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**THE LEGACY OF FR. PEDRO ARRUPE, S.J.
IN CELEBRATION OF THE 100TH CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH**

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Interpreting Pedro Arrupe

I would like to open my reflections on the legacy of Pedro Arrupe with several quotations. Taken together they capture something about this strange organization – the Society of Jesus – that St. Ignatius Loyola founded in the 16th century and that Arrupe himself led in the late 20th century. They also provide us with a sense of the feelings that Arrupe himself incited. The first quotation comes from a letter from written by one ex-president of the United States, John Adams, to another, Thomas Jefferson, in 1816. Adams writes:

If ever any Congregation of Men could merit eternal Perdition on Earth and in Hell, it is the company of Loyola.¹

The second quotation is the opening paragraph of lead story published in *Time Magazine* on April 23, 1973 entitled “The Jesuits: Catholicism Troubled Front Line.”

¹ Quoted in *Time* (April 23, 1973); <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,945242,00.html>.

Some of their critics have consigned them, in holy outrage, to the lower regions of hell. Some of their defenders, with equally fervent conviction, see them as saints destined for the higher reaches of heaven. Whatever their presumed destination, they are arguably the most remarkable company of men to embark on a spiritual journey since Jesus chose the Twelve Apostles. With a certain pride, they have adopted the name their enemies once used against them in derision. They are the Jesuits.²

What is true of the Jesuits in general seems especially true of the man pictured on the cover of that particular edition of Time Magazine thirty-four years ago, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Pedro Arrupe. He himself attracted admirers and detractors of equally fervent passion. Perhaps it is a testament to Fr. Arrupe's importance that, years after he died in 1991 he can still excite very strong feelings of various kinds. Consider, for example, the following comments from a letter addressed to me by one Gerald T. Griffin of Falmouth Maine on July 6, 2005. Mr. Griffin writes:

Dear Father Burke,

I just got done reading a review of your book, *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*.

Now, I realize, Father, that you were only ordained in 1986, so your empirical knowledge of the administration of Reverend Pedro de Arrupe y Gondra, S.J. from 1965 to 1983 is limited. None of Father Arrupe's writings are essential and he is best forgotten as the 28th Father General....

[Mr. Griffin goes on to point out several of Fr. Arrupe's most egregious crimes – which he names Drinanism and Berriganism – and then concludes with this brief paragraph:]

Father Arrupe's betrayal of St. Ignatius resulted in the collapse of the Jesuit Order in the United States where Jesuits on the faculties of high schools and colleges are an endangered species. The less said about Father Arrupe, the better. His legacy is one of Mortal Sin clubs (sodomy and abortion) at B.C. and Holy Cross.

Yours in St. Michael the Archangel,

² Ibid.

Gerald T. Griffin³

From this perspective it seems that Fr. Arrupe betrayed not only the vision of St. Ignatius but the trust placed in the Jesuit order by Church and the papacy. Mercy Sister Janet Ruffing, a professor of spirituality and spiritual direction in the Graduate School of Religions and Religious Education at Fordham University offers a different assessment. She writes:

Everything Arrupe advocated was based on deep fidelity to the church – a relationship of personal loyalty to the popes under whom he served and of fidelity to the implementation of the agenda of Vatican II, which included an entirely new relationship of the church to the world, a renewal of religious life based on an adaptation to the changed social contexts of modern life, and an authentic renewal of the original charisms of religious communities.⁴

And finally, Fr. Arrupe's successor and the current superior general of the Jesuit order, Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., calls Dom Pedro a spiritual master, comparing him to St. John the Baptist.

Pedro Arrupe is a spiritual master in the line of John the Baptist. Like John, he speaks prophetically from a life of ascetical simplicity and compassion. He confronts the great ethical and religious questions of the day, challenging not only his brother Jesuits and other men and women in vowed religious life, but all Christians and all people, to be rooted in truth and guided by love. He calls for authentic spiritual renewal, integrating prayer with the life of service. But above all, Father Arrupe is profoundly and passionately committed to Jesus Christ. Like John, he draws attention away from himself to Christ. He makes John's words his own: *he must increase; I must decrease.*⁵

In his own lifetime, Fr. Arrupe was controversial – seen by some as too hard-line and traditional and by others as too permissive of “new ways” that were damaging to the life of the

³ Gerald T. Griffin, Letter to Kevin Burke, S.J. (May 6, 2005).

