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A LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES AND OF ASIA*

Georg Evers

Introductory Note

When discussing the possibility of an interview with Fr. Arévalo, he replied that he did not think that he was a good subject for such an interview. He suggested to interview some of the "mainstream" theologians, that is, some of the bishops, as e.g., Bishop Ted Bacani, or Francisco Claver, because their theological work has been more at the immediate service of the church-in-mission, being a theology which has been most useful and effective for the life of the church. As regards his own theology, Arévalo considers that to have been a "theology behind the scenes," that is, consisting of work in various committees, preparing statements, giving background information, and acting as ghost writer for cardinals and bishops. As regards his own theological work, C. Arévalo stressed that he has been involved in many activities during his long years as a theologian in

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teaching theology, taking part in conferences, acting as advisor and so forth, but that he has never found the time and distance to sit down to write a comprehensive work of theology. Arévalo sees himself as a typical theologian from the Philippines whom he characterizes thus:

> We, theologians in the Philippines, do not have time for quiet reflection and reading, we are in the middle of things. For instance, Bishop Bacani, in his introduction to the book "For All the Peoples of Asia" puts down the tremendous amount of work he has to tackle. And yet he is considered for the church here as one of the leading theological lights.

1. Theological Formation and Training

Q: *Could you elaborate briefly on your theological formation and on the teachers who have influenced your own thinking?*

A: Theological studies, prior to ordination, were first pursued at Weston College, the Jesuit scholasticate of the New England Province. It was at that time affiliated to Boston College (now a University). I received my licentiate in theology (STL) in 1955 from Weston. At that time the Jesuits still had no theological school in the Philippines. Theological formation was in the neo-scholastic system. Within the limitations of that system, we received a good theological formation, for the time.

The teachers who influenced me most were *Francis X. Lawlor* who taught ecclesiology with a remarkable mastery of the field. He had taught briefly at the Gregorian University in Rome and later wrote the principal articles on the Church in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* of the 1960s; *Philip J. Donnelly*, who also taught at the "Greg," and participated in the debate on *Surnaturel* (de Lubac's positions on nature and grace) through his articles in *Theological Studies*. He was on the conservative side, but was a man of large and stimulating ideas, especially on God's gratuity in creation and redemption. It was Lawlor's work on the Church which influenced the choice of topic for my doctoral dissertation, on the Mystical Body teaching in Giovanni Perrone, Carlo Passaglia and Clemens Schrader (Roman College theologians of the

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19th century). This dissertation I worked on in Rome under *Francis Sullivan*, whose first *doctorandus* student I was.

As for formative influences on my student days I would name first: *Bernard Lonergan*, whose studies on St. Thomas (the *Verbum* and *Gratia Operans* articles) I discovered "on my own" and made the deepest impact on me. I wish I could have really grown in the Lonerganian method in my later years, but that would have demanded a degree of leisure-for-study I just never had, once I was back in my country. Then *Yves Congar*, who in a true sense was my life-long master, since his work has been almost daily theological food and drink for the nearly 40 years of my studying and teaching. Twice in my earlier years I wrote to the great Dominican Theologian asking some questions from him, and each time I was surprised and moved to receive fairly lengthy answers written in his own hand. Only many years later when I was named to the *International Theological Commission* (1974–1986) did I get to meet him and have a couple of long conversations with him.

From Congar I learned the importance of seeing ecclesiology in context, learned to appreciate the importance of the inter-relationship between what we call secular history and the life of the Church, i.e., the *significance of history* in the Church's life and theology. Congar's evaluation of Vatican II, his own journey before and after the epoch-making event, the willingness to be open to all currents in the Church and the world, that remarkable youthfulness of mind which he kept till his eighties … have accompanied me during these last thirty years. The sense of the breadth of the Tradition, the ecumenical sensibility, the respect for the heritage of the Eastern churches in particular, the centrality of mission for all ecclesiology, the vocation of lay people in the Church and in the world, the principle of conciliarity in the Church, the meaning of local church and inculturation, the *sensus fidelium*, the necessary interplay of spirituality, doctrine and life—these are some things I learned from Congar: in so many ways, *etiam a longe*, I believe I have been his student. Perhaps I should add some other formative influences: Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme*, Karl Rahner's essays in spirituality, Hans urs von Balthasar's notion of *betende Theologie* and

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his essays on Karl Barth. One's earliest enthusiasms in theology have a way of remaining operative the rest of one's life.

2. Teaching Experiences in the Philippines Before, During and After Vatican II

Q: *When did you start teaching? What were your subjects? Did you start teaching in Latin—and for how long?*

A: After a brief stint (one semester) of teaching at Woodstock College (Woodstock, Md.) after finishing my doctoral studies in Rome in 1959, I returned to the Philippines and started teaching at San José Major Seminary in Quezon City. I taught several subjects in dogmatic theology, in Latin, using Gregorian University textbooks. Among my students were some who became bishops later on, e.g., Archbishop Paciano Aniceto of San Fernando, Pampanga, Bishop Teodoro Bacani of Manila, Bishop Jesus Galang and Bishop Angel N. Lagdameo. In 1965 the Jesuit School of Theology, later named *Loyola School of Theology* (LST), was founded. I became the "founding dean" and later the first president. It was *Fr. Pedro Arrupe,* as general and *Fr. De la Costa* as provincial who pushed the idea of having a Filipino Jesuit theological school. In 1966–67, I was sent abroad to the USA and to Europe to find out the changes in teaching theology after Vatican II. For me personally, the transition from scholastic theology, which I had come to accept as a kind of "absolute system," to post-Vatican II theological changes meant a real crisis. It took me some time to find my bearings again, mostly in contact in Toronto with Lonergan's theology and theological method which was a real liberation for me, intellectually and (I believe) spiritually for the future.

We shifted to English teaching right after the Council, and began a theology "track" in Filipino a few years later.

I have been teaching continuously (more or less) at LST from 1965 to this year, inclusive. At present I have the ordinary courses in Christology, Systematic Ecclesiology, Holy Orders.

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Fr. Luis Antonio G. Tagle of the diocese of Imus is now teaching some of the ecclesiology courses at LST. He was a graduate of San Jose Seminary and was helped with grants by MISSIO Aachen during his STD doctorate studies in Washington D.C. and in Rome and Louvain.

3. Concern for Contextual/Inculturated Theology

Q: *When did your theology take the line of inculturation, that is, becoming aware of the problem of the Gospel meeting with Asian resp.*[sic] *Filipino cultural and religious heritage?*

A: In the spring of 1968 the New York Jesuit magazine, *Jesuit Missions,* organized a conference on "Jesuit mission in Asia for the 70s." I was asked to write one of the key papers, on "A Theology of Mission for Asia," for the conference. The concluding reflection, a "Letter to our Foreign-Born Brothers on Mission in Asia," proved to be a controversial text (Re-read 25 years later it said nothing that is not now considered obvious!). In our university campus it aroused much heated discussion; feelings ran high among some Jesuits from abroad in our province. It was Fr. Horacio de la Costa as Provincial who helped us weather the storm, and move along the line of making the Philippine Province a truly Filipino one, with Filipinos placed in positions of responsibility and decision-making, and with a clear policy of Filipinisation pursued. Fr. de la Costa felt Filipinos should hold, whenever possible, posts of direction in the Province. This meant offering foreign-born, especially American Jesuits the clear option to accept remaining under these policies or to decide to leave the country if they found they could not accept working under Filipino superiors, their not assuming "in charge" posts in our communities and works, and going along with the Filipino ways of doing things. A good number of American Jesuits decided to go back to the States, with no hard feelings. Others opted to accept the changes envisioned, and some eventually asked for Filipino citizenship, which Fr. de la Costa saw as a decisive following of the logic of the Incarnation of the Lord in missionary life.

This series of events, plus the demand for theological lectures on these ideas, both here and other parts of Asia, pushed me to

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deepen my own understanding of these issues. I began more serious work on a theology of local church, of indigenisation, inculturation, contextualization, of the deeper purposes of mission.

Q: *What were the theological ideas and guiding principles for this insistence on local theology and local way of doing things?*

A: Fr. Pedro Arrupe and Fr. de la Costa repeatedly urged us to try to develop what the Council in *Ad Gentes* had asked for, "local theological reflection" (*Ad Gentes* 22). This was to be one of the guiding objectives and norms for the setting up of what is now known as the Loyola School of Theology here in Manila. Fr. Arrupe first conceived of LST as a Jesuit theologate for all of the East Asian Assistancy. I was named first ("founding") Dean (1965) and later first President (1968) of this institute. From the beginning, inculturation of theology was part of our mandate.

In 1969 I was invited to participate in the first SEDOS theological conference in Rome which was, I believe, on mission and development. The following year I was asked to give a paper and several bible-study talks on religion, the Church, and development in the First Asian Ecumenical Conference on Development in Tokyo. It was becoming increasingly clear to me that contextualized theology for us in Asia meant reflecting on "development / liberation" issues and what the Gospel had to say on them. In 1974 I was asked to give the keynote theological paper at the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in Taipeh (We hope we can come back to these events later). In all these meetings the problems of local church, inculturation, the concrete meaning of mission in Asia today, came up for discussion.

Q: *In the 1970s, the Latin American theology of liberation saw its first major publications which found their way to other parts of the world. It would seem that the impact of this theology in the Philippines was stronger and more far-reaching than in other Asian countries. Was this the case? Is it correct to speak of a greater affinity to Latin American theology among Filipino theologians?*

A: There are many, among them Bishop Francisco Claver, who hold that in the Philippines, a liberation theology of our own (not labeled

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as such of course) anteceded the coming of Latin American theology (*TL*) to our country. This line of thinking came with the influence of Maoist thought and Catholic social teaching, some believe, even in the sixties. But no one denies that, starting with Gustavo Gutierrez's book, Latin American liberation theology exercised an increasing impact among Christians here.

