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THE MAKING OF A LOCAL CHURCH

By Francisco F. Claver, S.J.

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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

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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*.

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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).

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