our spouse, children and kin is the same fidelity of Christ to his ekklesia”].

⁴ *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya*, 99.

Cipriano's article, however, is open to the reading that only parallels the disciplines of theology and cultural studies in the doing of ecclesiology. That Jesus' fidelity is the wellspring of different communions and communal relations hardly systematically thematizes the disciplined reciprocity that should be present in the presentation of the relationship between theology and culture. The most successful weaving of these mediations of philosophy and culture is accomplished by Rebecca Cacho in "Tungo sa Kaganapan ng Magandang Buhay" ["Towards the Fulfillment of a Beautiful Life"]:

Ang mga bagay na nilikha ng Diyos ay palatandaan ng kanyang kagandahang loob. Sinasalamín nila ang gandang kailanman ay hindi maikukubli. Taglay ng mga ito and Ganda ng Diyos na Lumikha. . . . Ang mga kagandahang angkin nila ay mula sa Diyos na lumikha.⁵

The things that God created are signs of his goodness. They reflect the beautiful that can never be concealed. They bear the Beauty of God the Creator. . . . The beautiful that they possess comes from God who creates.

⁵ *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya*, 65.

The clearest point of departure of a disciplined formal theology was set thus by her; reaching unto the summit of the focal point of Christian theologizing:

[S]i Hesus ang kaganapan ng kagandahang-loob ng Diyos sa tao. Sa kanyang pagkatao, buhay at pakikipamuhay sa atin, nasilayan ang ganda ng kaloob . . . Sa pamamagitan ni Hesus ang ganda ng buhay na pinapangarap ng Diyos para sa tao ay naganap.⁶

Jesus is the fulfillment of the goodness of God in the human person. Through his personhood, life, and coexistence with us, one catches a glimpse of the beauty of the gift. . . . Through Christ, the beauty of life that God desires for the human person is actualized.

Hers is not only a thought that is Christian in origin, but a wellspring and height of reflection that finds itself in the reality of Christ. It is, therefore, an article that goes beyond the parallel thinking that other attempts may be faulted for. The summit of inculturation that finds the best in the Philippine culture, as shepherded unto fruition in Christ, is balanced with the manifest planting of the faith unto the soil of Filipino culture.

⁶ *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya*, 68.

Readers then can anticipate a Fundamental Theology of “ganda,” as penned by Rebecca Cacho, as fruitful and helpful to guide the systematization of the entire enterprise that is initiated by this book. More researchers can later be attracted by the clarity of approach and method of theologizing that is Christian in character.

The book *Ang Maganda sa Teolohiya* is a collection of articles centering on the theme of “ganda,” with a plurality of theologizing that is the present reality of academic reflection. Some attempts are informed by Christian inspiration, recognizing the Judeo-Christian tradition as wellspring for reflection; some parallel culture and theology at best, while others are nearer to the philosophical theology of Plato and Aristotle, rather than the contextual thought of the likes of Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutierrez or Edward Schillebeeckx.

V. Fullente Suarez

Ateneo de Manila University

<vfsuarez@gmail.com>