The Philippines had been under Spanish colonial domination from the 16th to the end of the 19th century, which had resulted in a strong Spanish influence on Filipino culture, philosophy, theology, and religiosity. This accounts for a certain affinity with Latin America which had a similar history of Spanish colonial rule. The anti-Spanish revolution in our country counted Filipino clergy among its earliest heroes and inspirers. We have a tradition of religious-motivation symbols working behind revolutionary movements. In Filipino popular religiosity, especially among rural people, the veneration of the *Black Nazarene*, that is, Jesus in his passion and on the cross, plays an important role. For Filipino people suffering from injustices and oppression, the passion of Christ—*Pasyon*—is a powerful symbol stimulating resistance and opposition. For myself, I went to Latin America in 1970 partly to learn all I could about liberation theology (TL). I met Juan Luis Segundo and from him received an initiation in the method and basic lines of this new theology. After my stay at Montevideo, I went to Argentina and listened to lectures by Lucio Gera. Both men really enlightened and moved me. The one brief hour Gustavo Gutierrez gave me at Lima was a deeply impressive experience. I have always had a special regard and admiration for him since that visit (The following December I received one of the first copies of his *Teología de Liberación* from him). The six weeks I spent in Latin America proved to be the beginning of something of a *qualitative jump* in my own theological thinking, a liberating experience whose influence endures today. Perhaps it was I who introduced *TL* to the Philippine audiences. With Gutierrez's book and notes I had taken from interviews with Gera, Segundo and others, I lectured on *TL* at Loyola School of Theology, at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, and to diverse audiences in our country. I must say honestly I never became a *TL* "convert" in a total way. From the beginning, the anti-communism of my earlier

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Catholic upbringing made me uneasy with what I thought was an insufficiently critical acceptance of some Marxist positions by at least some Latin American advocates of *TL*. Already in the Philippines, Maoist thought was being accepted in some circles without much reflection; many younger priests (and some foreign missionaries) were already opting for communism and for violent solutions.

Just before the declaration of Martial Law by Marcos I gave a lecture series on "The Mission of the Church in the Philippines," which developed the *signs of the times* approach to theology and praxis, brought *TL* to bear on our Philippine situation, and reworked the Church's "vision-mission" in line with that reflection. Notes taken at those lectures were mimeographed, recopied many times by diverse groups, and (so I was told) reached large numbers of readers. Up to now I sometimes meet religious sisters and people who were then seminarians and catechists who tell me that the talks influenced their thought and their lives. At this time too, some younger theologians (Edicio de la Torre, S.V.D., principally) began to develop theological themes which would later be more fully articulated by Christians for National Liberation (CNL). The coming of Martial Law accelerated and intensified all this thinking.

Q: *The dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, especially the Martial Law period which began in 1972, seemed to have stimulated much reflection and action within the Christian Churches. What was your own experience as a theologian during this time? You have spoken of addressing groups of concerned Filipino Christians during these years. There were people you worked with in whom you saw a keen desire "to reflect within the parameters of faith on the moment of history through which our people and the church in our country [were] going" (Preface to Leonardo Mercado, S.V.D.,* Elements of Filipino Theology *[Tacloban City: 1975]).*

A: The martial law years marked a new awakening for the Church in the Philippines. For the first time in her history, the Church in our country began to think out for herself how she had to fulfill her mission in the particular situation in which we found ourselves. Much reflection, in small groups of Christian people, in dioceses and parishes, in schools. Lectures: we were constantly being asked to address religious and seminarians. The bishops, individually and as

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national conference, began to address more sharply political, economic and social issues. Vatican II documents proved to be inspiration and guide; *Gaudium et Spes* became a rich vein to quarry, also the social teachings of the magisterium. The Church and her leaders became increasingly sensitive to human rights issues, because there was so much injustice perpetrated around us, so much violence, "salvaging" of those suspected of opposing the regime, the Philippine form of the national security state under Marcos. There were marked similarities between Latin American situations and our own; thus convergence of *TL* emerged not by design, but by "event."

Those of us who were considered theologians were invited to many places and by many groups to help sort out situations, ideological stances, concrete decisions by religious, priests, lay people. So we were forced to wrestle not with concepts only, but with real flesh-and-blood issues, with concrete policies and decisions which had to be worked out. Many of us had to think on our feet, outside the "shelter of seminaries," in some places the seminaries themselves became the places "where the action was!" We were not thinking with writings and books in view; what we thought and said was for action and praxis. It was a difficult time, but our then theological reflection was "for real."

It was also in the early 1970s that young priests were getting deeply involved in what we might call conscientizing and liberationist activity, trying to organize the poor to struggle for their own education and formation, their own liberation.

There is Fr. Niall O'Brien's *Revolution from the Heart* to tell us something of this powerful story. I think it was in the late 60s and early 70s (especially) that this movement really started. The then Fr. Luis Jalandoni of Bacolod was a pioneer and prophet in this area. A wonderful young priest leader then, who had the poor really at heart, who moved people to wanting to do something about the situation. More than once if I remember rightly, he asked me to share what I knew of *TL* with the priests of Negros, the seminarians and some lay leaders. Later on of course Marcos himself had him placed in concentration. From there he moved to the Netherlands where he has been working for the Communist Party for many years now. Fr. Edicio

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de la Torre also was a pioneer in the ideological struggle. Greatly gifted and marvelously articulate, Edicio won over many young people and intellectuals at that time.

Q: *Can it be said that the Church in the Philippines was of one mind and one voice? Or were there ideological differences within the Church?*

A: Martial Law intensified the movement of minds and hearts and feet toward the Marxist-Maoist ideological line. In my own experience, the seminars led by Francois Houtart were one powerful instrument for both conscientizing and leading young people especially towards the Marxist/Maoist movement.

At an Houtart seminar in Baguio, I remember, I was asked to explain *magisterium* texts on social political involvement of Christians and apply them to our situation. Some at the seminar took vocal exception to the *caveats* given, e.g., by Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* regarding Marxism. The positions there taken were attacked as unrealistic, conservative, supportive of the capitalist *status-quo*. The split in ideological positions was rapidly shaping up almost everywhere, in the Church of course also.

There were some who supported the Marcos regime as the only effective way to prevent a communist takeover. Others moved step by step toward "the Far Left." In the broad middle spectrum, you had church people, in various degrees of opposition to the Marcos regime. These divisions existed on all levels of the Church.

It was the "far left" which kept gaining ground among many younger people, students, religious, seminarians, workers in rural and urban areas. *Christians for National Liberation* came into being at this time. Edicio de la Torre, S.V.D., highly intelligent and charismatic, was perhaps the outstanding figure in this "shift to the Left." Alliances were being formed between church people and the communist party, the *National Democratic Front*. I knew some seminarians and priests as well as religious sisters who joined the underground or collaborated intensively with it. As martial law multiplied its abuses the Communist party grew, and collaboration with the party and its fronts grew within the Church. The underground broadened, developed wider networks, the New People's

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Army (NPA) increased and so did its support. All this had repercussions within the Church also; it is hard to quantify this of course.

Q: *One of the recurrent topics in your theologizing was "discerning the signs of the times" (Cf. "On the Theology of the Signs of the Times," in* Philippine Priests' Forum*, 1972, 4, 14–26). In responding to the Signs of the Times, was it your belief that the Church, and you yourself as a theologian, were responding to the Spirit, as the Filipinos faced the experience of the 1970s and the 1980s? Would you consider the Church in the Philippines as a hermeneutical community encountering the Spirit in these challenges, and thus moving forward as church in its praxis?*

A: We did formulate our responses in those terms, I believe. We at Loyola School of Theology began publishing *Loyola Papers* under my overall editorship in the 70s and 80s. This was in response to insistent requests for "theological reflection" texts—from religious, seminaries, from schools, from individuals. How should we respond as Christians, they asked, to what was happening under martial law, to the "great ideological battle" taking place all around us, to other national concerns? Could we draw guidelines from the magisterium, and could we show how these applied concretely, here and now? Those were the questions we tried to meet. Not to do thinking for others, but to help them make their own discernments. *Loyola Papers* went through some 15 numbers. The numbers were printed and reprinted again and again, they reached several hundreds of copies, a few even thousands (For local publications in theology, remarkable enough). They were meant for immediate use, and I believed served their purpose. Later on, some graduate students used them for their masters' (and even doctorate) dissertations on the Philippine situation.

Q: *What other theological reflection were you called on to do during this crisis period?*

A: *Loyola Papers* and rather widespread lecturing led to being invited to act as resource person to meetings of the Association of Major Religious Superiors (AMRSP) and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). I was sometimes invited to participate in CBCP discussions, alone or with others. At one general session in the early 80s, a formal discussion of the national situation and the

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"ideological lines" within the country and the Church was held in the CBCP. It was preceded (or followed) by a seminar on the same topic, under then Bishop Leonardo Legaspi. Several of us theologians and "active" clergy were invited to speak to the Bishops. Fathers Blanco, Intengan, Lambino and myself among the Jesuits, Bishops Leonardo Legaspi, Francisco Claver, Julio Labayen, Antonino Nepomuceno, among the bishops themselves, were much involved in the discussions. We were told the session proved very helpful. The CBCP documents, more involved and more specific as Martial Law progressed, began to increasingly oppose the dictatorship and its abuses. Only a small group of bishops remained pro-Marcos at the end. It was a remarkable moment of history for the Church and our bishops. Reflection on that history has not been adequately done, not at all. And yet it was a time when the Church was, literally, "making history."

