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# Pedro Arrupe

## THE OTHER BASQUE

• BY JOE NANGLE, OFM

**T**

o be the only Basque elected superior general of the Society of Jesus since Ignatius of Loyola would have been notable enough when Father Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991) assumed that post on May 22, 1965. But the parallels between the lives of the first and the 28th leader of the Jesuits go much further.

Both men first embarked on careers well outside religious life: Ignatius as a soldier, Arrupe as a medical student. Each experienced a remarkable conversion that led him to pursue a radically different pathway in life. Both Ignatius and Arrupe left their Basque homeland in search of the best way to serve God—the former in the Middle East, the latter in Japan. Each served the Catholic Church during turbulent times in that communion's history; each had his difficulties with the ecclesial institution. Both made indelible marks on the Society of Jesus.

So it is that the lives of these two giants of the Jesuit Order are increasingly linked. Indeed the appellation "refounder" or even "second founder" of the Jesuits is heard more and more in reference to Don Pedro, as he was called. None of this should surprise us when we look at the wealth of experience that Arrupe brought to his 18-year ministry as superior of the Jesuits, and when his impact on the order and the church is considered.

### JAPAN

PEDRO ARRUPPE BECAME A JESUIT in 1927. After priestly ordination in 1936 he was granted his wish to serve as a missionary in Japan. He arrived in that country in 1938 and began learning the Japanese language and culture, accomplishments that he cherished until the end of his life.

On August 6, 1945, Don Pedro was serving as director of Jesuit novices in Nagatsuka, six kilometers from the center of Hiroshima. He saw and felt the impact of the world's first nuclear bombing and described it in these words: "I was in my room with another priest at 8:15 when suddenly we saw a blinding light, like a flash of magnesium....As I opened the door that faced the city, we heard a formidable explosion similar to the blast of a hurricane. At the same time doors, windows and

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walls fell upon us in smithereens."

Arrupe went on to describe his and his companions' attempts to enter the destroyed and dying city, initially prevented because of the procession of dazed and wounded people emerging from Hiroshima. Arrupe's medical training enabled him to help out with the overwhelming number of people needing attention.

In telling of those endless days and nights during August and September of 1945, Arrupe mentions celebrating the Eucharist, though his description is not greatly detailed. One can only speculate on the depth of his reflections, as he offered the bread and the cup over a broken city, as he celebrated the paschal mystery of resurrection in a place surrounded by death. It must have been a powerful, searing preparation for the work that lay ahead in his life.

In 1958 the Japanese mission of the Jesuits was raised to the status of a province and Pedro Arrupe became its first superior. His task was to mold into an effective evangelizing body the 300 Jesuits from 20 different countries working in Japan at that time. His position as provincial superior in Japan made it necessary for him to travel worldwide in search of additional personnel and funds for the fledgling province. Thus by 1965 and his election as the new superior general, Arrupe was a familiar figure in most parts of the Jesuit world.

**THE SUPERIOR GENERAL**

ACCOUNTS of Don Pedro's personality by those who knew him reveal a thoroughly contemporary man, possessed of deep spiritual convictions, enormously interested in people. In addition to his duties as superior general of his order, Arrupe was elected to five three-year terms as president of the Union of Superiors General of Catholic orders worldwide. To these tasks he brought the ability to inspire those he was called to lead, especially younger members of his own order. His travels all over the world of the Jesuits—a departure from the custom of his predecessors—made of Arrupe a connector of Jesuits everywhere.

It was in small groups of his brothers that Arrupe was said to be at his best. The story is told of a car trip in Egypt during which Arrupe was engrossed in conversation about the order and its ministries there. An aide tried to point out the beauty of the pyramids as they passed them on the road. Arrupe paused for a moment, nodded in appreciation and plunged back into his conversation.

**THE REFOUNDER**

AS PROVINCIAL IN JAPAN, Arrupe's travels had taken him to various parts of the underdeveloped world. These journeys, together with his momentous experience at Hiroshima, forged in the future superior general the conviction that the pursuit of justice was integral to life in Jesus. He saw this integration as a unifying force for the life and ministries of the Jesuit Order in modern times. It became the great gift of Arrupe to the Society

of Jesus.

What is more, the justice he saw as being needed in the world was as much on the level of societal structures as personal relationships. His travels and conversations with oppressed peoples and those ministering to them convinced Arrupe that justice meant structural change in every aspect of human life.