⁴ Janet K. Ruffing, R.S.M. “Ignatian Mysticism of Service,” in J. Ruffing, ed., *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001) 121.

church and to the traditions of religious life within the church. I can say, looking back on the years when I was attending Jesuit high school and college, that my teachers thought Fr. Arrupe was nothing short of a great man. Like Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, he faced the difficulties and challenges of his complex and turbulent times with brilliance, holiness, and courage. Several years ago, in the *Introduction* to a small collection of his writings that I edited, I wrote of Father Arrupe:

He was the Superior General of the Society of Jesus when I entered the order in 1976 and in many ways – ways too numerous to count – he inspired, taught, encouraged, and formed me as a Jesuit. He was a hero to those entrusted with my early formation in the Jesuits and he quickly became my hero. More importantly, although I never met him personally, I count him among my spiritual friends and fathers in faith.⁶

I will be up front on this point: I side with those who consider Pedro Arrupe a great man. He ranks with the three or four greatest Catholic leaders and saints of the 20th century, people like Oscar Romero, Mother Theresa and Pope John XXIII. He was, of course, a human being and, as such, a person of his times and his own training, with shortcomings of temperament and experience, with passions, biases, and even peculiarities. But his life itself serves as a parable of contemporary Christian discipleship. I believe his visionary leadership represents a gift to us who, a generation or two later, long to follow the path he followed out of love for Jesus Christ and a fidelity to his gospel. To illustrate this I will attempt to weave the story of his life with his vision of faith lived in the world and his understanding of how Jesuit education serves, or should serve, this broken world that longs for God.

⁵ Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “Foreward,” K. Burke, ed., *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004) 11-12.

*Pedro Arrupe's Early Life*⁷

Pedro Arrupe was born 100 hundred years ago this fall (November 14, 1907) in Bilbao, Spain. He grew up in a good family of modest means, the youngest child and only boy among five children. He lost his parents when he was quite young. His mother died when he was only ten years old and his father when he was eighteen. At the age of fifteen, having completed his secondary education, he began undergraduate studies in medicine at the University of Madrid. In 1926, after the death of his father, he and his sisters traveled to Lourdes where he witnessed a miraculous healing, an experience that led him eventually to set aside his medical career (over the vigorous protests of his favorite teacher) and enter the Society of Jesus on January 15, 1927 (19). He was nineteen.

It might have seemed that Pedro Arrupe turned his back on the world when he entered the Jesuit novitiate. Indeed, Jesuit training at that time manifested many of the features of monastic life, including a radical withdrawal from the world followed by years of seclusion, asceticism and study. But the world kept interrupting Fr. Arrupe. He was directly affected by the chaos afflicting Europe between the Great Depression and the Second World War, the years of Hitler's rise to power in Germany and of the violent Spanish Revolution. In 1932, for example, the Republicans expelled all the Jesuits in Spain from the country. As a 24 year old seminarian Pedro Arrupe went into exile and, although he visited Spain on various occasions in later years, he never again returned to live in his native land. He studied in Belgium, Holland and the United States (19). Following his ordination and in response to his own urgent desires, his provincial sent him to Japan in 1938. There he planned to work as a missionary for the rest of his life.

⁶ Kevin F. Burke, S.J. "Introduction: A Mysticism of Open Eyes," in *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*, 37.

⁷ Some of the information on Arrupe's life was first gathered by the author and presented in the "Introduction" and Notes to *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*. Where relevant I cite that collection by page number in the text.