Q: *Did you meet with the grass-roots groups at this time, with people who had joined the underground or gone "up the mountains"?*

A: No, I do not pretend to having ever been to the mountains to talk with the insurgents. With some justice, I was accused by some as an "armchair theologian," whenever I took part in the battle of ideologies through writing and speech. But I did join seminars and workshops of priests and other groups, seminarians' discussions, in several parts of the country. I remember several meetings in Mindanao where confrontations were sharp and strong. Once, a priest said the hierarchy, especially our two Cardinals Rosales and Sin, had no longer the right to call themselves *Church*, that they had betrayed the Gospel. At another discussion, a foreign missionary burst out that in our situation, there was no more place for prayer and spirituality; we sinned by not aligning ourselves actively with the extreme Left. I had a brief "exposure period" in the Ipil area of Zamboanga where I listened to farmers and other rural folk discussing scripture passages in the evening, in preparation for Sunday Mass. I visited with some younger priests and our Jesuit missionaries in some areas where the insurgency was much in evidence. But most of my contact with "the front lines" was through meetings of priests and religious men and

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women. I did learn something of what was "really going on" in the hinterlands through listening to their experiences and reflections.

Q: *Could you share some personal experiences of this period?*

A: Let me just touch on some stories, situations brought up for reflection and evaluation. Once a Mother Superior asked one of us at the School of Theology about one of her religious Sisters who would often go up to the mountains to spend time with armed insurgents. The Superior found out that this Sister was facilitating meetings of the rebel troops. One of the items on their agenda, often enough, was to "discern" who would be put on their assassination list of people to be killed in the coming weeks. The Mother Superior didn't know what to do about this! To her relief the Sister left the congregation in due time!

At another time, a Provincial inquired about a community of her congregation: the armed insurgents were using their chapel to hide their guns, ammunition and even heavy weapons. Another case: a superior found out one of his religious men was acting as treasurer for guerrilla groups, withdrawing and disbursing money for their needs, etc. Yet another case, a priest was using funding from Europe sent for the diocese and diverting it to the support of guerrilla groups in the hills. When I speak of reflection on ideological issues, you can see that we were not involved in abstract discussions.

Let me end this with a true story about a religious Sister whom I had known when she was just a school-girl, from a rather well known Manila family. She used to see me from time to time. She was working among the poor in the outskirts of a city in Mindanao. She had seen the violence of the Marcos military against the poor, violence against those who were suspected of being pro-NPA. She had just witnessed a vicious killing of a woman and her child, family members of an NPA leader. She wept as she recounted things she had seen with her own eyes. The communists were the only people really fighting to change this evil situation, she said. Would it not be better actively to work with them, help them, in their struggle? Even join groups helping them, espousing violence, fostering the revolution?—There was little I could tell her, except to hold on to her faith, its insistence on non-hate and

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non-violence, its recourse to prayer and love …. As it was, she was doing so much for communities of poor people and for victims. She wanted to do even more. In any case, within a few weeks she died in a ferry accident. She and some other sisters (R.G.S.) were on an inter-island ferry, the *Cassandra*, licensed to have some 500 passengers but actually carrying over a thousand. At night it hit a reef and went down rapidly. Through the confusion and terror, she and her companion nuns refused to receive life-belts, insisting that mothers and children, and others first get them. As the ferry sank, these sisters were seen gathered in prayer; they were swept away in the dark waters. Her desire to lay down her life for the poor had been answered by the Lord, not through violence, but from self-sacrificing love.

Contextual Theology

Q: *It is an interesting coincidence that the first contribution in our book series* Theologie der Dritten Welt *(*Den Glauben neu verstehen, Beiträge zu einer asiatischen Theologie *[Freiburg: 1981]) is by Catalino G. Arévalo: "Was ist kontextuelle Theologie?", which is the German translation of your contribution towards an International Colloquium on contextual theology in East and Southeast Asia in June 1978 in Manila. In your contribution you seem to give preference to the term contextualisation, with its emphasis on the socio-economic-political context, as more apt to express the needs of an Asian theology than inculturation. Would you say that this is correct, especially in view of the aim of a contextual theology which you describe as the Christian decision to engage in action?*

A: The question of "how I moved into the area of contextual theology" is probably answered easily enough. I did *not* "get interested" in contextual theology, I was simply obliged by situations in which we were inserted to "do it." As contrasted with seminary professors who were deep into "book theology," some of us were being asked to speak at grassroots seminars and workshops, regional meetings of religious, priests and lay people, meetings of religious superiors, and the like, where theologians were asked "to help us to analyze the situation from the standpoint of faith, and to address the situation and what we should do about it, also from the standpoint of faith." We were being asked to "do theology on our feet" so to speak. In the years following Vatican

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II, from ca. 1965 on, through the next 30 years, this was the work we were "forced" to do, if we wanted to be of help to our local churches.

Incidentally, this is one reason I have never had time to write a single book of my own. From 1965 onwards, all my work, except for classroom teaching of seminarians, was in the area of "helping Christians to think their way through" developing situations in our country, in other countries in Asia. Work for the CBCP (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines), for the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences), for individual dioceses and religious communities was all in this direction. Teaching at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) during the seventies especially was also an effort to "think through" rapidly-changing situations developing throughout our part of Asia. The themes I was asked to discuss were *Theology of Mission* in Asia and the Philippines, *ecclesiology* (especially the developing theology of *local church*), *"development and liberation," inculturation* (through the seventies this was a topic that people wanted to enter into!), *faith and ideological positions, dialogue,* especially *dialogue with other religious traditions, missionary formation* (what did all these "new things" mean, for those being formed for mission?), *ministries* for needs of *local churches* especially in Asia, the *roles of priests and religious men and women* in Asia today, theology of basic ecclesial communities, and (especially as the eighties began) *violence* and *non-violence in political situations*. And at the background, gradually growing in importance, the *role of lay people in the developing churches* in Asia, and the *role of women*. *All* these themes are ecclesiological. That is why I was asked to help people in workshops, etc., reflecting on them. You see *I had to* do contextual theology, there just was no choice. Too, I was invited to give lectures in Tokyo, Seoul and Pusan in South Korea, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, Saigon (before its fall), many many times in Hongkong and Taipeh, there were workshops, conferences and dialogues in Bangkok, Melbourne, Nagpur, Bombay and Calcutta. There were invitations to Bangladesh and Burma, Indonesia and Port Moresby I was unable to accept. At Melbourne I was part of the Holy See's delegation to the World Council of Churches' conference on mission. Then the countless workshops of the FABC "departments": missionary activity, social action, inter-

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religious dialogue, ecumenical conversations, theological interchange … all this was always "dialogue" and addressing contextual issues.

Looking back now from ca. 1967 on, the overarching question theology here in our part of the Church was being asked was: what is the faith-response, what is our response as Church, as Christians to the changing situations around us? In more formal terms, what is the mission of the Church for us here and now, and how do we, concretely, work out in thought and praxis what that mission is? That is why the Latin American response was so influential in the 70s. Not as something to be copied, but as an effort to evolve a methodology of response.

Development/Liberation

Q: *Was the conflict between a liberationist and a developmental approach to the social mission of the church a real opposition, or simply a difference in the approach (cf. C. G. Arévalo, "Notes for a Theology of Development," in D. J. Elwood, ed.,* Asian Christian Theology, Emerging Themes *[Philadelphia: 1980], 267–288)?*

A: Perhaps one good way of looking at this diversity of theological approaches is to recall one rather frequently-voiced principle some people invoked at the time: *"There is no third way"* between capitalism and socialism. One either opts to reform and renew the capitalist way, or opts to reform and recreate socialism along more democratic lines.

This was equivalently the debate we had in our hands. "Developmentists" in fact said: from experience, from our own perception of the concrete situation in our country, the way forward is to start with the capitalist-style society we have, and to keep pushing it towards more just distribution structures—of the fruits of production, of power relationships, of ownership of means of production, etc. Push as hard as you can, trying to move from above and from below. "Liberationists" saw the priority in moving by revolution into the socialist system, with the radical changes which that called for in the social, cultural, economic structures. But they wanted a socialism that had learned the lessons history had taught; they wanted a more

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human, more Christian, more democratic socialism. For most people it wasn't a merely ideological issue; they were arguing from history and the praxis-possibilities open to them.

If I may try to articulate that approach some of us took: we said, instead of rigid ideologies, we have some principles from the Church's social teaching to bring to bear on our situation. They can be "radicalized" with liberationist *analyses*. We in the Church, bishops included, can come to agreement on the wide range of policies and practice. The *Maoist approach*, with its Marxist metaphysics, its primacy of class warfare as "hinge-dogma," the option for violence, we cannot "christianize"—at least in practice. It would mean the de *facto* alliance with communism and the communist party, following the party's strategy, aligning the church organizations with the party, as many even now believe should be done. There were others who believed the socialist option was the necessary one, but one different from the Marxist-Maoist line. They came to be known as SD's (socialist democrat). They opted for limited violence, which they considered in line with Christian teaching: limited to neutralizing some key people in the dictatorship, violence exercised on taking over certain power centers, etc.

As Martial Law worsened and its oppression escalated, more people in the Church including bishops, understood the liberationist perspective better: there was a *more conscious* acceptance that fundamental reforms were needed, but by and large the bishops were against violence. Then, providentially the "non-violence option" began to be propagated and grew in acceptance: a peaceful revolution was possible, was possible for us. Then a situation developed that became its staging ground. The rest is EDSA,[1] unplanned, in a true sense a gift.

[1]EDSA is the acronym for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the name of the street on which Camp Crame, the headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary (later renamed the Philippine National Police [PNP]), is located, and from where Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos were calling for the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986. Cardinal Sin called the people on Radio Veritas to come out to EDSA in order to block with their bodies the tanks ordered forward by the Marcos regime to crush the rebellion.