**REINFORCED BY THE CHURCH**

ECCLESIAL EVENTS around him served to reinforce this conviction. As the newly elected superior of the Jesuits, Arrupe attended the final session of Vatican II and witnessed the promulgation of the great document "The Church in the Modern World." Its opening sentence confirmed Arrupe's own sentiments: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

In 1971 Arrupe attended the synod of Catholic bishops and witnessed the amazing declaration from that body: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as constitutive to the preaching of the gospel." Such statements and all that led up to them in terms of social analysis, pastoral concern, and biblical reflection reinforced Arrupe's own conviction that his order had to be about the work of Jesus in the name of the gospel. As one of his closest collaborators described it, Arrupe's dream was that there be one mission for the Jesuits—that of promoting justice—which would focus all of their apostolic energies.

**THE 32ND CONGREGATION**

THIS DREAM, articulated by Arrupe from the time of his election as superior in 1965, culminated in the 32nd Congregation, a meeting of representatives from across the Jesuit world, held December 1974 to March 1975. Under Arrupe's guidance this supreme gathering of the society stated in its famous "fourth decree" what was the modern-day vocation of the Jesuits.

The title says it clearly: "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice." It went on to flesh out the concept: "Our faith in Christ Jesus and our mission to proclaim the Gospel demand of us a commitment to promote justice and to enter into solidarity with the voiceless and the powerless."

Prior to the promulgation of this breakthrough decree, Arrupe had prophetically warned his brothers of its consequences. He asked them to pray about what they, and he, were contemplating, stating that they would lose friends, be criticized, and suffer persecution. How right he was. Less than three years later, Don Pedro was writing a letter to the entire society about the five Jesuits who had already been killed for their pursuit of justice.

Much has been written and spoken about Don Pedro's other contributions to his order as its superior general, which include

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modernizing its internal structures, promoting its missionary endeavors, encouraging the prayer and community life of Jesuits. But even today, so shortly after his death, it seems clear that the great integrating vision of Arrupe—joining Christian faith and the service of justice—will mark him as the order's second founder.

As clear implementations of Arrupe's vision for his order, one can point to the University of Central America (UCA) in El Salvador and the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C. The first of these, under the leadership of the Jesuits during the Arrupe years, made an institutional option for the poor.

The rector of the UCA, Father Ignacio Ellacuria, offered the clearest explanation of this institutional option: "A Christian-inspired university focuses all its academic activity according to what it means to make a Christian preferential option for the poor....The university should become science for those who have no science, the clear voice of those who have no voice....Our university has modestly tried to adopt this difficult and conflictive course." (Ellacuria was murdered by elements of the Salvadoran military on November 16, 1989.)

This was precisely what Arrupe had in mind in the fourth decree of his 32nd Congregation, where it states: "Solidarity with men and women who live a life of hardship...should be a characteristic of the life of all of us as individuals and a characteristic of our communities and institutions as well."

Similarly, during the first part of Don Pedro's generalship, the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C., came into being. Originally a Jesuit initiative, directly approved and blessed by Arrupe, the center has since expanded to include men and women from many walks of life among its staff. However, it remains true to its original vision—a think tank, educational resource, and activist center offering alternative analyses of current economic and political issues, based on an option for the poor.

## OPPOSITION

INEVITABLY, ARRUPÉ'S VISION and its implementation throughout the Jesuit world drew criticism and opposition. Many of his own order felt that their leader, far from building up the society, was destroying it. They simply could not understand nor accept the great gift they had in this man. Those who knew Arrupe testify that he exercised great charity toward his brothers who disagreed with him. His constant theme was that they all had a right to express their opinions.

From the highest ranks of the Catholic Church as well came opposition. Pope John Paul II and to a lesser extent Paul VI found Arrupe too radical or too permissive. One can imagine the reaction of institutionally minded popes on hearing what Don Pedro had said in answer to a question about Jesuits in jail: "If it is necessary to give witness to injustice by going to jail, well, 'Welcome jail.'" A Jesuit who knew him well said that one of Don Pedro's dreams was to wake up one morning and not have

on his desk a letter of complaint about a Jesuit from another ecclesiastical authority.