But, of course, life in Japan represented no retreat from the world or the events shaping it. In December 1941 the Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor and drew the United States into the Second World War. That same month Japanese security forces arrested Fr. Arrupe on suspicion of espionage and placed him in solitary confinement for 33 days. There was no evidence to support the charges, but because he had lived for several years in the U.S. before coming to Japan and because he was a westerner and a Catholic, and because the times were so polarized, his arrest was hardly surprising. He later referred to this period as a time of great suffering – the peculiar suffering of lonely uncertainty: when the guards came to release him, he thought they were taking him to his execution. But this experience also filled him with a deep inner calm. It deepened his radical trust in God, a gift he would need that for the years ahead.

Fr. Arrupe at Hiroshima

Not long after his release from prison, Fr. Arrupe assumed the duties of the master of novices for the Japanese mission and moved to Nagatsuka on the outskirts of Hiroshima. He was there on August 6, 1945, when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on the city. He writes of that morning:

I was in my room with another priest at 8:15 when suddenly we saw a blinding light, like a flash of magnesium. Naturally we were surprised and jumped up to see what was happening. As I opened the door which faced the city, we heard a formidable explosion similar to the blast of a hurricane. At the same time doors, windows, and walls fell upon us in smithereens. We... were thrown to the floor... The shower of roof tiles, bricks and glass rained upon us. Three or four seconds seemed an eternity because when one fears that a beam is about to crash down and flatten one's skull, time is incredibly prolonged.

When we were able to stand, we went running through the house. I had the responsibility for thirty-five young men who were under my direction. I found none of them had even a scratch. We went out into the garden to see where the bomb had fallen since none of us doubted that that is what had happened. But when we got there, we looked at one another in surprise: there was no hole in the

ground, nor any sign of an explosion. The trees and flowers all seemed quite normal. We searched the rice fields surrounding our house, looking for the site of the blast, but to no avail. After about fifteen minutes, we noticed that in the direction of the city dense smoke arose. Soon we could see enormous flames. We climbed a hill to get a better view. From there we could see a ruined city: before us was a decimated Hiroshima (40-41).

Fr. Arrupe continues:

I shall never forget my first sight of what was the result of the atomic bomb: a group of young women, eighteen or twenty years old, clinging to one another as they dragged themselves along the road. One had a blister that almost covered her chest; she had burns across half of her face, and a cut in her scalp caused probably by a falling tile, while great quantities of blood coursed freely down her face. On and on they came, a steady procession numbering some 150,000. This gives some idea of the scene of horror that was Hiroshima. We continued looking for some way of entering the city, but it was impossible. We did the only thing that could be done in the presence of such mass slaughter: we fell on our knees and prayed for guidance, as we were destitute of all human help (41).

Prayer first, then action: this is a pattern that goes to the heart of Ignatian spirituality. It constituted Pedro Arrupe's automatic reaction. One he got up from his knees, he lost no time sizing up the situation. Drawing on his earlier training as a medical doctor, he converted the novitiate into a hospital and his novices into nurses. They cared for about 150 people suffering from the mysterious aftereffects of radiation poisoning and of these only one, a small child suffering from meningitis, died (42). It was an extraordinary and disconcerting experience. For one thing, he didn't know what he was treating. For another, he was overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the event, the incredible numbers of people killed or injured by a single bomb. He was standing at the epicenter of a world-changing historical moment without yet realizing it. Twenty-five years later, as the superior general of the Jesuit order, he reflected back on that extraordinary experience:

The roof tiles, bits of glass, and beams had scarcely ceased falling, and the deafening roar died away, when I rose from the ground and saw before me the wall clock still hanging in its place but motionless. Its pendulum seemed nailed down. It was ten minutes past eight. For me that silent and motionless clock has been a symbol. The explosion of the first atomic bomb has become a meta-historical phenomenon. It is not a memory, it is a perpetual experience, outside history, which does not pass with the ticking of the clock. The pendulum stopped and Hiroshima has remained engraved on my mind. It has no relation with time. It belongs to motionless eternity. Sad eternity. A constant presence of that human tragedy (188).