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Let me end by saying that when I wanted to "stay" with Church teachings and work rather to keep Church people united with the bishops, I began to be ostracized by "far Left" groups in the Church. I was called "an armchair theologian, a bleeding heart, an establishment lackey," etc. No, I never got to a point where I felt a working alliance with the communist party was the solution. To the end of the dictatorship I felt we should work to keep the Church united, move it toward "the liberationist direction" so we could at least work together for fundamental reforms, but trying to accomplish things in a non-violent way. But there were groups in the Church which wanted a more radical option. There were instances of diocesan, social action centers and works being taken over by people who wanted all-out collaboration with the "far Left." Funding from foreign Catholic agencies was at times being diverted for these purposes. Some priests and sisters, and of course a good number of Christians, joined the Party. We'll never know how many, I guess. The full story of those years has never really been studied, probably it will never be fully known.

Filipino Theology

Q: *You have often made references to* Ad Gentes *22 as a seminal text. It says that "theological investigation must be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area." How did you view attempts to develop a Filipino theology or Filipino theologies?*

A: Developing *a Filipino theology (or* theologies) means, for me, to get in touch with concrete questions Filipino Christians are asking, even if these have not yet been well articulated. It should be part of the theologians' intellectual "sensitivity" to touch the deeper movements in the lives of Filipinos and the currents in Philippine contemporary history, and from within the context and culture, to bring to articulation what operative images and aspirations are present and emerging. *Aspirations*, I think, are an important key; "desires." In the last few decades, we have seen currents in Filipino religiosity, the concerns for social justice and social reforms, the emergence of political activism, issues raised by human migration movements: hundreds of thousands moving into city-slums, hundreds of thousands taking overseas jobs (mainly as domestics and manual workers), etc. There

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are aspirations in motion here, changing patterns in the interface between traditional community-life and the disintegration modern life has brought. These are the kind of things Filipino theology must begin with. A theological interpretation of key events in our history, to collocate our Church history within the larger story of Catholicism; e.g., a deeper reflection on the history of colonization and its good and bad sides; some analysis of the Philippine experience of Church, etc., little of this, if anything, has been attempted, let alone completed. The stories of priests who have influenced our history, the prophetic figures of our local churches as shedding light on the mission of the Church here, none of this has been explored.

We have theological dissertations now addressing the Philippine context. Fr. Ben Beltran's Christology is well-known as an important inquiry. A few works for the theological academe exist. But a local theology in a way presupposes a theological community; in the Philippines this hardly exists. I believe such a community is necessary, even for the solitary genius who might give us a truly significant study. Even our professors of ecclesiology have never (not even once!) met to discuss that significant area. In the past there have been attempts like Fr. Leonardo Mercado's, to write on Filipino theology. Mercado explored the language, sayings, thought patterns of Filipinos as starting point. We have Dr. Jose de Mesa's well-read books, Fr. Dionisio Miranda's impressive work …. But as I said we have not developed a *corpus* of writings which is on a par, say, with Latin American theological output, moving in rather clear directions, etc. All this we must try to stimulate still, for the future.

Popular Religiosity

Q: *In Latin American liberation theology there has been a lively discussion on the position and function of popular religiosity. Sometimes it is seen as obstructing liberation, because it was seen as preserving the status quo. How has popular religiosity been viewed by Filipino theologians?*

A: In our Christian history in this country, popular religiosity has often been linked up with liberation movements, beginning with the Spanish colonial period itself. The Gospels' passion narrative

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has been a source of strength for those subjected to oppression, both in the sense of giving people fortitude under suffering (I do not see this as necessarily supporting the *status quo*) and motivating people to take stands against oppression, because Christ did not "cave in" to persecution. There are revolutionary and resistance movements throughout our history where the symbolism of passion-cross-resurrection has been seen as supportive of resistance rather than resignation. The EDSA "revolution" in February 1986 was powered by religious motivation and religious symbols, by the active non-violence movement which had gained a foothold here—not in conflict with, but supported by popular religiosity. The omnipresent symbols at EDSA and surrounding areas were religious: Mary above all, the rosary, Marian hymns …. Night and day, wherever the crowds gathered, religious symbols were there in their midst, and prayer and hymns were heard everywhere. No one thought this unusual; people drew strength and unity from their common faith.

Sometime a perceptive and insightful reflection should be done on the role of Mary in the conversion of our people to Christianity, what her influence has been, its shaping power for "the Filipino story," its particular meaning for the Filipino spirit. Some two-finger exercises on this theme have been sketched. An intelligent, detailed and critical study remains to be done. Similar studies could be made on the Christ-child and the Nazarene, on the *Santo entierro*[2] and maybe the Christmas story; they are "foundational" symbols for many of our people.

I do not think that, by and large, most theologians believe that popular religiosity in our country has been allied predominantly with the *status quo*. It is rather the American-backed "born again" movements which have been perceived as instrumentalized by the National Security State and by economic colonialist interests.

The EDSA Revolution

Q: *You participated rather fully in the "People Power Revolution" in February 1986, both before it and during it, and in your active support of the post-EDSA*

[2]Veneration of Jesus in the grave during the Holy Week, a common expression of Filipino popular religiosity.

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presidency. What is your assessment as a theologian of those events? In a reflection done immediately after the events you spoke of "EDSA '86" as an event deserving deeper theological reflection, with the Exodus as "background-story" and the non-violent movement as part of the scenario. Now, ten years later, how would you assess these events?

A: The EDSA revolution of 1986 was surely a *moment of grace* for our people, a moment of true liberation for our people, a moment of true liberation given to us. The analogy with the Exodus was drawn again and again by Cardinal Sin and President Aquino shortly after the event. It is truly a pity that no sustained deeper theological reflection has been made on the events.

Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador once said that the mission of the Church in any given country is to help transform that nation's history into a history of salvation. As theologians we of course tend to be highly critical of "faith interpretations" of secular events; I have no quarrel with that. Yet thousands of those who actually were at EDSA and participated in the revolution experienced in their minds and hearts the conviction that God was present and acting in the thousand-and-one "little miracles" that together made the revolution possible. At a workshop held months afterwards I heard a Protestant pastor, with tears, describe his experience of EDSA "as living in the midst of a miracle," which he said he would not deny to his dying day. It is difficult to communicate to those who were not there what the lived experience of so many people was. People in deep prayer for stretches of time, the spirit of sharing and love that we felt was being given as gift "from outside of us," and the willingness of so many to stake their lives, the surprising response of the soldiers, the chain of events, incredible when one looks at it now, which brought about the turnaround of the military, the sudden reversals and miraculous decisions. We who were there can only say we lived out a miracle in those hundred fateful hours! There was the Marian Year of 1985 taking up the Holy Father's urging to celebrate the bi-millennium of Our Lady's birth with its intense prayer offered all over the country for a peaceful solution to our deepening national crisis. The fervor of the prayers, pilgrimages, penances, offered by the people! The increasingly united stand of the majority of our bishops, speaking

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out against the abuses being perpetrated, but urging also nonviolence and reconciliation. Prayer for peaceful deliverance, from near despair, from the growing and ruinous poverty of our people, not in a spirit of hatred, but in hope. All these were coming together as a scenario leading to the EDSA events.

Then the fateful Saturday afternoon, when at night, Cardinal Sin called people to the streets to avoid bloodshed, and everything began to come together: "people power" generated as itself a miracle of minds and wills united to overturn the dictatorship; the unexpected crowds gathering by hundreds of thousands with one purpose, the firm, daring will to peaceful change; and everywhere, prayer and sharing, love and laughter. What ideologies, political maneuvering, countless efforts at organizing the opposition, etc. could not accomplish for many years, overnight the movement of faith did. What message should we as Filipino Christians draw from these events? How discern the "surface factors" from what was from God in people and through people? The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) came closest to the reflecting, in faith, on what happened. But the real analysis and discernment remains to be done. Perhaps through narrative, done by a *theological community*, moving from experience to reflection and discernment, through judgments that can be made, conclusions that can be drawn in the spirit of faith. *Narrative as bearer* of the theological reflection, instead of something abstract and formal.

4. Experiences as a Theologian of the International Theological Commission (1974–1986)

Q: *When you were made a member of the papal theological commission in 1974 you were the only Asian theologian in the commission. Were there any expectations, with regard to the contribution that Asian theological reflection could make, from your side, or were you considered just another ordinary member, with no special perspective to contribute?*

A: First, the twelve years during which I served the commission were enriching for me personally. I looked forward to the meetings, listening to theologians I had long admired, whose works I had for years studied, like

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Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Juan Alfaro, Heinz Schurmann, Jan Walgrave, Jean Marie Tillard, Karl Lehmann, Walter Kasper, Joseph Ratzinger, Cipriano Vagaggini and others. I learned much, and outside of the sessions I could enter into fruitful conversations.

On the other hand, I do not think there was any real interest in what we from Asia or Africa had to contribute, from different cultural viewpoints. We were expected simply to "fit in" harmoniously. I believe the then-Father John Onaiyekan from Africa, now a bishop, felt the same way. Even on the theme of inculturation, where I was asked to contribute a paper, I felt the Europeans present felt there was little, if anything, we could add to the discussions. There was really no opening for different approaches to theology, for a need of an experiential perspective "from below." The discussions were invariably structured according to the traditional methods. So when we spoke, unless we could speak from expertise in patristics or exegesis, etc., as good European theologians, we really had nothing relevant to say. The one outstanding exception: Fr. Congar would go out of his way to encourage us to speak out, to share some of our different experiences or viewpoints. Whenever I intervened he would seek me out at the coffee break to make some comment, express gratitude, etc. When we were discussing the "liberation problematic," Fr. Congar urged that we invite theologians of liberation to participate in our discussions, but this was not believed advisable.

Would it not help if the ITC met in other venues, took up problems other than those discussed in Europe, listened to other theologians (non-members) who had fresh viewpoints and experiences to contribute, etc.? There would be practical difficulties in trying to test newer methods of theological reflection, to see something of the situation from which certain theologies (e.g., theologies of liberation) arose, etc. For the FABC (cf. following section) Bishops would spend a week of "exposure" in certain settings, to understand the problems the Church was faced with. It will be argued that thus one would be dealing with "pastoral," not theological problems. But is theology to be divorced from life, that it has nothing to learn from concrete situations which pose questions and problems to the Gospel and theology?

