ON CATALINO G. AREVALO, S.J.

Daniel Patrick Huang, S.J.

In 1941, a young man of sixteen, newly graduated from the Ateneo de Manila High School as its class valedictorian, informed his confessor, a Basque Capuchin priest, that he was entering the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. His confessor uttered words that, at the time, puzzled the youth: "God will ask you to do much work for the Church, in the Philippines and in Asia." Twenty-two years later, in 1963, when the young man was thirty-eight years old, and nine years a Jesuit priest, a special issue of Asia magazine named him, along with Ninoy Aquino, Gerry Roxas, O. D. Corpuz, Leandro Locsin, Arturo Luz, and Captain Fidel V. Ramos, one of the "24 most outstanding young men in the Philippines." Last year, 1997, the Holy Father himself, John Paul II, bestowed on this man, by this time seventy-two years old, the prestigious Papal Award, Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice; and Jaime Cardinal Sin, conferring the award and speaking in the Pontiff’s name, hailed him as "the Dean of all Filipino Theologians and the Godfather of Hun-

Citation for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Humanities, Honoris Causa, on Fr. Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J., by the Ateneo de Manila University, on July 30, 1998.

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hundreds of Priests." Today, the Ateneo de Manila University takes
great delight and pride in adding her own tribute, to honor the
distinguished life of theological and priestly service to the
Church in the Philippines and Asia of one of her own, the Re-
verend Fr. Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J.

Fr. Arévalo’s remarkable career is characterized by numer-
ous “first’s.” After ordination in 1954 at the Fordham Univer-
sity Chapel, Fr. Arévalo studied Dogmatic Theology at the
Gregorian University in Rome, as the first doctoral student of
the esteemed ecclesiologist, Fr. Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. After
finishing doctoral studies in 1959 (with a dissertation cited by
the foremost ecclesiologist of this century, Fr. Yves Congar,
O.P. in the latter’s L’Église de Saint Augustin à l’époque
moderne), Fr. Arévalo became the first (and only) Filipino to
teach at the Jesuit theologue, Woodstock College, in
Woodstock, Maryland. Returning to the Philippines soon af-
ter, Fr. Arévalo taught in San Jose Seminary until 1965, where
among his students were the future bishops Paciano Aniceto
of San Fernando, Pampanga, Teodoro Bacani of Manila, Jesus
Galang of Urdaneta, and Angel Lagdameo of Dumaguete. In
1965, he moved to the newly founded Jesuit School of Theol-
ogy (later renamed Loyola School of Theology) as its first dean
and later, its first president.

In 1970, he traveled to Latin America, conversed at length
with Juan Luis Segundo, Lucio Gera, and Gustavo Gutierrez,
and coming home armed with notes and new ideas, delivered
the first lectures on liberation theology in the Philippines. In
the same year, 1970, he served as peritus at the first organiza-
tional meeting of what would soon become the Federation of
Asian Bishops’ Conferences. In 1974, at the first FABC ple-
nary assembly in Taipei, he drafted the first statement of the
Federation, the landmark Evangelization in Modern Day Asia,
which remains perhaps the single most influential articulation
of the “vision and mission” of the local churches of Asia in the

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post-Vatican II era. Also in 1974, after serving as delegate of the Philippine province to the Jesuit Thirty-Second General Congregation (the Congregation which articulated the Jesuit mission today as “the service of faith and the promotion of justice”), he was named the first, and for many years, the only, Asian member of the Pontifical International Theological Commission, serving with some of the greatest theological minds of this century: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Yves Congar, Walter Kasper, Joseph Ratzinger, Jean-Marie Tillard, Christophe von Schönborn. In 1985, he was named first Convenor and founding member of the Asian Bishops’ Theological Advisory Commission. From the 1960’s on, he has been serving as one of the first theological periti of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines.

That so many historic “first’s” mark Fr. Arévalo’s career is not accidental; for his life and work coincide with, and more importantly, have significantly contributed to, the birth of a “new way of being Church” for the Church in the Philippines and Asia in the second half of the twentieth century. Writing for the bishops of Asia, Fr. Arévalo wrote: “To preach the Gospel in Asia we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our people. The primary focus of our evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church . . . the realization and enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time.” In these sentences, inspired by the magnificent, authentically Catholic vision of the Second Vatican Council, we find perhaps the central unifying focus of Fr. Arévalo’s many and varied activities.