Most notable was Don Pedro's attitude toward the member of his order who stretched the limits—in some people's minds—of a "prudent" promotion of justice. A case in point is the conduct of the Jesuits in Nicaragua both before and during the Sandinista revolution.

Jesuits in the country felt that the nature of the changes taking place there had been badly misunderstood in the Vatican. To label them "Marxist" without any nuancing was for the Nicaraguan Jesuits incorrect and pastorally dangerous. This led to the accusation that they themselves were Marxist sympathizers. Arrupe countered the criticisms by saying that the Nicaraguan Jesuits were in constant communication with him, that they had done nothing without his knowledge and support, and that to attack them was to attack him.

Without doubt Arrupe on occasion had to call his Jesuit brothers to accountability for their mistakes. But even in these cases he showed utmost generosity and loyalty to the men.

One of his more famous quotes came out of the monumental debate over Pope Paul's letter on artificial birth control. Jesuits found themselves on all sides of the issue, and while Arrupe supported those who found the letter difficult or impossible to accept, he asked: "Please make it easier for me to defend you." He stated his overriding principle in taking responsibility for a large and activist order in a 1966 press conference when he said that the worst position would be to fold one's arms and do nothing for fear of making a mistake.

## APPROACHING THE END

THE FINAL CHAPTERS of Pedro Arrupe's life began with his request to resign from the generalship in 1980. Though he was still in good health, he wanted to implement a decree passed at the general assembly that elected him in 1965, namely that the superior general could resign. Theretofore the Jesuit superior general had served for life. But Pope John Paul II refused to accept Arrupe's resignation.

Somewhat more than a year later, on August 7, 1981, Don Pedro suffered a disabling stroke. The pope appointed a personal delegate from among the Jesuits as interim superior of the order, passing over the man whom Arrupe had designated as his vicar general.

Two years later, at the election of his permanent successor, Arrupe tendered his official resignation. In a moving farewell message to the assembled group, Don Pedro, limited now to halting speech, had these words read: "In these 18 years, my one ideal was to serve the Lord and his church....I thank the Lord for the great progress I have witnessed in the society. Obviously, there would be defects too—my own, to begin with—but it remains a fact that there was great progress, in personal conversion, in the apostolate, in concern for the poor, refugees. And special mention must be made of the attitudes of loyalty and filial obedience shown toward the church and the Holy Father, particularly in these last years. For all of this,

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We can only speculate on the last, silent years of Arrupe's life. The man who perhaps knew him best, his vicar general, Father Vincent O'Keefe of the New York Jesuit Province, says simply: "From his resignation as general until his death on February 5, 1991, Pedro Arrupe's life was one of silent prayer and suffering, of utter dependence on others for daily and devoted care, and of waiting patiently for his Lord. His speech had become more and more difficult and limited, but he said a great deal with his eyes and his face....The man himself was the most striking message."

### FINAL JUDGMENT

History will pass judgment on Pedro Arrupe's ultimate place in the Jesuit Order. Still, it seems clear already that his niche will be found alongside the great ones of that remarkable group, even that of the founder himself, Ignatius of Loyola.

Vincent O'Keefe and Phil Land, S.J., the much respected elder at the Center of Concern, state categorically that Don Pedro was the greatest Jesuit they have ever known. This is a mighty testimony from two who have known most of the world-famous members of the order in this century.