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In a sense, we could perhaps say that the ITC is still overwhelmingly a European commission. Its set-up, methods, themes, atmosphere are those of European university theology. Its concerns, at least in the years when I was a member, remained those of the European sectors. Maybe nothing else is possible at this time. But let me go on record as having profited much from my years of membership in the ITC, and I am grateful for that experience.

5. Contribution to the Work of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

Q: *You were present at the first Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila 1970 on the occasion of the visit of Paul VI in the Philippines from which the idea of setting up the FABC was born. What are your own recollections about the meeting and the process which led to the founding of the FABC? You have been speaking of a special grace of collegiality which you have observed to have been operative in some of the FABC meetings of bishops, who, freed from their day-to-day chores, are open to more universal concerns and the work of the Spirit (in "For All the Peoples of Asia," in G. B. Rosales & C. G. Arévalo, eds.,* Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970–1991 *[Manila: Orbis/Claretian Publ., 1992], XVII).*

A: Pope Paul VI's visit to the Philippines in December 1970 provided a happy opportunity to hold an *Asian Bishops' Meeting* (ABM). It was during that meeting that the first steps toward forming the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC) were taken (This year, timed to coincide with Pope John Paul II's Manila visit for World Youth Day 1995, the FABC met again in Manila to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its beginnings).

The final statement of the ABM summed up the essential directions for common efforts for the Asian Churches and the Asian bishops: solidarity with Asian peoples in their aspirations and struggles in the years to come (Yes, that final statement was given to me to piece together, using the assorted concluding reflections of the bishops as basis. The text had to be done overnight, in less than a few hours.

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Fortunately it was rather well received.). It was also realized that an organization like the FABC could be an important means for helping the Churches in Asia toward communion, mutual knowledge and cooperation in apostolic and missionary endeavors, and the like. Among the moving spirits for FABC's formation we should name Cardinals Kim (Seoul), Gracias (Bombay), Archbishops Fernandes (New Delhi), Lokuang (Taipeih), and Bishops Gaviola (CBCP) and Francis Hsu (Hongkong). Bishop Hsu was, along with Cardinal Kim, very supportive of the idea (The first concrete organizational meeting was held in Hongkong in the following March. The first draft of the statutes were drawn up then.). Father Horacio de la Costa acted as facilitator of the first meeting held at his office.

In April 1974 the first FABC plenary assembly was held in Taipeh. For the participants, it was (I believe) truly an historic meeting: the bishops realized that they could take collegiality some important steps forward together, that they had much to learn from each other; that the communion of Asian Churches could be built up through communion and friendship among themselves. FABC-I served, at the same time, as a preparation for the 1974 Synod on Evangelization held that autumn in Rome; the bishops articulated at that Synod what they had discussed and agreed on at Taipeh (We have published three volumes which document this). Regarding the final FABC-I statement: Bishop Rodericks (Jamshedpur) headed the drafting committee, and he asked me to help out with the task of bringing together the consensus statements of the various workshops into a coherent whole. The draft, when presented to the entire assembly, was approved with minimal changes. The bishops saw in it a good spelling-out of what they believed to be the tasks of evangelization for Churches in Asia. The now well-known "triple dialogue"—with our Asian peoples, with their *cultures* and *religions*, and with their *situations of poverty and underdevelopment*—had a large influence in the self-understanding of Asian Churches, and an understanding of what their mission-thrusts should be. Cardinal Cordeiro was later to tell me that FABC-I's final statement had an unexpectedly great impact in most of the local Churches in our area, that it served as a sort of "vision/mission" statement for the next ten years and more, in our part of the world.

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In October 1974, for the Roman Synod on Evangelization, the FABC set up in Rome, at a hall in the Augustinian institute near the piazza of the *Sant' Uffizio*, a series of meetings of the Asian bishops. Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, that prophetic figure to whom Asian theologians owe much, was named one of the theological secretaries of the Synod, along with (I believe) Fr. Domenico Grasso of the Gregorian. "Amalor," Fr. Jacques Dupuis, myself and others spoke to the Asian bishops and they held lively discussions among themselves.

When the stage of drafting texts was reached, Amalor, Dupuis and I worked together on a text he [sic] wanted to present. We tried to incorporate a strong "from below" perspective. I don't know all the details, but I remember Amalor telling us that other official theologians could not accept his views on theological approaches "from below," with data from experience and praxis used as starting-point for reflection. "It was just not an acceptable method." He felt frustrated. If I remember rightly, he mentioned that Archbishop Wojtyla was the main relator and did not accept that perspective either.

It was at this Synod that African bishops and theologians issued a document urging that the notion of inculturation and contextualization take the place once for all of "adaptation" which they felt missed the point of what was really called for.

The FABC "study and discussion sessions" emerged as an excellent idea. I believe Fr. Edward Malone, Asst. Secretary General of the FABC, kept them up to help the Asian delegates to succeeding Synods.

The later FABC plenary assemblies, at Calcutta (1978) and Bangkok (1982), discussed the themes of Asian prayer and Christian prayer, and the Church as a community of faith. I was also asked to help in the drafting committees for both plenaries. This work was always done under pressure, and it was difficult trying to get all the main themes in the group-consensus reports into a coherent whole. The book *For All the Peoples of Asia* contains these texts. They exercised some real influence, I am told, in the Church in many countries especially among religious. I took part in a great many workshops of the *Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Activity* (BIMA), *Bishops' Institutes for Social Action* (BISA),

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Bishops' Institutes for Inter-Religious Dialogue, et al. Regarding my own theological "focus" in the 70s especially, my work constantly moved around the theme of *the mission of the Church*, *especially in Asia*. I found this a really challenging area because so much was going on around us, in the local churches.[1] For many years I had courses on these topics (the *"triple dialogue" especially*) at the Loyola School of Theology, at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, in other seminaries in the Philippines and elsewhere in this part of the world. I lectured on the same concerns at Seoul, Hongkong, Taipeh, Saigon, Kuala Lumpur.

… "The Church in the FABC region was seeking increasingly to *'become* Church' (to use Fr. Congar's wonderful words)." It was an exciting time to awaken minds and hearts of Asian Christians to the reality and endeavor of the "self-realization of the Church."

Q: *In your introduction to the compilation of FABC texts, "For All the Peoples of Asia," you refer to Yves Congar's words "the time of the heirs." You applied words Congar used for Africa to the Asian setting: the heritage of the Christian Tradition, the heritage of Catholicism, had been transmitted to Asia by missionaries, and now the time had come for Asian Christians to speak in their own voice, to construct their own local Churches. The point of departure in the thought and texts of the FABC assemblies has been the vision (and reality) of a new world being born in Asia, a world of vast changes and youthful restlessness, of conflict and struggle. These are the words you yourself use to describe the surprising consistency of the major orientations in the FABC papers.—Is this sense of urgency and change still the pervading mood in Asia, in the Asian Churches? Would you still hold that an adequate theology of history or a theology of responsibility for the world is far from being an accomplished task in Asian theology?*

A: For me, behind the desire for constructing local theologies lies the "dream of catholicity." The catholicity of the Church has been a passion, in a way, in my mind and heart since my first contacts with ecclesiology. Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme*, and essays of Congar and Pierre Charles played a part in enkindling this passion. It is a consequence of Incarnation and Paschal Mystery, it is the meaning of Pentecost, that (rightly understood) the realization of *catholicity* is the meaning of the Church's mission. *Deus nostra sumpsit, ut nobis sua daret. Quod non assumpsit, etiam non redemit.* The salvation brought to us by

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Christ, the Fathers of the Church said, could be encapsulated in the *admirabile commercium*: God wants everyone, all peoples, all "pieces of our earth" to be filled and fulfilled with his life and his Spirit. That means that every people, every place in Asia, has a vocation to the realization of the catholicity of the Church. Christ is "not yet complete" until all humanity, each part of it, has made its contribution to the "Christ of all peoples." Every people has its gift and riches, and the Father has a place for all these gifts, in the Kingdom, in the Body of His Son. Equality and participation is a calling for each people in the human family. Until each people has made the contribution to the Church's unity-in-diversity which it has a right and duty to make, the work of mission and the mission of the Church has not been fulfilled.

It is my experience that the local Churches in Europe especially (their theologians most certainly) feel no need whatever for what other cultures have to give to them. My experience in the International Theological Commission was, I believe, confirmatory of this. I do not speak of any bad will, or spirit of discrimination. It is very simply this: an unquestioned attitude that "we have everything; we really have no need of anything from you." "We have much to give you, but you have nothing to give us, to be honest." So what Africa or Asia has to contribute to the Church is "local color": some strange and exotic costumes and songs, different skin-colors at the liturgical rites perhaps. Nothing much more. "The millennia of Christian life and culture has nothing to gain from your under-developed ways of life." Yet, does not God's dream of catholicity mean that we have need of one another? That a particular blindness, which sees no need of what others can give, is a blindness that contradicts the Christ, incarnation to Pentecost?

My growing conviction has been that each place and region in Asia has to make its specific contribution to the mosaic which constitutes the catholicity of the Church, which in my mind is one of the most important principles of our faith. Every people has a right to find its place within the church. Every local church can only contribute to this *dream of catholicity* when it is given a status of equality and participation, because every people in the eyes of the Father is equal to all the others and has a right to be loved for themselves and for the gifts and

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particular contribution it can make. That was the point I made to the *International Theological Commission* when I told them:

> Most of you don't seem to feel the need of any Asian or African contribution. You find it nice that we come to add some decoration, but you don't have any need for our gifts, because you are representing a European church which is complete to herself! And then you tell us Asians that we need you, because you represent millennia of a Christianity that is the true tradition!

