apologetic, to the final chapter, aglow with the joy of EDSA, he keeps the reader aware of a theological imperative emerging in recent Philippine history. Thoroughly dedicated to theological aims, his interdisciplinary concerns embrace a wide-ranging variety of academic pursuits: anthropology, criteriology, linguistics, history, political science, psychology, and sociology.

What is the object of this passionate concern? The first four chapters, analytic in intent, barely articulates this. But the fifth and final chapter, entitled "EDSA as paradigm for Asia," that arose, he says apologetically, "out of theological conversation that had to be hastily addressed," reveals a desire, shared with many Filipino theologians today, to discover the jewels of a pauper, the riches that we can call our own, for us to share with the rest of the world. The very spontaneity and haste with which he has managed to put his reflections together in seventeen tightly packed pages can give a clear idea of the object of his passionate concern.

Clear, yes. But now, what is the best word for it? Readers will have to decide that for themselves. Whatever the English word for the central concern of the fifth chapter, it is a good norm with which to critique the preceding four chapters. In these chapters, one sees Tagalog theology launching out into the unchartered seas of indigenous linguistics. As a linguistic venture, it cannot as yet be criticized adequately until after a few more semestral voyages in other oceans of acadeeme; other theologates must carefully check out the etymological details. What is now of importance is the desire and the decision to launch out.

But why linguistics? Because faith comes from hearing. Because theology has to be shared and articulated in the language familiar to the hearers. Because the insights accumulated in every worshipping community through centuries of Christian thought are for all nations. Because a linguistic sharing of faith experiences generates transcultural creativity, raises levels of consciousness, and reveals hints of hierophany — like the EDSA experience.

In Miranda's hesitant choice of linguistics, his intuition can be trusted to provide a fruitful agenda for recasting theology in a Filipino context. Congratulations are in order.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.


Ibn ‘Abbād was born in Ronda in Spain in 1332. He emigrated to Morocco while still young, completed his studies there, and wrote a commentary on the sayings of the Shadhili master, Ibn ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Iskandari, a work that
made him widely known as a director of souls. Father Renard in the book here reviewed offers a translation from Arabic of sixteen of his letters of spiritual direction. In them their author seeks to explain some of the fundamentals of the spiritual life to individuals struggling with specific personal problems. The Shadhiliyya Order or Islamic fraternity to which Ibn 'Abbād belonged had as its aim to inspire the ordinary Muslim to sanctify his daily life. The fact that an offshoot of the Shadhiliyya is one of the few modern orders that still gains new followers in Egypt today gives some idea of its popularity down through the centuries.

The Series in which the book appears is entitled The Classics of Western Spirituality. The translator in his Introduction defines spirituality as the expression of a dialectical personal growth from the inauthentic to the authentic. Authenticity in turn he explains as fidelity to God's promptings at this moment. From the viewpoint of content, spirituality may also be understood, with de Guibert, as the doctrinal synthesis of matters pertaining to the interior life which a person expounds or assumes in his writings.

The subtitle, in referring to the Sufi Path, might suggest that the present work deals with Islamic mysticism. Mysticism in its strict sense is the belief that knowledge of God or of ultimate reality can, through contemplation, be attained directly, that is, without the aid of the senses and the processes of thought and reason. The word is also taken to mean the actual experience of such direct communion. If mysticism is so understood, Ibn 'Abbād was not a mystic, as Annemarie Schimmel discerningly points out in her preface. He himself admits that he never experienced mystical rapture or higher forms of prayer. Rather he was a man of deep faith — seeing himself as a slave constantly aware of his nothingness before God, never as a lover longing for mystical union.

The concern of these letters, then, is with the ascetical rather than the mystical properly so called. They stress the methodical effort to control the inferior tendencies of nature in order to realize progressively spiritual perfection. The thought of Ibn 'Abbād, as it here appears, is centered on the purification of man's soul. A few citations, selected at random, may serve to bring out this general trend and purpose.

Scruples, exaggeration, extravagance, obstinacy — all . . . are blameworthy (Letter Three). If they (God's servants) are wronged they do not retaliate. . . . They are patient until God takes up their cause (Letter Three). Anyone who is persuaded that he can escape people's faultfinding . . . is deluded (Letter Five). The entire lives of the . . . spiritually insightful are immersed in penitence (Letter Eight). Self-scrutiny [is capable of] . . . verifying the soundness of his (the servant's) motivation (Letter Eight). Pretentious people . . . have severed their communication with God (Letter Nine). Proper demeanor consists in docility to the spiritual guide, . . . in
not concealing any of one’s inner secrets from the guide, and in not exchanging one spiritual guide for another (Letter Fifteen).

Many of the counsels offered in these letters manifest an austere quality that will impress the Christian reader more deeply than it does the ordinary Muslim. This is so because the Qur’ān itself proposes a piety that is much more eschatological and monastic in character than that distinctive of Christian lay spirituality. This ascetic type of piety appears in the recommendations given in Letter Sixteen to one who would cultivate the interior life:

The seeker must flee from every occasion of strife . . ., withdraw from public gatherings and crowds, and sever . . . associations that entice him into sinfulness. . . . The latter include all situations essential to holding political office or positions of authority . . . or the study of a science. All of those things are major distractions and are opposed to traveling the [Sufi] Path.

Some passages emphasize their point by paradoxes resembling Zen koans: "There is no reason to fear anything; but one is never secure from God' (Letter One). "O God, protect me from ever disobeying you. I heard a voice saying. . . . If I were to protect them all (my servants) that way, to whom could I then be . . . forgiving?" (Letter Two). "I fear that I am a hypocrite. Hudhayfah replied: If you were a hypocrite, you would not be afraid of hypocrisy" (Letter Two).

One might ask how wide an influence such ascetical treatises have in Islam. It is estimated that at present the total number of persons affiliated to the Muslim devotional fraternities comes to hardly three percent of the total number of Muslims and that their influence extends to about ten percent in all.

Students of spirituality are indebted to Father Reynard for making available in English some of the writings of a Muslim teacher of a higher way whose attitudes towards the moral life can appeal to modern readers. Ibn ‘Abbād has much to impart to both Christians and Muslims regarding the life of the spirit and the paths that bring the soul closer to God.

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