'Finding God in All Things' after Hiroshima

In 1954 Pedro Arrupe was appointed superior and then later the provincial of Jesuits in Japan. When the superior general who appointed him provincial, Jean-Baptiste Janssens, died in October 1964, Arrupe went to Rome as a delegate to the Thirty-first General Congregation (GC 31) that met to elect a successor. On the morning of May 22, 1965, much to Arrupe's surprise, the Congregation elected him (20). A man whose life took shape in the midst of the great events of the time, who experienced exile, imprisonment, war, and the dawn of the atomic age, now assumed responsibility for the largest religious order in the church at the very moment the church was asking itself anew how to engage the World.

In the early 1960s the church and the world were still feeling the aftershocks of the Second World War, the horrors of Auschwitz, the massacre of six million Jews, and the dawn of the Cold War and the nuclear age. How was the church to respond to this changed world? How do believers live in the world? These and similar questions motivated Pope John XXIII to call the Second Vatican Council.

The Council met from 1962 to 1965 and ignited an extraordinary process of renovation in response to the signs of the times. Vatican II dramatically reshaped Catholic liturgy and

devotions. It renewed the forms of religious life and rediscovered the role of the laity. It shifted its relationships with other Christian churches and redefined its relationship to other religions, to secular institutions, and to the world itself as “secular” (15).

Taking his cue from the Council, Fr. Arrupe urged Jesuits to rediscover their call to contemplation in action, to a spirituality of a profound engagement with God in the World. The first companions who founded the Jesuits understood this to mean a spirituality of “finding God in all things.” For Arrupe and the Society he led it meant finding God even in the tragedies and tensions of world history and personal history, finding God in a world marked and symbolized by Hiroshima and Auschwitz, a world fraught with division and oppression. And the real trick is finding God and not just our own images of God, our own projections of what we think a god should look like. This requires us to *discern the signs of the times*, an important biblical saying adopted by Vatican II in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Fr. Arrupe helped the Society of Jesus rediscover its fundamental call to discernment, its call to read the signs of the times. Before the council Jesuits ran schools, sent missionaries to so-called ‘mission lands,’ and did retreat work and spiritual ministries. After Vatican II, with a renewed sense of discernment, Jesuits found they were not so much called to abandon their schools or missions or retreat work, but to do all these things in new ways. We serve the Church by being at the growing edge where the church is constantly running up against the world. In the early 1970s, at General Congregation 32, the Society of Jesus asked itself this question: *What is it to be a companion of Jesus today?* The answer it gave is memorable. *It is to engage, under the*

*standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes.*⁸

Men and Women for Others: Jesuit Education after Arrupe

The call to embrace a faith that does justice had an enormous impact on Jesuit education. In 1973, on the feast of St. Ignatius Valencia, Spain, Arrupe gave one of his most famous speeches. Its title has become a motto for Jesuit education: “Men and Women for Others”(23, 171). His audience was comprised of the alumni of Jesuit schools from various parts of Europe, many of whom came from wealthy and prestigious families. Early in his talk, Arrupe asked his audience whether their Jesuit teachers had adequately educated them for justice. He then observed, “You and I know what many of your Jesuit teachers will answer to that question. They will answer, in all sincerity and humility: ‘No, we have not’” (173). Arrupe explained:

Education for justice has become in recent years one of the chief concerns of the church. Why? Because there is a new awareness in the church that participation in the promotion of justice and the liberation of the oppressed is a constitutive element of the mission which Our Lord has entrusted to her... Today our prime educational objective must be to form *men-and-women-for-others*; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ – for the God-human who lived and died for all the world; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. This kind of education goes directly counter to the prevailing educational trend practically everywhere in the world (172-173).