For me, however, catholicity implies that we all have need of one another. That is the ultimate meaning of local church for me. A local church is never a means in itself, but in equality and participation every local church helps to bring forth the catholic communion as the ultimate aim of being church.

The Church catholic is a communion of local churches. Every local Church is the Church in a given time and place, but it is also in communion, both diachronically and synchronically, with the Church in all times and in the world. Unless every local church shares in the *koinonia* that is the Church universal, in true equality, in authentic participation, in the interchange of gifts and blessings, then the dream of catholicity has not yet been realized. It is part of our deepest duty, as Catholics especially, to help bring this to pass.

Q: *You were the "theological program coordinator" of the International Mission Congress (IMC) held in Manila in 1979. Its theme was "Toward a New Age of Mission." You were asked to be the main organizer of the event as far as content and dynamics were concerned. You wrote one of the main pre-congress papers, "Further Reflections on Mission Today in the Asian Context." Before the congress you were charged with preparing the overall program and agenda and acting as Executive Secretary of the Congress Office. During the congress you functioned as coordinator and resource person of plenaries and working groups. You were asked to draft the concluding statement and to edit the papers and proceedings ("Towards a New Age of Mission. The Good News of God's Kingdom to All Peoples of Asia," The International Congress on Mission, Manila, December 2–7, 1979 [Manila: 1981], three volumes). In your own contribution and in your summing up of the results of the IMC, you concentrate on the local church in Asia as the operative agent of mission.*

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Now, some 15 years later, do you see Asian local churches living up to the ideal that every local Church is called to be a missionary, called to be a "sending Church"?

A: On the local church, this I believe must be said again and again: the concrete, operative meaning of inculturation is the process of letting the local Church be the local Church, assuming responsibility, within the *koinonia* of all the churches in the *catholica*, to "realize itself" in its own life and mission; Fr. Congar has written on this, with all his rich knowledge of the Tradition. Until the local Churches see their own self-realization as their duty and task, and strive to bring this about, they have not yet "become Church" in the truest, fullest sense. Yet here in Asia, we are still a long way from that!

The operative center of the Church's mission today is the local Church: it must discern for its own time and place what the concrete tasks of its own mission are. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (1991) was an exercise in formally discerning, after 25 years of *post-Vatican II experience*, how we must in fact move forward. PCP-II said we want to become a true community of discipleship of the Gospel, especially in small ecclesial communities throughout the land. We want to move towards becoming in reality a Church of the Poor. We will make every effort at a renewed evangelization, but one that is truly inculturated and integral (in all dimensions of our common life). Most of our local communities are far from accomplishing these objectives.

But this self-realization as local Church need not and should not be seen as a chronologically prior and separate task from that of "sending on mission" to neighboring or even distant areas. But that mission "abroad" must be seen as the starting of a process of building up a local church in another place, a local church for its own people, in their own cultural setting. The experience of true inculturation—and all it demands by way of openness and willingness to learn through "missionary silence"—should teach us that all Christlike mission is done in dialogue. For Jesus, the years of Nazareth and its silent obscurity were a learning-process, an inculturation for the Son of God, made man like us.

Q: *"The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the centre and primary element of evangelization"—this is your own formulation when reflecting on the IMC ("To*

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All the Peoples," XXI). In the last decade there have been accusations directed against some Asian theologians and Asian churches that the preference given to dialogue (with cultures and especially with Asian religions) has obscured the vision of evangelization as the raison d'être of local churches. What do you think of this alleged conflict between proclamation and dialogue?

A: For the FABC, in its various official statements over the last 20 years, dialogue has always been seen as a *mode of proclamation* itself. It is not a substitute for, or an alternative to, proclamation! Some commentators (e.g., Domenico Colombo) have either failed to understand this, or have chosen to misunderstand the clear texts of the FABC assemblies. The FABC in its episcopal texts has never soft-pedalled "telling the world of God's love in Christ Jesus." It has never seen a contradiction in its insistence on inter-religious dialogue as a privilege and task and the joy of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel. But it has insisted that in Asia, all this must be done in dialogue mode. I believe the FABC chose this perspective as definitory because this was what Asian experience demanded, and because Pope Paul VI's *Ecclesiam suam* spoke so eloquently on this note?

Q: *During this period of your close association with FABC (1970 to 1990, roughly), what other convergent theological activities helped to shape your theological work?*

A: My work for the FABC and the International Theological Commission led to serving as consultor of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and as member of the Vatican delegation to the World Council of Churches' meetings on Mission and Evangelism in Melbourne (1980), WCC Sixth general Assembly in Vancouver (1983), the preparatory Geneva meetings for, and the actual WCC Conference on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul (1990). I found participation in WCC assemblies both tiring and yet quite instructive and inspiring. Despite our human failings, we know the ecumenical movement is a work of the Spirit. The expression "breathing with both lungs" refers to the Churches of East and West. But it has relevance for the entire ecumenical movement.

The inter-Church dialogues open us all to an interface of histories, perspectives on the Tradition as it is a part of the life of the "other Churches and ecclesial communities." When I accompanied Cardinal

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Jaime Sin in his visit to the Soviet Union in 1987, I came into contact with the Orthodox Church for the first time. It was an eye-opening and profoundly enriching experience. We have so much to learn from their traditions which, in some genuine sense, form part of the great Tradition of the Church. Cardinal Sin also asked me to form part of his companion-group when he visited mainland China in 1985, when China was beginning to open out. There I came in contact with the present Church situation in China: a major ecclesiological issue (Fr. Berchmans Chang of Taipeh has written valuable reflections on this burning issue, which is very real, and not a mere abstract "textbook case"). All of this is valuable education for a theologian.

Then, in 1974–75, I was a delegate from our country to the Jesuits' 32nd General Congregation, when the Order took a strong official position that today the integral proclamation of the Gospel must include the promotion of, and struggle for, justice and human liberation. Those months at Rome were difficult, but rewarding; I had a chance to learn so much from Jesuits from all over the world, who opened windows into the life of the Church in such a diversity of situations. Once again, Fr. Congar's position, that secular history and the life of the Church need always to be in constant interface, struck me as a fundamental perspective! I was chosen to head the commission on inculturation. For various reasons we issued only a one-paragraph decree but it was a significant beginning.

Lastly, my friendship with Fr. Horacio de la Costa, first Filipino Provincial of the Jesuits and later General Assistant to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, was a formative influence on my theological work, an influence of the first order. He was a first-rate historian who obtained the highest academic honors at Harvard University for his graduate work and thesis. But he was also a consummate writer in English and a person who hid beneath his shyness truly outstanding exceptional human gifts. He inspired a generation of young Jesuits and intellectuals in the Church in the Philippines in measure, more than we can surmise. He encouraged us who were somewhat younger than himself to be creative in the tasks of inculturation. He was a true nationalist, in the most honorable sense of that term. At his death, several Filipino VIPs spoke

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of him as "one of the great Filipinos in our history." His writings need to be collected, his biography needs writing. The Protestant scholar John English has written an essay which places Fr. de la Costa as one of the leading pioneers in Asian theological thought.

6. The Work of the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) on the FABC

Q: You *served at the commission from its beginning in 1985 till 1992. What were the reasons which led to the formation of the TAC?*

A: The first idea of setting up a *Theological Advisory Commission* (TAC) within the FABC was launched by Fr. Amalorpavadass during the FABC General Assembly in Bangkok in 1982, when he pleaded for a forum of Asian theologians to discuss the major theological problems of the churches in Asia as an active community of theologians and then be able to assist the bishops in their tasks. The bishops reacted positively to this idea and even then the first topics put forth were *inter-religious dialogue* and the *local church*. I was then asked to be a convenor of the preliminary meeting which was held in 1985, and then of the first meeting in Hongkong in 1986. As regards my own contribution as a theologian I did more work on the *Theology of the Local Church* than for the paper on inter-religious dialogue. For many years I had been exploring the theology of the local church/inculturation in my classes and lectures. I was also instrumental in bringing Fr. Carolus Putranta, who had just finished a thesis on the *Ecclesiology of the FABC* in Rome, and Fr. Joseph Komonchak as resource persons to our discussions on the Local Church.

Q: *How do you evaluate the interplay between the work of theologians and the various organs of the FABC, the local churches, the bishops, the body of fellow theologians, and the churches and theologians beyond the confines of FABC?*

A: To be honest, I do not think that the Theological Advisory Commission has found its place yet. We have nearly no responses from seminaries, fellow theologians and bishops on the working papers. As far as I know in the Philippines no discussions have been held

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regarding the TAC-papers. There is as yet no real *theological community* for the FABC-region because of the diversities in situations from country to country, from region to region, even within our countries. Not enough written theological work which has come from this part of the world circulates within our regions. How many in Asia have studied Aloysius Pieris and Michael Amaladoss? Patiently we have to build up a theological community, perhaps ecumenically, as The World Council of Churches is already doing. The FAB has not moved with true interest in those areas as yet. The Pattaya Colloquium in 1994 was called the *First International Theological Colloquium,* but did not turn out to be a real *theological colloquium:* it was more a pastoral meeting. That is all right, because it was a first attempt. But is there enough interest to try again? I would suggest that at least before every Synod of Bishops we have a theological workshop, with theologians meeting with the bishops who will go to Rome. As the Holy Father has said, an *Asian Synod* will be held before the year 2000. Should that not be a marvelous opportunity to have a major meeting between the best Asian theologians and the bishops before the Synod? What role will the TAC play here?

