

Salvador B. Vista. A Review of Douglas J. Elwood's *Living by Faith or Fate: God's Will and Man's Option*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2004. 197 pages.

The profundity of the theology of William Barclay, Leslie Weatherhead, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner, and, earlier theologians as Gustaf Aulen, Harold DeWolf, even thinkers and reformers as John Calvin, Martin Luther and going further back into the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas and others, proliferate the pages of this succinct presentation of quite a brief but comprehensive coverage of a delicate topic as "Faith versus Fate" (reviewer's words). Another way of putting it is simply say, "the will of God." This volume, needless to say, is replete with pertinent biblical references which are posted in appropriate places.

If a discussion or debate were to ensure, perhaps it may rise to a level of real theological vis-à-vis socio-anthropological exchange of ideas simply because Dr. D. J. Elwood brings into play a sampling of college-student thinking on the subject matter. All the more interesting is the fact that the representative groups that were surveyed by way of a 64-item questionnaire are: on the one hand, Asians, and on the other hand, Americans. The former, from Silliman University, in the Philippines; the latter, from Westmond College in California, U.S.A. all questions in the instrument are answerable by either "true" or "false".

Filipino college professors Agaton Palen Pal (Sociology) and Mary Raciles Hollsteiner (Cultural Anthropology) are made useful references as academic authorities regarding certain concepts presented in the book. These are terms in the vernacular emanating from ethno-linguistic groups, namely, *Sugbu-anon* Visayan of the Central Philippine Islands; and, *Tagalog* of Manila and its immediate surrounding areas. *Tagalog* had become the base for the Philippine national language, Filipino.

The term *kismet*, a Turkish word, meaning "will of Allah" (p. 5) is equated with "fate" or "fortune" and, on the same vein, the Filipino word "*palad*" (palm) is referred to similarly translatable in meaning. No in-depth discussion in terms of connotation, denotation, implication, nuances of the oriental words which are used of the oriental words which are used appear in the book.

Understandably, the contents of this monograph are slanted in favor of the Christian point of view. One can disagree with the author's

expressions as “a philosophy of determinism of fatalism, has blinded many of us...” (Preface). Or, with respect to *The Lord's Prayer*, “Thy will be done” is interpreted by many Christian and Muslim Filipinos alike to mean resignation to the inevitable.” Then, onward, chapter after chapter of the book the author's attempt to teach into the misconstrued or misunderstood meaning of God's will forthwith are spelled out.

A number of salient points may strike the attention of a theologically interested person:

1. God's Will to a Muslim is a *fait accompli*. To a Christian, the will of God allows for a revelation and ultimately, redemption because God is love (Agape: Divine Love), (p. 21).

2. Divine Love is self-emptying (kenotic) love. God gives out Himself in the interacting manner with human beings in the world. The ultimate purpose of such interaction is at-one-ment; that is, God and the human creature are restored a unity (p. 41).

3. Circumstantial dynamism—not a one fixed static condition—where creativity characterizes various facets of human experience should be understood. “The Will of God is continuously unfolding in an open and flexible universe.” (p. 70).

4. The human being having been endowed with free will, and therefore, has the freedom to choose, carries with it the burden of responsibility. Hence, discerning God's will is part of that responsibility. This is predicated on the concept that we are partly of divine nature—created in God's image—yet unlike God because of our finitude. It is really paradoxical. (p. 95)

5. A step further and the author takes us to the idea that God has some expectations. Again, on the basis of the concept of being human with a divine attribute we have to make decisions—intelligent ethical decisions. And the yardstick as to the rightness or wrongness of such a decision is verifiable in a maximized service to others. (112 ff.)

6. In the penultimate chapter of the book the author discusses the theology of the reality of Evil in juxtaposition with God, as a loving God. “Suffering is evil,” he contends. Yet, “God shares in the world's suffering.” (150). That is the Christian view. Furthermore, god is able to turn evil to good purpose; and finally, God will ultimately triumph over the power of evil.

7. Before the book comes to its close in the 8th chapter, Dr. Elwood shows his being a teacher of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics. He even appears like a preacher at the end of an evangelistic rally. He brings up a challenge to the reader. “What shall I do with my life?”, he asks. Being a

Christian, his answer is “the choices that one makes...our thought, attitudes, actions must be consistent with the character and purpose of God as revealed in Christ.

Contemporaneous events are found in the book such as Timothy McVeigh’s wanton bombing of a populated building in Oklahoma; Susan Smith’s drowning of her own children; the 1996 terrorist bombing of Tel Aviv are a few examples. Dr. Elwood even includes some personal testimony of his own—his own marriage (80). All these bring theology and ethics in real human scenarios.

On page 55 “Robert Skinner, a behaviorist...”—is he the same person as the well-know B.F. Skinner of Psychology? One wonders.

There are few proofreader’s oversights, e.g. “cards are sacked (sic) against us” (7). Ninevah (sic) is repeated on some pages. The book does not have an index.