For almost forty years, he has taught courses in Ecclesiology, Missiology, Christology, and Holy Orders, in San Jose Seminary, East Asian Pastoral Institute, and, above all, the Loyola School of Theology; courses that have profoundly affected generations of Jesuits, Josefinos and his other students
because of the originality and depth of his thought, and the clarity and the passion with which he communicated it. Numerous lectures and talks before lay-people, religious, priests and bishops here and abroad; learned papers delivered in theological conferences in Rome, Tokyo, Seoul, Saigon, Bangkok, Calcutta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Fatima, Taipei; membership in delegations representing the Vatican at conferences of the World Council of Churches at Melbourne, Vancouver, Lausanne and Seoul; ten years editing the influential *Loyola Papers* series; countless homilies, recollections and retreats preached with unforgettable fire and a seldom paralleled beauty of language; long hours of wise and compassionate spiritual guidance for diverse groups of people, such as his former high school students and their families; nuns, San Jose seminarians, Jesuit scholastics, diocesan and religious priests; a president of the Republic of the Philippines: all these forms of ministry have kept Fr. Arévalo, in his own words, "busy, busy, busy" for nearly half a century. Yet in this dizzying diversity of activity, a unity of purpose and vision emerges: a lifelong effort to build up truly local churches in the Philippines and Asia, through a threefold dialogue with the cultures of the people (inculturation), their great religious traditions (interreligious dialogue), and specially with the great multitudes of destitute and poor (development/liberation); a steady effort to bring to birth total churches, so to speak, in which all the baptized bring their gifts and charisms in the service of the mission of the Church, and in which all the ordained humbly serve as sacraments and servants of unity; churches formed in the image of the Trinity which is their source and goal, and rendering service to the broken world in the pattern of their crucified-and-risen Lord.

Although he has published articles, studies, and book reviews for theological periodicals in the Philippines, Japan, the United States and West Germany, from 1960 to the present; and although three collections of the *acta* of international con-
ferences, including the important *For All the Peoples of Asia* (Orbis, 1994), bear his name as editor, most of Fr. Arévalo’s influential writings shall not be known to posterity as his own. For the past thirty years, he has drafted numerous statements of bishops’ conferences and a federation of bishops’ conferences; letters and speeches of cardinals and bishops, a Jesuit general and provincials; decrees of councils and conferences—all told, by his own estimate, “eight or nine thousand typewritten pages, perhaps more.” “I have not been able to write things in my own name,” he muses. “I have not written even one book of my own. I have never had the time...” Yet, reflecting on the prodigious output of writing he has done for other people, without credit to himself, Fr. Arévalo says simply, “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.”

The powerful influence of Fr. Arévalo’s selfless service of the Church has been confirmed most significantly this year at the recently concluded Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia in Rome. Fr. Luis Antonio Tagle, Fr. Arévalo’s student and successor on the International Theological Commission, recounts that, at the moving concluding Mass of the Synod, Fr. Eduardo Hontiveros’ *Papuri sa Diyos*, originally written for a small Christian community in Barangka, Marikina, filled the halls of St. Peter’s Basilica. Fr. Hontiveros’ music had traveled from a chapel in Barangka to the heart of the universal Church. In the same way, Fr. Tagle points out, the Synod’s overwhelming affirmation of the directions and intuitions of the FABC, crafted anonymously in large part by Fr. Arévalo for almost twenty-five years, meant that, unknown to many, Fr. Arévalo’s theology had traveled from the “peripheral” young churches of Asia to the very center, the heart of the universal Church. And so, although Fr. Arévalo was not present at the Synod, his former students and colleagues, arch-

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bishops and bishops, acknowledged in many private conversations that, in the truest sense, he was there.

In respectful and grateful recognition, then, of the outstanding fruitfulness of his life of complete service to the Church, especially the Church in the Philippines and Asia; in deep admiration at the generosity and self-effacing humility with which he rendered this service; in delight and wonder that the prophecy spoken by his Capuchin confessor fifty-seven years ago has been fulfilled with such distinction, the Ateneo de Manila University confers on Rev. Fr. Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J. — Jesuit; priest; theologian; faithful, fruitful servant of Christ's Church — the degree of Doctor of Humanities, honoris causa.