“IT IS THE LORD!” OCCASIONAL LECTURES AT LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
By Luis Antonio G. Tagle, DD
Quezon City, Philippines: Loyola School of Theology
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Reviewed by Victor R. Salanga

This book consists of eleven lectures of Bishop Antonio Tagle: nine delivered at Loyola School of Theology (LST); one, “The Renewal that Awaits the Church in Asia,” at the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in Thailand; and one, “The Church’s Mission Toward Minorities,” an article from a German book. The latter two were also published in Landas, the journal of Loyola School of Theology [13:2 (1999) 14-35 and 14 (2000) 129-39].

Bishop Tagle in his Preface explains the structure of the book: the first part deals with theological issues about God, Jesus Christ and the Spirit; the second dwells mainly on the Church, especially on issues of renewal and acceptance; and, the third focuses on mission and the spirituality of mission. The lectures are therefore neatly arranged topically and theologically—from the Trinity to the Church and then to mission and spirituality.

If readers were to line up the lectures chronologically, as one LST professor has done and has remarked, they will notice a marked development in style and thought. From what may be termed as formal and “high-brow” lectures supported by abundant footnotes (1992, 1996 and 2000), they metamorphose into lively, intuitive and deeply pastoral reflections and insights (1998 to 2002). This is not to affirm however that the more recent talks are less theological and scholarly.

Perhaps Bishop Tagle himself may well have described the palpable and distinctive change and development when he said that his talks “are not so much attempts of the mind to dissect truth by dissecting events and ideas,” but rather, talks that take the posture of beholding, “allowing the mystery of God’s presence to unfold before
our eyes in people’s stories of pains, sorrows, defeats, also stories of hope and triumph” (xix). This posture of beholding explains the title of the book, “It is the Lord!”—the apostle John’s declaration of intimate and loving faith when he recognized the breakfast host as his beloved Lord in that memorable Easter morning by the Galilean seashore. It is not coincidental that Bishop Tagle chose “It is the Lord!” as his episcopal motto.

Because “stories” are an important ingredient in Bishop Tagle’s talks, this leads to another characteristic feature that needs to be underlined: storytelling. As a Scripture teacher, I cannot help but be reminded of the biblical writer, Robert Alter. If Alter has distinguished himself for his book, The Art of Biblical Narrative, Bishop Tagle has also distinguished himself by developing “The Art of Theological Narrative—in the Philippines and Asia.” Bishop Tagle again says: “Is it not the case that we Asians [like Jesus the Asian] like to tell stories? It is difficult to have a teacher who is always talking in abstract concepts. I always tell stories. If you do not understand the stories, then you will not be able to understand the concepts. That is the Asian way. The Asian understands stories and Jesus knew that” (32). This may well be the key, the hermeneutical key, to Bishop Tagle’s lectures.

A final feature of Bishop Tagle’s lectures has to do with spirituality. If Karl Rahner’s statement is true that one’s theology is also his spirituality and one’s spirituality is his theology, then we also find in this book Bishop Tagle’s theology and spirituality, a theology and spirituality that is uniquely Filipino and Asian.

This work is therefore highly recommended for anyone genuinely seeking to discover God—but through the prism of beholding, letting the Lord’s presence unfold through the flesh-and-blood stories of people’s pains and defeats, hopes and triumphs.

“It is the Lord!” is Bishop Tagle’s first book. We look forward to many more!