A generation later, one cannot help but notice that a palpable shift in Jesuit life and ministry has taken place. The task of “educating men and women for others” has become almost a byword in the various circles of Jesuit education. Many Jesuit schools now promote some version of this

⁸ Society of Jesus, General Congregation Thirty-two, Decree 4, “Our Mission Today,” in *Documents of the 31st and*

saying as an official or unofficial motto, and changes in the curricula and campus ministries of the schools reflect the shift to justice-centered evangelization (172). The Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, which Arrupe called and over which he presided in 1974-1975, declared: “The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”⁹ This, perhaps more than anything else, represents the defining achievement of his term as Superior General of the Society of Jesus. His address, “Men and Women for Others,” remains a striking reminder and symbol of that achievement. Indeed, one can hardly imagine the Lane Center at the University of San Francisco, or the kind of Jesuit President this university has in Fr. Steve Privett, without Fr. Arrupe. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that Fr. Arrupe is the inspiration, practically the founder, of the Lane Center... and many other centers like it in Jesuit universities throughout the world. If Jesuit education has always had an appropriate humanistic emphasis on excellence in the arts and sciences, what it has today is a special emphasis on *education for a faith that does justice*, a deep attention, at least as an ideal, on *the education of the whole person*, and above all, on *education as a way to encounter the world*, that is, as a way to find God in all things.

Into that Great Silence: Fr. Arrupe’s Final Words

In early September 1981 Arrupe followed up an exhausting two-week visit to the Philippines with a brief stop in Thailand to visit the refugee work of the Jesuits there (25). Just a year after founding Jesuit Refugee Services, Arrupe took this occasion to praise the efforts of the refugee workers. Near the end of his remarks, he exhorted them: “I will say one more thing and please don’t forget it. Pray. Pray much. Problems such as these are not solved by

⁹32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977) 411.

human efforts. I am telling you things that I want to emphasize, a message – perhaps my ‘swan song’ – for the Society” (171). Indeed this was Arrupe’s “swan song.” On his arrival at the airport in Rome the following morning, September 7, 1981, he suffered a massive stroke from which he would never fully recover. His speech center was severely impaired and he remained partially paralyzed for the rest of his life (25).

Just months before, aware of his growing age and infirmity, he had attempted to resign as General, but Pope John Paul II had denied his request. Once it became clear that the stroke was of such a severity that Arrupe could not continue his duties, the Pope intervened in the Society’s normal procedures for succession. He removed Arrupe’s general assistant, Fr. Vincent O’Keefe, and appointed as his own delegate an elderly Italian Jesuit, Fr. Pablo Dezza, to head up the Society indefinitely. When he first learned of this extraordinary intervention into the governance of the Society, Arrupe burst into tears (25). He was embarking on the most difficult decade in his life, a decade of forced inactivity and silence, a season of profound spiritual poverty and surrender. Yet he met these challenges with courage and trust in God. When General Congregation Thirty-three (GC 33) was eventually convoked in September 1983, Arrupe was able to attend its opening session and formally resign as General of the Society of Jesus. Because of the effects of the stroke he could not speak directly to his brother Jesuits, but his final address was read to the delegates in his presence. Here is what he said to them:

More than ever, I now find myself in the hands of God. This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth. And this is still the one thing I want. But now there is a difference: the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in His hands. At the end of eighteen years as General of the Society, I want first of all, and above all, to give thanks to the Lord. His generosity towards me has been boundless. For my part, I have tried to respond, well knowing that all His gifts were for the Society, to be shared with each and every Jesuit. This has been my persistent effort (201).

⁹ Society of Jesus, General Congregation Thirty-two, Decree 4, “Our Mission Today,” 411.

Similarly, Fr. Arrupe's final homily was delivered on his behalf at mass the following day in the famous chapel of La Storta, the site of one of Ignatius's most important mystical visions, where he saw God the Father placing Ignatius with Jesus carrying his cross. Fr. Arrupe's trust in God remains his most enduring legacy to us. I conclude with his words:

I have always had a great devotion to the experience of Ignatius at La Storta, and that I am immensely consoled at finding myself in this hallowed place to give thanks to God on arriving at journey's end... How often in these eighteen years I have had proof of God's faithfulness to his promise: "I will be favorable to you in Rome." A profound experience of the loving protection of divine providence has been my strength in bearing the burden of my responsibilities and facing the challenges of our day. True, I have had my difficulties, both big and small. But never has God failed to stand by me. And now more than ever I find myself in the hands of this God who has taken hold of me (204).

Pedro Arrupe is indeed a great man. Thank you.

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