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FR. ARÉVALO
My Professor for More Than Fifty Years

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Writing about Father Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J., for me is recalling my experiences with him as my theology professor at San Jose Seminary at Highway 54 (EDSA) more than half century ago. It was in 1961–1965 that our class had him as our theology professor fresh from his doctorate and professorship at the Gregorian University.

All our professors at San Jose, to use the phrase hallowed by Fr. Emilio Azárraga, S.J., were "the best of the best." But Fr. Arévalo, the youngest of them at that time, was to become gradually the icon of both students and professors of theology.

If there was any subject in theology which we studied the longest and the hardest, it was either *De Ecclesia* or *De Christologia* or *De Trinitate*. I use the Latin titles of the subjects because, remember, we were in the transition from Vatican I to Vatican II. Latin was the sacred medium of teaching at that time. Father Arévalo in addition to the Latin texts current at that time supplied us with practically a library on each subject matter. It was in his subjects that some of us seminarians extended the study period beyond the evening prayer to bed, under cover of the bedsheet with a flashlight.

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The Jesuit scholastics and fathers took turns in giving pointers for the following morning's meditation. The pointers were not only materials for meditation and prayer, they were likewise pointers on how to develop topics for future homilies or sermons. I had Fr. Arévalo as my mentor in "homiletics." Before we delivered our prepared homilies in the refectory at lunch-time to the delight of seminarians, the Jesuit fathers would practice us at recreation time in some small chapel. Fr. Arévalo mentored me in my first two homilies: the first was in 1961, a homily on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, based on the encyclical "*Haurietis Aquas*." The second was in Oct. 29, 1962, a homily on "Christ the King and the Forthcoming Vatican II," in Filipino, based on the encyclical "*Quas Primas*." Fr. Arévalo corrected my homily texts before he practiced my delivery.

De Ecclesia

As a requirement of our course on Church (*De Ecclesia*), Fr. Arévalo asked us to submit two papers on the topic. I chose "Cardinal Bea: On Our Separated Brethren" and "The Divine and Human Elements in the Church."

At that time Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J., was the chairman of Vatican II's secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (Ecumenism). Cardinal Bea tried to bring the church beyond "hating the errors" of heretics and schismatics and "loving the erring." Cardinal Bea was trying to bring to light a "more positive way" of regarding them: although denied "the full participation in the life which Christ communicates to his Church," nevertheless, he said, they had the indelible mark of baptism which made them "our brothers." The "untraditional" or "controversial" position of Cardinal Bea was meant to secure for the "separated brothers" "a room in their Father's House where they also belong." The title "separated brothers" was found then to be both severe and gentle.

Our theses on the divine and human elements in the Church tried to reconcile the sinfulness or weakness of her members with her essential holiness. There can never be, we were taught, a real distinction between the Church of the holy members and the church of the sinful

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members. There is only one church, and she is *de iure* holy. Her divine element, her sanctity is an article of faith. But it is important to realize that faith in her sanctity does not depend on ignorance of her weakness and sinfulness nor on the refusal to accept facts and scandals. Despite the reports of many sins in the church, the church at any given time will never fail to produce holiness in her members. And so, if there are sinful Christians and sinful priests, nothing would be more foolish than to leave the church because of them. The seeming conflict between the human and divine elements in the church is precisely the burden of our faith in the church's holiness.

De Verbo Incarnato

Father Arévalo was not only always "on fire" in the classroom, eager that his students be in touch with the Trinity, with the divine and human in Christ; he also wanted them to be "on fire" outside the classroom. In Fourth Year Theology—our last year in the seminary—Fr. Arévalo required us to submit two more papers on Christology.

For the first paper, I submitted a summary of *De Verbo Incarnato* by Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.—a text used at the Gregorian. I tried to present (in 24 pages!) Lonergan's position regarding an aspect of Christ's psychology, namely, his consciousness. Lonergan had brought to light the way to understand the consciousness of Christ, the closest way being our own experience of our consciousness. Lonergan's thesis went this way:

> while it is true that the more we know Christ, the more we will know how to conform to him, it is also true that the more we know ourselves, the more we are conscious of ourselves, of what we are, the more we will grow in our understanding of the mystery of Christ, how perfectly he has conformed himself to us.

This ultimately is what will make Christ's passion more real and true and meaningful to us. We have not a Redeemer who has not known himself, who has not known what is to suffer, what is to die.

On the first page of my paper Fr. Arévalo wrote "*Fine translation-summary of Lonergan, although could stand improving in a few spots. If you have*

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another copy, please let me have one. CGA, S.J." Since I had only one typewritten copy, and it was the professor himself asking for it, it was a joy for the student to give it to the professor. That was October 30, 1964.