Q: *At the first international theological conference organized by the TAC in Pattaya in April 1994 you took part and gave a retrospect of the work of the FABC and the TAC. At this conference you reacted somewhat disturbed to a contribution by Felix Wilfred, the secretary of the TAC, when he criticized the concept of inculturation, calling it a spent force. Why do you still think that the concept of inculturation is essential for the work of the FABC or Asian theology in general?*

A: Inculturation in the sense of *a truly local church* coming into being is a process hardly begun in most Asian countries. That was my point in the discussions with Felix Wilfred regarding his remark about *inculturation being a spent force.* I do not know what has been done in India and Indonesia, but I believe that in most other countries, the local church is still *on the way* to becoming a local church, and that *cultural imperialism (sit venia verbo)* is still present, coming still e.g., from missionaries from abroad like the American fundamentalist groups, charismatic movements or as importation of thoroughly European or USA methods, with hardly any respect for local churches.

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Inculturation—in the sense of the TAC papers—has yet to be realized in Asia. If I understand Felix Wilfred, it would seem that he interprets dialogue in a new way as compared with what the FABC has been saying up to now. I do not know for sure how Fr. Wilfred articulated his own position. But some Asian and Indian theologians seem to be posing a new *status quaestionis* which is different from the one the FABC has had. Should the communication of the Gospel, of the person of Christ, be the obligatory *content* of the dialogue at all?

I was not present at Pattaya when Felix Wilfred explained his own views on "inculturation" at length, so let me not say that my own views are in conflict with his. The "background" of the religious history of my country is quite different from India where the great religions have flourished and shaped cultures and civilizations for centuries. I have never lived in India and Indian religious history and traditions have not been part of my life. So I must say with all honesty that I probably am not well positioned to grasp Felix Wilfred's views.

This is only what I can say: the FABC documents spoke of dialogue as a mode of proclamation. Jesus Christ and his Gospel are to be proclaimed, but dialogue is the absolutely necessary mode of proclamation. The ending of the final statement of FABC I perhaps reflects best (in a few words) what for FABC dialogue means: There is the Word who has been present in Asia from the dawn of the ages, even in our philosophies and religions. There is the Lord, Christ of the Gospels, head of the Church. Mission sets up the dialogue "between" these two aspects of Christ" (We must remember that those words were written in 1974!). The Christ of our Asian peoples will be the coming together of these two faces of Jesus. It is the task of mission to help this to happen; proclamation in Asia must be conscious of the process of this dialogue. So there is no evangelization without the Gospel, without Christ, without the Church.

A new way of positioning the issue would seem to say: Christ, the Gospel and the Church are not the necessary content of the dialogue; these need not be brought in. From the religious heritage present within the traditions of a people we can *already* find the meanings and values which are present in the Judaeo-Christian revelation, present in Jesus

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and in his Gospel. The meanings and values are already there; our task is to educe them, so to speak, and help them to come to fullest fulfillment. In the end, Jesus Christ is but one of the saviour figures in religious history. Jesus is a revelation of the Word, a revelation of the Father. But the Word speaks to us through other revelations, through other savior figures. There is no need to bring in Jesus "from the outside," so to speak. Finally, there is really no absolute need to bring him into the picture. Does Fr. Wilfred agree with this position? Is this one of the meanings of the saying, "inculturation is a spent force?" I want to be very honest: I do not know if Fr. Felix will recognize his position in this view at all.

Q: *Listening to the discussion in Pattaya, and during other meetings of the TAC, I understood Felix Wilfred differently, in that he takes the cultural and religious heritage of Asia together with Christian revelation and tradition—which after all has an Asian background and in this sense is not coming from the outside —as the resource from which to do theology. Do you really think there is such a deep rift between what he is saying and what the FABC have been saying?*

A: If his position is what you say it is, then there is no quarrel with him. But let me say what I think must be "saved." Maybe I am too old to change now, at seventy! I believe that we cannot speak of missionary dialogue in Asia without bringing up the person of Jesus Christ and his Church (From what you have said of Fr. Wilfred, he would agree to this). There are Christian theologians who do hold, I know, that there is no need of receiving anything "from the outside," not even Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is there already, "on the inside," and will make up for everything from the inside of Asian cultures and religions. I appreciate the effort they are making, from within their own contexts, to reach out to others. Many of the positions they hold are tentative hypotheses, looking for validation. Thus we must give them time to work out their theologies, and not judge them right off—give them time to grope a little, time to work out where they really stand. But for myself, I cannot leave out the person of Christ, the community of believers that is the Church, even its "institutional character" rightly understood.

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Q: *Am I, therefore, correct in assuming that you see an intricate link between a theology of inculturation and Christology?*

A: Is not the history of Christological teaching itself a theology of inculturation of the faith? To me the very meaning of inculturation comes clear from the history of how our christological and soteriological notions developed as the Church moved into new cultural contexts.

But as to the links between Christology and inculturation, let me draw parallels from my own experience and life. I am seventy now, a Christian all that time. For me Jesus Christ has been the fulfillment of everything I believe is Filipino, in myself. In my own life experience, all that I have wanted, and longed for in life, I have myself found in Jesus Christ. My deepest aspirations have found rest in his person, in his presence. From this may I not extrapolate: whatever there is that is Asian within ourselves will come to fruition in the Lord through the Spirit. Jesus himself enters into our lives, to bring something new, a new personal meaning, a new creative power, a peace and courage and joy that I believe uniquely comes from him. "Peace that only I can give, that the world cannot give." Is this not true of whole peoples also? I think this is valid about the Philippine experience of being Christian: the history and vicissitudes of our christianization as a people have their many dark and sorrowful moments. But the process has given us something we treasure as a people, something we have held onto despite everything, something we do not want to lose.

Is not this the meaning of the catholicity of the Church? That each people, in its own particularity, keeping all that is good and beautiful in the particularity, will yet find in Christ its wholeness, the fulfillment of its particular vocation, its deepest identity? I may be speaking as one less wise *(minus sapiens dico)* but this is what my experience as a Filipino Christian leads me to confess.

Q: *What do you think of the double allegiance some Asian theologians are speaking of to describe that, on the one hand, they are indebted to the Christian tradition as their first allegiance, but that they accept at the same time the cultural and religious traditions of Asia as part of their own heritage as well? Would you*

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agree that in this process not only Asian traditions are fulfilled, but that Christianity is gaining something new as well?

A: The formula, as you articulate it, seems to me valid. It is from Indian or other Asian theologies that we can hope to find the spelling out of this double allegiance. India has a history of many religious traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, and other religions (We in the Philippines cannot speak from the same background). We await the working out of this double heritage in a new Christian theology. For we have not yet in Asia a worked-out theological vision on a par with Latin American liberation theology, if I may say this.

I want to bring up a conversation in this line that troubled me. Once a novice master of a religious order, an Indian priest, asked me if Jesus Christ was really more than just an acquired name, an acquired label, for an experience of the Absolute. If you have ever had a really deep experience in prayer, and have thought of yourself in contact somehow with Jesus Christ, … was not "Jesus Christ or his Spirit" only an acquired label you tagged onto that experience? It was an encounter with the Absolute, the Divine. But, Jesus Christ? Did not Jesus come into it only because your Christian upbringing taught you to give it a Christian label? Maybe you hooked it up with some image of Jesus, inherited from past formation? A Hindu may have a like experience, but he would put another name, another face to it. What is distinctively of Christ or from him, in your deepest experiences of the Divine?

I was troubled by this, maybe it was good to be so questioned. Was the mediation of Jesus only a label I put on an experience of God? For me, "No one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6 and the Matthean logion, Matthew 11:27) has been a central truth for both prayer and life. I have always seen the Christ of the Letter to the Colossians as beginning and term of all creation, and therefore of all religions: the one Mediator in our access to God. I believe my own experiences bear this out, and so I hold on to the universality of the mediation of Jesus. An excellent Indian theologian once told me, "Yes, I hold the universality of Christ's salvation. My question is, how is he universal savior? We have not yet asked that question in depth." I hope Asian theologians continue to wrestle with that question! It

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is now "at front and center" and rightly so. I await eagerly the work of those who are in a position to shed light on this deepest and most urgent of questions of our time!

Q: *What do you think in that context of the formulation once used by Michael Amaladoss: "Jesus of Nazareth is Christ. But Christ is more than Jesus"?*

A: There are few Asian theologians of the caliber and quality of Michael Amaladoss; I have only the greatest respect for his thought which I believe to be both profound and orthodox. I would like to understand his thought on this issue more fully. But in a way, we can only answer questions in the terms in which they have been raised for us, and in the context we are addressing. Here in the Philippines, we have had a Christianity which goes back over four hundred years. Our people literally live on and are nourished by the most traditional symbols of their Catholic faith. We are very much "image and icon Catholics." And this, on every level, from the most simple to the most educated. I can give you story after story to tell you what I mean. At the EDSA revolution of February 1986, everything was held together by symbols of our Christian faith: the crucifix, images of Our Lady (especially the Immaculate Heart of Mary), the rosary … I myself find it difficult to "un-imagine" these symbols: my office holds a collection of crucifixes that speak to me of the core things in my faith. I would find it difficult to be "less Filipino" in my own piety and prayer, even if I do not now strictly speaking "need" these supports in prayer and belief. When I read that the Cross reveals to us not only a moment in history, but the deepest nature of the Father, I look at the crucifix and in it I grasp the truth of that statement.

Let me for a moment go to Thomas Merton's "final encounter" with the great Buddha images in Sri Lanka. You remember how he found enlightenment as he stood contemplating those gigantic figures which communicated to him such wisdom, such light and peace, such meaning. But I don't think he ever got around to articulating that moment of enlightenment. What would that moment have meant, for his Christological faith? I would like to know; I would really like to know.

