Landas 23:2 (2009) 143–146

FABC'S PREMIER THEOLOGIAN

James H. Kroeger, M.M.

"Without a vision, the people perish." This brief quote from the Book of Proverbs (29:18) enables us to understand the pivotal role that the person we are honoring today has played in the assembly of the local Churches of Asia. Father Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J. has served the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) since its beginnings in 1970. In November of that year, when Pope Paul VI visited Manila and gathered together 180 Asian bishops, Father Arévalo already served as *peritus* (resource person) for this first-ever Asian Bishops' Meeting. From this organizational gathering, the FABC would soon emerge—with a wide vision of service for all God's peoples of Asia.

In 1974, at the First FABC Plenary Assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, Father Arévalo was the principal writing consultant for the first statement of the Federation, entitled *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia.* This visionary document has served the local Churches in Asia so well; it remains the single most influential articulation of the "vision and mission" of Asia's Churches in the post-Vatican II era. The depth of theological, pastoral, and missionary insight of this programmatic document has enabled Asia's missionary local Churches to understand and implement a vision of integral evangelization through dialogue. It has facilitated the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the

https://publications.lst.edu/

Asian continent. Indeed, today FABC can properly be called "Asia's Continuing Vatican II."

In fidelity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and in communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, the FABC has pioneered a "new way of being Church" in Asia. As expressed in FABC I, "To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local Church" (9). "The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions [of Asia]" (12). The validity of this "triple dialogue" vision, enunciated in 1974, has been repeatedly reaffirmed at subsequent FABC Plenary Assemblies as well as in the pastoral praxis of Christian communities across Asia.

As an integral part of his service as theological advisor for the FABC bishops (1970–1995), Father Arévalo was named in 1985 the first convener and founding member of the Asian Bishops' Theological Advisory Commission (TAC). In 1986 the FABC:TAC met in Hong Kong to begin treating the subjects of the local Church in Asia and interreligious dialogue. Participating in the conference were theologians of the different member countries of the FABC who had been appointed by their respective bishops' conferences.

Renamed the FABC Office of Theological Concerns in 1997, the basic aims of this FABC office are the following: (1) to foster Asian theological reflection on issues which are of special interest for the Asian Churches; (2) to be of assistance to the FABC in conceptualizing and making policies for missionary and pastoral action; and, (3) to bring relevant contemporary theological thinking into dialogue with "Asian" theological reflection emerging from within the FABC countries and then to mediate the results to the wider Church.

Father Arévalo shepherded the TAC for a decade. During this period several insightful and in-depth studies were produced: *Theses on Interreligious Dialogue* (1987), *Theses on the Local Church* (1990), and *Asian*

https://publications.lst.edu/

Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics (1992). In 1994 the FABC sponsored the first FABC International Theological Colloquium with the theme: *Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life.* These profound studies had as their central focus the development of an "ecclesiology of the Asian Churches." Along with the plethora of FABC theological reflection, these materials are a privileged *locus* where the voice and experience of the local Churches of Asia are heard.

The committed involvement of "Father Revs" (as he is known by his many students and friends) spans a wide spectrum of activity. He was the first and for many years the only Asian to serve on the Pontifical International Theological Commission. Through appointments by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, he served on that commission for twelve years. He was executive coordinator and program director for two major theological conferences held in Manila, the International Congress on Mission (1979) and the International Conference on the Alliance of Two Hearts (1987).

In 1997 His Eminence, Jaime Cardinal L. Sin, Archbishop of Manila, conferred upon him the award *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* and identified him as "the Dean of All Filipino Theologians and the Godfather of hundreds of priests." When he received the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, from the Ateneo de Manila University in 1998, Father Arévalo was identified as "Father of Asian Theology," owing to his more than 9,000 pages of theological writing "with an Asian emphasis." Speaking of his own prodigious theological output, Father Arévalo simply says: "All this writing has been done, I trust, in the service of the Church. My Jesuit vocation places my life completely at the service of the Church: her people, her communities, her leadership, her works."

Father Arévalo has always remained involved in pastoral ministry in a variety of apostolates. Former Philippine President Corazon Aquino has revealed that he has been her family's spiritual confidant since the assassination of her husband Ninoy Aquino in 1983. She related that during that time she prayed at a church in Boston for a Filipino priest with whom she could talk. The following day, she said, Father Arévalo was at her doorstep. When Corazon "Tita Cory" Aquino was finally

https://publications.lst.edu/

laid to rest on August 5, 2009, Father Arévalo preached her funeral homily—fulfilling her and her family's personal request.

