book is divided into five parts: (1) Is There Life After Death? (2) What Are We Before Death? (3) What Happens At Death? (4) What Happens After Death? (5) What Happens At The End Of The World?

Each part is divided into chapters (27 chapters in all). Most of the chapters are treated in methodical fashion: First, a general overview of the chapter; then the evidence from other religions; the evidence from the Old testament; from the New Testament; from the Fathers of the Church; from the Church Magisterium; from theologians, both Protestant and Catholic; and finally, a conclusion.

Once in a while Fortman argues his own position on the matter discussed; but most of the time he is content to outline the doctrine gleaned from his sources.

Most of the subjects treated in the book are pretty much the subjects found in the traditional manuals De Novissimis: Death, Judgment (Particular and General), Heaven, and Hell — as well as Purgatory, Limbo, the Parousia, the Resurrection of the Dead. But the presentation of the doctrines of modern theologians brings the discussion of these subjects up to date. Many readers would find interesting the modern description of Heaven, Hell, Death as final option, and the fate of unbaptized infants. Fortman also adds a discussion of questions of modern interest, such as Reincarnation, Out-of-the Body Experiences, Spiritualism, and Parapsychological phenomena.

The value of the book, in my opinion, is the thorough and systematic presentation of the various views on the Last Things, and the easy access to the pertinent bibliography. This book is apparently the result of the author’s experience as theology professor in West Baden College, Campion Academy in Wisconsin, and Loyola University in Chicago.

Eduardo P. Hontiveros, S.J.


The immediate impression that a reader gets upon first reading this book is a feeling of the immensity and complexity of the problems of inculturation. When Vatican II opened windows to the cultures of the world, it also opened a Pandora’s box of problems that almost defy systematization. In response to this defiance, Pope John Paul II, in January 1983, created the Pontifical Council for Culture. Ten months later, the theology department of the University of Notre Dame organized a regional conference to address these complex problems. Two years later, this book is published.

It is to the credit of the editor, Msgr. Joseph Gremillion, that the difficult task of systematizing such complexity has been achieved with remarkable success. Undoubtedly, this is due to the methodical way in which the detailed
analyses of each contributor are grasped in their interdependence and synthesized into unity. This becomes evident after a second and more careful reading.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I contains the eight principal presentations and three reports of general discussions of these presentations. This is subdivided into three sections: one on the church’s role on culture, a second on Latin American cultures, and a third on North American cultures.

Part II contains excerpts from nine magisterial documents on inculturation. This is very useful for study-groups tracing the evolution of insights concretized in Vatican II decrees, the emergence of problems that have since arisen, and attempts to discover concrete solutions. Indeed, the general discussions in Part I can be seen basically as an exercise of communal discernment into the pastoral experiences of inculturation in the context of these documents.

One immersed not in American but in Filipino cultures will see differences that can further complicate the problem of inculturation. However he will also find similarities that may suggest partly similar solutions. One interesting difference is the “cultural mestizaje” observed by Scannone in Latin American religiosity. There appears to be no clear evidence of this trait in Filipino popular religiosity. Instead, one feels that a gap separates elitist and indigenous tastes in Filipino religiosity. This is mentioned here to show that this book may also be useful in studies on cultural contrasts with those outside the American continents.

It is also interesting to note the contrasting emphases in sections two and three of Part I: technocratic values in North American cultures are higher than in Latin American cultures (and in Filipino cultures). This contrast may suggest a dialectic between two ways of patterning religious experience: an intellectual way and a dramatic way. If one grasps the complementarity of an intellectual pattern and a dramatic pattern, the roots of the diversity may also be revealed from a higher viewpoint. In turn, this higher viewpoint may lead to the re-discovery of a splendid unity in the rich context of diversity.

One negative observation: in Part II, the selection of excerpts from magisterial documents may be somewhat arbitrary. For example, the whole section on “Popular Religiosity” was not included in the apostolic exhortation “Evangelization in the Modern World.” This is an important section because it highlights the conversion of attitudes: from “despising” to “rediscovering.” However, some abbreviation is obviously needed.

The three preceding paragraphs may be taken as suggestions for a future enterprise inspired by the present book. Can an Asian counterpart of the American event be considered in the near future by the Pontifical Council? If so, the necessary groundwork has been laid, thanks to the editorial expertise of Grenmillion.

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