EDITOR'S PREFACE

How does one do theology in Asia? How does one do a genuinely Asian theological reflection? It is a question that concerns methodology and the fruitfulness of theological reflection. Arévalo's theological reflections provide an educative example of doing theology in Asia, and in that way, he makes an invaluable contribution.

He asserts that what makes theological reflection Asian is its rootedness in the concrete life-situations of Asian peoples. The questions articulated, the imperatives discerned, and the responses chosen all arise from this rootedness.

Himself rooted in the social realities which influence the life of the local churches in the Philippines and in Asia, and steeped in the perspective and orientations of Vatican II documents, papal decrees and the statements of the FABC, Arévalo does theology in a manner which is conscious of methodology and, because of that, is able to provide his readers reflections which are incisive, insightful and point the way to action and further theological reflection.

In terms of methodology, Arévalo identifies the hermeneutical circle, wherein one takes as the starting point for theological reflection the total social reality, then undertakes analysis and evaluation of this reality according to the canons of analysis from the social sciences, faith and religion, and theology, and eventually identifies responses called for, i.e., imperatives discerned including both goals and means. Corollary to his hermeneutical circle,

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Arévalo suggests the hypothesis of ecclesiogenesis which holds that "the local church, at this moment in history, [is] moving towards its self-realization within and towards the *catholica unitas* (the true oneness within cultural diversities)."

The theological reflections chosen to be included in this volume cover the years from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Because of this span of time, they provide us a privileged vantage point of hindsight and foresight. Hindsight. We can acquaint (or re-acquaint) ourselves with the reflections and orientations that have guided thought and action in the life of the local churches. We can examine which of and to what extent these ideas and orientations have been lived out; we can evaluate how much these ideas and orientations remain true and applicable in our present time. Foresight. Ongoing reflection and action in the local churches can avail of the wisdom afforded by the living out of these ideas and orientations, deepening and if necessary modifying the theological reflections which have arisen from the life of the local churches in Asia.

Central to the theological reflections of Arévalo is the building up and coming-to-be of the local churches. Each local church builds itself within the particular social environment in which it finds itself. In its coming-to-be, the local church undertakes its mission and the task of evangelization and re-evangelization. Inculturation is synonymous with the coming-to-be of the local church. Inculturation is one way of putting the hermeneutic circle to practice. It is to be guided by general principles: incarnation and assumption; judgment, death and the cross; resurrection, pentecost, communion and participation. When these three principles are held together, the local culture is transformed by the Gospel and changed in an organic way.

Inculturation begins with the imperative of the dialogue of life. It has the three major tasks: dialogue with the cultures of peoples, dialogue with the Asian and religious traditions, and dialogue with the poor in their search for development, justice,

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brotherhood and peace. Inculturation also has three major concerns: the proclamation of the Gospel as an urgent commitment, the necessary role of prayer and contemplation in the work of mission, and a truly contextualized formation for mission.

Arévalo offers us images of the church which "we should keep before our eyes to 'charge our imagination' in the years ahead": the church as fellow wayfarer, as companion of the journey, as being-with; the church as Suffering Servant, a diaconal community; the church as the community of Jesus, the compassion of God; the church as first fruits; the church as new creation in history. As the local church builds itself continuously in specific communities of people, its coming-to-be is always God's gift and the community's task and achievement.

May Arévalo's clarity of thought, depth of insight, and genuine and passionate love for the local churches stir us, and under the guidance of the Spirit, may we participate responsibly in the coming-to-be of our local churches.

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