Thus, with sincere appreciation, the Ninth FABC Plenary Assembly is pleased to recognize the invaluable and visionary contributions that Father Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J. has made both to the Filipino nation and, through the FABC, to all the peoples of Asia. In profound gratitude and prayer, we lift you, your loved ones, your intentions, your life and priestly ministry to the Father of Mercies. Father Arévalo, to you we extend our sincere, heartfelt thank you. *Maraming, maraming salamat!* Together we pray: *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.* Forever I will sing the mercies of the Lord. Amen.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Book Reviews

https://publications.lst.edu/

Landas 23:2 (2009) 149–151

THE MAKING OF A LOCAL CHURCH

By Francisco F. Claver, S.J.

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008
194 pp., ISBN 978-1-57075-786-0
Reviewed by James H. Kroeger, M.M.

In a brief, succinct description, Claver describes his book: "I have no trouble saying this work is all about efforts at bringing about a Vatican II church" (3). Claver, a well-known Filipino Jesuit bishop who holds a doctorate in anthropology and has served two dioceses [Malaybalay (1969–1984) and Bontoc-Lagawe (1995–2004)] as well as being a regular professor at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, further expands his purview by noting: "There is no other way for us Asians to evangelize our continent and its people, to do pastoral work among them, than through our becoming truly and determinedly active local churches" (11).

The urgency and commitment to truly becoming a genuine local church repeatedly emerge through Claver's narrative and his sharing of poignant, first-hand experiences of what he terms his "thirty-five years of *episcopating*" (1). He captures much of Philippine history and culture in an early chapter entitled "The Locus of the Church in the Philippines." In the ten other chapters, Claver unfolds his personal pilgrimage with his people as they collaborate to build "discerning communities" (123) that flourish through "participative leadership" (163). As one journeys with Claver, the strong conviction emerges that these phrases are more than popular buzzwords; this is an ecclesial

https://publications.lst.edu/

vision that begs embodiment! And, Claver invitingly shows just how this genesis of "authentic local churches" (172) is accomplished.

Three germinal ideas from the Second Vatican Council (dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility) are the bedrock of Claver's vision of a renewed church. He consistently and forcefully interweaves them, drawing upon his theological and anthropological acumen as well as pastoral praxis and communal discernment. Church leaders, relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are to put the *aggiornamento* teachings of Vatican II into practice, and this is best achieved by forming faith communities at all levels of the church.

In chapter seven, the longest of all, devoted to "Basic Ecclesial Communities" (BECs), the author lays out the essentials of BECs. For example, Claver illumines eight key elements and activities that are unique to BECs (88–92); he describes the various kinds of BECs (liturgical, developmental, and liberational) and the stages of their development (92–93). The bishop explores BEC leadership (98–99), opposition to their growth (101–103), and discernment in the BECs (105–107). In this well-crafted chapter, one finds a synthetic integration of Claver's most profound insights—valid for the Philippines as well as local churches worldwide.

Readers will profit much from Claver's insights on inculturation, social change, spirituality, solidarity, *aggiornamento* and pastoral renewal, particularly as they contribute to the process of ecclesiogenesis. The author has many experiential insights regarding the Synod of Bishops in Rome and the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. Not to be missed are Claver's narratives from "our farmer-theologians" (130) and the "people of simple faith" (105–107).

This reviewer, a four-decade, veteran Philippine missioner, can testify to the depth and validity of the insights offered by Claver. Some very minor factual errors appear (72, 81, 161, 177), but they do not detract from the overall positive impact of the work. In this *vademecum* for pastoral leaders, one hears the voice of a shepherd, exuding pastoral sensitivity coupled with competent leadership, guiding God's people to become a genuine local church *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

https://publications.lst.edu/

The Making of a Local Church was first published (2008) by Orbis Books at Maryknoll, New York. A Philippine edition, which reformats the essentially identical content, has been co-published by Claretian Publications and Jesuit Communications (2009). The local edition contains an enlightening and laudatory forward by Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I. of Cotabato. He asserts that Claver "has written a truly exceptional book" (xiii), a work that "is exceedingly helpful for every member of the Church, laity, religious, priests and Bishops" (xiii). Quevedo also writes: "This wonderful book demonstrates why I personally consider Francisco F. Claver, S.J., one of the most outstanding Church leaders in the Philippines in the past fifty years" (xiii).

https://publications.lst.edu/