In his Christmas sermons Karl Rahner often speaks of "light coming into darkness, from outside the darkness." The midnight Mass

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symbolizes this for him. Is this not true of all human situations? When a de-Christianized Europe is re-evangelized, must not Christ be brought to it again "from the outside"—in a new way, once more? Perhaps in this matter I have been too westernized by all my years of learning. So I cannot do now, perhaps, the work that needs to be done here, which Indian and other Asian theologians are now beginning to do. I can only welcome their initiatives and wish them *buon lavoro.* For myself, I guess, I do hold on to convictions which a lifetime of experience and life have given me. But I do not close my mind; I want to hear what other Asian theologians have to say. After all, their effort are efforts of creative evangelization. Not all valid theological reflection has been done. Europe and the West are only part of the Church and the world. The life of theology is *not* the past. There is a future to look forward to, to salute *a longe* with great hope. Asian and African theologies will be increasingly theologies of the future.

7. Work "Behind the Scenes" for Philippine and Asian Bishops, Other "Behind the Scenes" Experiences

Q: *How would you assess the important and rather extensive contribution you have made in the formulation of position papers, pastoral letters, messages of individual Philippine bishops and the Bishops' Conference, and the many texts which you have been asked to draft for assemblies, workshops, seminars—most of them a rather "official" kind?*

A: Over and above my teaching and work at seminary formation, work for bishops and bishops' conferences (CBCP, FABC) has taken up so much of my time and energy. There has been little time to do "my own personal work," little time to read and reflect in peace. Since 1967 or so (the post-Vatican II years) life for me has been a succession of jobs to be done. Meetings, conferences, assemblies of bishops and priests, workshops of congresses for religious, lay people …. Being asked to speak on a very very large variety of subjects, knowing the while that one doesn't really know so much about a subject, but that one must spend several days and nights "cramming." It has been hectic

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(some thirty years of work, work, work), but in its own way fulfilling, giving one a sense of making a contribution, serving people who are "influentials" in the life of the Church.

True, I have not been able to write things in my own name. A few years back, an interviewer asked me how many pages I had drafted mainly for other people, congresses, etc. We estimated, over the last thirty years, some eight or nine thousand typewritten pages, maybe more! 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. I hope at the hour of death the Lord will be merciful.

There has been a hectic side to the work. Much travel: since 1968 or so, I believe I have been to practically every country in the FABC area except Indonesia and Burma. One, two, or three trips abroad almost every year for some 20 or more years. Several trips to Visayas or Mindanao each year, in our country. Not something exceptional, but it all adds up. But there is a happy side too. I have seen the Church at work in so many countries, met so many who are the *real laborers* in our Asian Churches: from Cardinals and bishops to Sisters-in-charge of everything, to typists and drivers—wonderful people who give their time, their energies, their lives to the Gospel, the Church, and the Lord. I have developed friendships with many Asian Christians (Protestants and Catholics) on "diverse levels." I have seen so much of the emerging life of the local Churches in Asia in the last thirty years. It has been a journey, in breadth and depth, into the life of the Church, the Spirit at work in minds and hearts and communities. It has been a lifetime of having one's faith and hope and love expanded and renewed, in the experience of life, in contact with the "people of God." All of it has been grounds for thanksgiving and rejoicing.

Q: *Would you care to elaborate on the relationship between theologians and bishops working together in the various FABC conferences: the example of the various BIRA, BIMA, BILA, etc., that is the close cooperation between theologians and other experts who organize and conduct seminars for bishops to help them in the various issues of the Asian Churches?*

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A: In the various FABC seminars for bishops there has been a very good interaction between theologians and bishops. This is a kind of ideal set-up. A smaller group of bishops, with some good resource persons, in a rather informal set-up, with lay people and religious rounding off the composition of the group. My own experience with Asian bishops, by and large, has been that there are so many of them who are real pastors, not afraid to be real human beings, at heart simple and humble men, really dedicated to furthering the Gospel and the life of their Christian communities. The *interaction* within these groups has been wonderful, in the instances where I have had experience. I think *the strength and the beauty* of the FABC lies so largely in these assemblies, these smaller colloquia. The *theology* discussed here is, necessarily, rather down-to-earth, *pastoral* in the best sense. This is the theological *genre* that is most useful for our bishops in general. Thus this is where *Asian theological reflection* is most possible and useful for the concrete life of the Church. But theology precisely must *mediate* between religion and culture, between the Gospel as we understand it in theological terms today and the concrete needs of our local churches today.

Q: *Could you perhaps single out some Church leaders with whom your ministry as priest and theologian has brought you into close contact and who have in turn influenced your life and your work?*

A: Previously I have mentioned *Fr. Horacio de la Costa.* His influence on me has been a deep and lasting one. Other brother Jesuits (Bishop Vincent Kennally; Fr. Walter Hogan who pioneered in labor work in the Philippines and instilled a strong sense of social commitment in all whom he taught) should be mentioned, but this is perhaps not the place for this. *Don Pedro Arrupe:* he marked all of us who got to know him!

Since 1985 1 have worked closely with *Cardinal Jaime Sin* in different ways. Work for the Philippine Marian Year in 1985, the trip to China (1985) and then to Moscow and the Soviet Union (1987) to be of some help to him. The two international conferences on the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary which Cardinal Sin initiated, in Fatima (Portugal) in 1986, and in Manila in 1987. I have been able to be of service to him, in various capacities, for some ten years now. He has surely an undeniable place in the history of our nation and the Church

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in the Philippines. He is without a doubt a remarkable churchman, a charismatic leader, who has accompanied much for the Church and for our people. As I said, his place in the history of our time, in our county, is secure.

In 1983, when Senator Benigno Aquino was assassinated at the airport in Manila, providence led me to his wife—Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino—and his family, who were staying just across the street from the Jesuit Boston College (BC) in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. I just happened to be at BC for a few weeks. In succeeding years back home I got to know her and her family well. A journalist wrote that I served as an "unofficial chaplain" before and during her presidency. While Mrs. Aquino was head of state I was able to see her at work from "not too great a distance." I remember bringing Cardinal Stephen Kim to visit her, and his coming from the interview much impressed by her deep faith and purity of heart, i.e., her profound sense of mission, service and stewardship. Mrs. Aquino is a person of deep faith and prayer, in her private and public life. She asked me to organize three Lenten retreats for herself and her cabinet, and other officials working closely with her. I continue to be greatly edified by her Christian commitment and life, her fortitude, her desire to be faithful to the Gospel and constantly to seek the guidance of the Spirit. Her devotion to Our Lady's rosary is a very strong part of her piety. Our people could and can look up to her as a person of conscience and integrity and deep Christian principle.

My work has brought me to come to know remarkable lay people. For instance, Ambassador Howard Dee, our Philippine Ambassador to the Holy See during the Aquino presidency, is a Catholic of outstanding spiritual qualities: a deep piety, marked by an extraordinary devotion to Mary, effective commitment in deeds to social justice, to action for the poor, to the tasks of peace and reconciliation. A truly remarkable Christian.

Q: *Would you comment to P. T. Giordano who sums up your work: [Catalino Arévalo] "has contributed much to the theological effort in the Philippine Church, and his writings have influenced many other theologians, bishops and pastoral workers" (P. T. Giordano,* Awakening to Mission: The Philippine Catholic Church, 1965–1981 *[Quezon City, Metro Manila: 1988], 68)?*

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A: What is the final value of all this work, I must finally leave in the hands of the Lord. Only this has been my great consolation. It has tried to be a continuous, unremitting service to the Church, and I trust, to the Lord whom we want to serve. Surely the Lord will have made use of some of it: surely it has had some (no matter how little) *effectivity* in the life of the Asian Churches. That one's own personal work, at the end of a lifetime, is *poca cosa,* does not matter. I have not written even one book of my own. My own notes on the church, the priesthood, on Christology, in the Ignatian exercises, on Mary, I have never had time to put together in a way I thought I would like to for publication. I have dozens of *bits-n-pieces*, homilies, articles hurriedly written, shorter pieces published here and there, nothing that finally *hangs together,* nothing that is really one book, even as *opus parvum.*

Maybe I can publish some few homilies which seem worth publishing, before I die. Maybe my notes on the presbyterate can be put together as a textbook. My lectures at the EAPI on church and mission, which I believe had much that was fresh, original and imaginative in the 1970s, are now old hat. I always wanted to write a book on soteriology, but I don't have the energy for that now. But it does not really matter. Now books have a life span of about 10–15 years, and then they are out of date. Perhaps the work I have been allowed to do will have longer *shelf life*, because it has moved directly into the life of the Church.

Q: *Can you find yourself and your work as theologian in the definition your confrere Antonio Lambino once coined when speaking of the present generation of Asian theologians as theologians of transition, that is theologians who have been trained in a rather traditional way but who as pioneers are busily trying to open up new ways of doing theology without, however, succeeding in presenting a full-fledged new way of doing theology in an Asian manner?*

A: I would count myself rather as belonging to the *theologians of the old dispensation*. But I don't think that there is a need to qualify our theological endeavors. What really matters to me is that when I consider all the churches in Asia and try to look forward to their future, I am filled with a real sense of hope. The churches in Asia are in the process of a *true*—first (?)—*awakening*. I am sure of it. We have at present only

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3% of Asia as Christian. That means 97% are still largely un-influenced by the Church, by the Gospel, and perhaps by Jesus Christ. Thus we are at the beginnings. The future will see new shapes of Christian life as wonderful as what the European centuries of Christianity have given us. We ourselves may not live to see this future, but I know and am sure, it will be wonderful beyond our imaginings, beyond my own dreaming. I believe this with all my heart. This has given purpose to all these years of work, of prayer, of study, of preaching and teaching. Catholicity and *catholica unitas* has been the great dream for the Church, one way of seeing aspects of the Kingdom of God coming-to-being already in history. I think of that great text in Isaiah, and perhaps we can adapt it to read thus:

> Blessed be China, my people India … Japan … Burma, the work of my hands, and Filipinas, my inheritance! (cf. Isaiah 19:25).

And the prayer of Angela of Foligno: "Let your love embrace all the nations!" "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

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