

El-Roi

→ God (Names and Epithets)

El Shaddai (Movement)

The Filipino Catholic charismatic movement El Shaddai originated in 1981 as a nondenominational radio program initiated by the geodetic engineer and real estate developer Mariano “Mike” Z. Velarde (b. 1939). The group comprises approximately nine to eleven million members in the Philippines and abroad. The conversion of “Brother Mike” happened in 1978 when he was in the Philippine Heart Center Hospital due to heart enlargement and multiple heart artery blocks. According to the origin story, an angel appeared, and he was miraculously healed. This experience changed his life course, and subsequently he created a Christian radio program and a foundation which financed the radio station DWXI. The name of the program “El Shaddai” was picked from an evangelistic booklet. Beside his evangelical activities, Velarde is the owner of the real estate company Amvel Land Development Corporation and the DWXI-TVstation.

The religious movement started as a mere radio audience in 1981. Soon afterwards, Velarde organized outdoor Saturday night rallies in Metro Manila which mobilized hundreds of thousands who have been listening to his “healing messages” ever since.

Besides these weekly “prayer and healing rallies” there are TV broadcasts in the Philippines and overseas, nonstop radio programming, and print magazines. In local neighborhood chapters, adherents gather for prayer meetings, spiritual counseling, healing, and exorcism rituals. The believers are called on to pay tithes with prayer requests, which is considered a ritual of personal elicitation of miracles. It is believed that such “seed faith” money of-

ferings will be returned hundredfold. The positive reinterpretation of life events as a chain of miracles is another powerful effect of El Shaddai affiliation.

Velarde and his movement are strongly influenced by the “prosperity theology” of the US-American televangelist and businessman Pat Robertson. The affirmation of material prosperity, emphasis on healing and religious experience, direct connection with the Holy Spirit, ecstatic speech, and the notion of personal choice are characteristic elements which are authenticated by Scripture references. Despite the authority of “Brother Mike” and his Bible interpretation, it is a firm conviction of the movement that anyone can understand the Bible and communicate with God without an intermediary. Velarde’s prosperity theology attracts mainly lower- and aspiring middle-class Filipinos. Numerous El Shaddai followers are also recruited from all over the world, especially among labor migrants.

Velarde distances himself from traditional Catholic practices such as passion rituals, devotion to the saints, praying the rosary, and the like. However, he carefully avoids contradicting official Catholic teachings and supports important facets of Catholic-based culture. In 1989, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines recognized El Shaddai as a Catholic lay movement.

Bibliography: ■ Wiegele, K. L., *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu, Hawaii 2005).

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