1995. I received a letter from Fr. Arévalo, dated August 18, 1995. Handwritten. "*A few months ago (as I think I told you) I found this term paper on Christ's consciousness and knowledge (a presentation of Lonergan's thoughts), which was excellent work, even if it needed some 'improvement'" … "I have Xeroxed a copy to show to my present students in Christology* …." That was a most encouraging comment from a professor of yester years. The distance, 31 years. I was already Bishop of Dumaguete. My professor was still following me up!

I submitted my 18-page paper on "The Satisfaction of Christ" on Dec. 9, 1964, exactly ten days before I was ordained a priest. In the conclusion, I wrote: "In the vicarious passion and death of Christ, there is no place for any consideration of vindictive justice. Vindictive justice is brought to bear only upon a sinner. Now Christ neither contracted nor took upon himself the sin of man, and therefore, it was impossible for Him to contract in any way the punishment due to sin. It can only be said that Christ voluntarily took upon Himself the punishment due to the sins of men out of obedience to the Father and out of love for both God and men." Fr. Arévalo told our class that the "satisfaction" Christ offered to God for sin and sinners was beyond the demands of justice.

What delights me most even up to now is what Fr. Arévalo wrote on the last page of my paper: "*I would urge that you do more work on this, checking it for greater precision, greater accuracy of expression; it will be useful for you in the future—for the exams, for your own preaching, for future clergy meetings, etc. But you will not have time to polish it later, so polish it up now, before you leave*." Now, now … not later! *Salamat po*, Father.

Symposium on Episcopacy

Before the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1964, Father Arévalo moderated our Symposium on the *Bishop in the Church*. It was an academy

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in honor of an alumnus, the Archbishop of Caceres, the Most Rev. Pedro P. Santos, on the eve of his departure to attend the Council. I was one of the three who presented papers in the symposium. Sem. Alfonso Cariño, O.M.I. spoke about "Authority in the New Testament," Sem. Rogelio Sioson spoke about "The Episcopacy: Some Aspects of Collegiality." Father Arévalo assigned me to write about "What is a Bishop?" To my paper, months later, Father Arévalo added "A Postcript" to include a note on "the sacramentality of the episcopate" and "the *diakonia* of the bishop," reflecting on the mind of the Council Fathers.

Fr. Arévalo taught me how to celebrate Mass. He gave me my first "green stole" at my first Canta Misa in Lucban on December 20, 1964, at which he acted as my "subdeacon." He had taken interest in Lucban: one summer vacation he asked me to accompany him to Lucban. We went around Lucban the whole day. He got a close look at mythical Mt. Banahaw. Before he returned me home, we passed by Ateneo de San Pablo, our last look before its closure.

After I was ordained Bishop in August 12, 1980, the late Julio Cardinal Rosales, the preacher, gave me a copy of his homily. The theme of his homily was my Episcopal motto "*Thy Presence, O Lord, I seek*." Having read it again, I thanked the good Cardinal for his reflections in the homily. But he said, "*You must also thank your favourite professor in San Jose*." I guessed correctly whom the Cardinal meant by professor. The homily taught me to seek the presence of the Lord in the Scriptures, in His Word, in Christ's broken body, in the ecclesial assembly, in our daily bread, in the person of His ministers, in the poor around us, in the people, in our prayer, in our fidelity. Presence of the Lord. Only in this can the priest and bishop become the "*sacramentum humanitatis Christi*," the sacrament of the humanity of Christ.

Through the years Fr. Arévalo followed me up as professor. He would send me updated notes on Christology and the priesthood for my reflection and clergy retreats.

On March 13, 2000, when I was announced to become Archbishop of Jaro, after failing twice to reach me by phone, Father Arévalo faxed his congratulations to me, assuring me that Jaro has "many good and

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devout priests and much strength from their devotion to Our Lady." The professor encouraging his student!

Through articles he sent me, he had introduced to me Pope Benedict XVI even before I personally met the Pope. Recently he sent me Pope Benedict's "Heart of the Christian Life" (on the Mass) and an early copy of Pope Benedict's "Jesus of Nazareth"—last March 3, 2011. *Salamat po*, Fr. Rev.

I know that Fr. Arévalo has taken great interest in the alleged apparition of the Mediatrix of All Grace in Lipa. He had brought one of his classes to Lipa to pray to the Mediatrix. Every now and then he would ask me about the beatification cause of the Servant of God, Bishop Alfredo Ma. Obviar. I assured him that the Diocese of Lucena has already submitted to Rome the diocesan process on Bishop Obviar. Knowing that I had been for many years the secretary of this "alumnus of Colegio de San Javier," Father Arévalo recommends in his prayer this "little bishop" to Bishop Obviar.

I am glad Fr. Arévalo can still read and hear me say it. Through the years, Fr. Arévalo has been to me a friend (Fr. Rev.), a father (because a Jesuit), a fellow priest, but as an icon, my professor for fifty years.

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