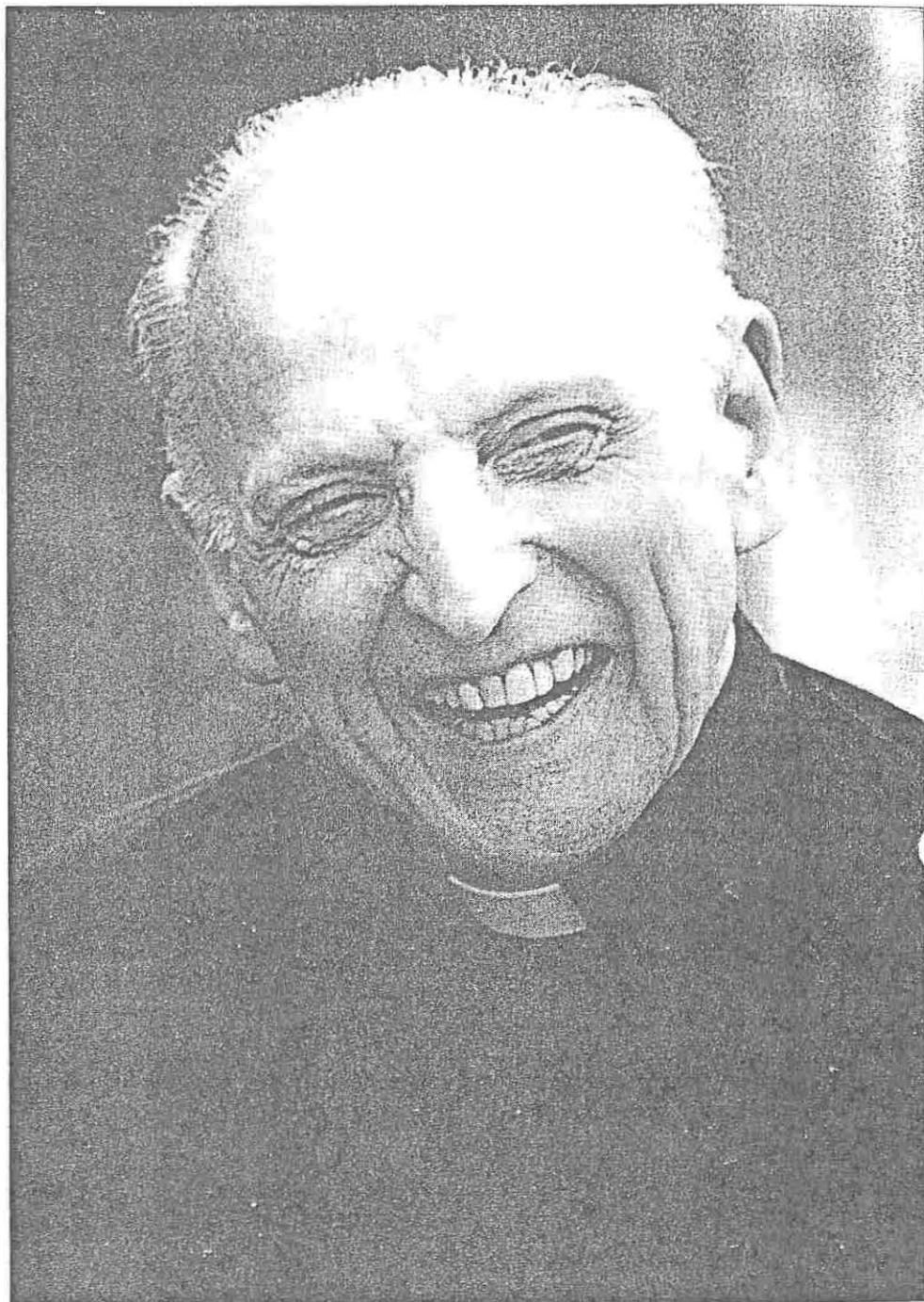
It is universally agreed that Arrupe demonstrated a serenity of spirit in the midst of enormous pressures from inside and outside the order during his generalate. Such equanimity speaks of a deep relationship with God and reliance on the Holy Spirit—hallmarks of true sanctity. Further, he remained true to his commitment of service to the institutional church, even when tried sorely by that very organization. Such steadfastness, too, bespeaks a life of trust in God at work in and through the church, despite its sins.

Above all, it appears that history will accord to Arrupe the title "refounder of the Jesuits" for his great vision that integrated faith and justice. It was Arrupe's call to articulate that vision and see to its implementation among his brothers. This he did in all faithfulness throughout his life as their superior.

Said another way, Don Pedro came to understand the Last Judgment chapter of Matthew's gospel in social and universal terms. The hunger, thirst, nakedness, loneliness, and imprisonment, and our response to them which Jesus declared in that gospel passage as the final judgment on our lives, Arrupe saw

not only in personal terms but in a societal and global sense as well. He called himself and his entire order to analysis, concern, and action around the indignities suffered by the least of humanity. In this the Society of Jesus will never be the same again.

On February 5, 1991, the day God called him to give an account of his stewardship, Pedro Arrupe could say in the words of the first Basque: "Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty; my memory, my understanding and my entire will. Whatever I have or hold, you have given me; I restore it all to you a surrender it wholly." Arrupe had done just this throughout his life, in and through the circumstances of his special time in history. ■



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