

# A Loyal Liberator

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By PARMANANDA R. DIVARKAR, S.J.

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**W**HEN A REPRESENTATIVE BODY of Jesuits met in 1965 they could hear voices suggesting that since the Second Vatican Council had renounced the Counter-Reformation with all its works and pomps, the Society of Jesus had better wind up business and disband. Instead, the Jesuits chose Pedro Arrupe as their leader—and soon found themselves in the vanguard of the movement for renewal launched by the council.

Father Arrupe's 18 years in office corresponded to the turbulent process of growth by which the postconciliar church came of age. And he was very much a part of that process, very much involved in the turbulence, not only as Jesuit General but as president of the Union of Superiors General for an exceptionally long period, as an active participant at successive synods of bishops and on several episcopal committees and as a popular speaker in many languages.

In fact, his first constructive encounter with the *aggiornamento* occurred before he became General, when the electoral assembly debated whether the man it would choose should hold office for life, as laid down by St. Ignatius, or have a limited term, as the signs of the times seemed to indicate. There were strong opinions on both sides, backed by an impressive array of arguments. Father Arrupe always held what eventually became the law, that

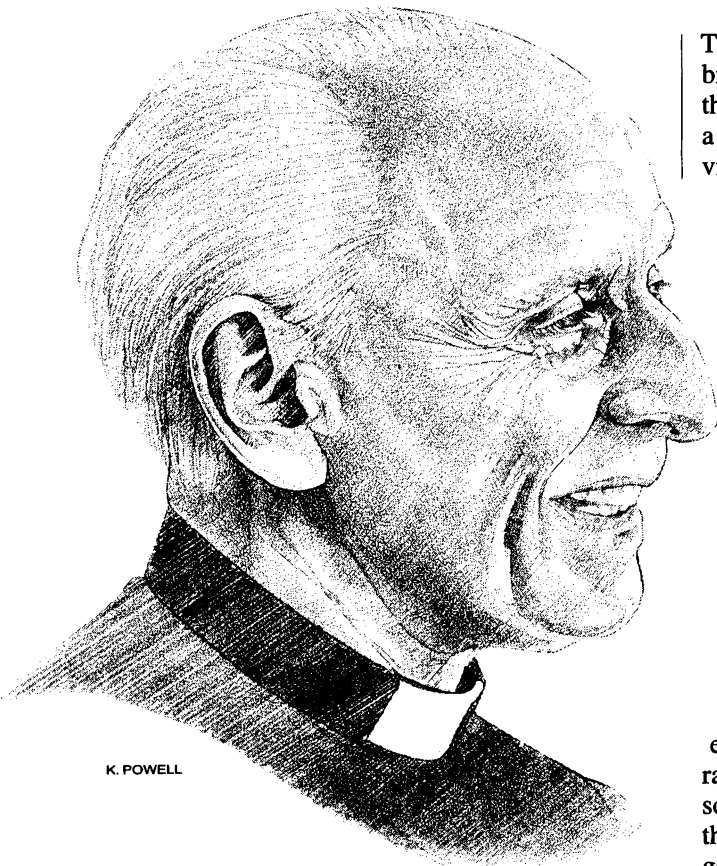
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PARMANANDA R. DIVARKAR, S.J., who now lives in Bombay, where he writes, teaches and gives retreats, was one of four general assistants to Pedro Arrupe, S.J., when Father Arrupe was Superior General of the Society of Jesus. At that time, Father Divarkar was the General's adviser on the mission work of the Society.

the General should indeed be elected for life, but with an established procedure for resignation if and when he could no longer cope with his task. About himself, he would later say that he wanted to carry on as long as he could. He loved the job because he loved his Society; but for that very reason he would withdraw when he was not able to meet his responsibilities.

In this he was perfectly consistent with his whole personal attitude and with his official policy about renewal in the church, and in general, about what it means to be a Christian and a Jesuit. He had a strong attachment to tradition and a fearless openness to fresh challenges. This was very much in line with the formula for religious life today, as proposed by Vatican II: a return to the foundational charism and adaptation to present circumstances. It also goes a long way toward explaining his great success as a spiritual leader, as well as the incomprehension and rejection he experienced in certain quarters, both inside and outside the Society of Jesus.

**I**T SHOULD BE NOTED that adherence to the old and acceptance of the new were not two things for Father Arrupe. It was precisely his unflinching loyalty to the sources of his being that enabled him to extend a generous welcome to the reality in which he lived. Not all could appreciate the vital unity of spirit that animated the multifarious activities in which he so enthusiastically engaged and the powerful inspiration that he radiated. Some found him overly naïve, others judged him quite reckless, while a good number followed him erratically, without the delicate balance and the uncompromising fidelity that characterized Pedro Arrupe himself. He was free, bold and innovative, not in spite of being tradi-



K. POWELL

tional, but precisely because he held on so tenaciously to all that was implied in his fundamental commitment.

Conversely, he was flexible with regard to all else and easily adjusted himself to an unfamiliar environment. The varied experience of his early years and the traumatic events through which he lived during World War II doubtless helped him to sift the essential from the accidental. His theological horizon was limited, in many ways preconiliar, and there was much in present-day thinking and behavior he did not understand and could not approve. But he kept an open mind; and while he accepted the responsibility for government that had been thrust upon him, he was always more of a learner than a teacher. His many insightful initiatives came from a creative assimilation of what he picked up in his wide contacts.

It has been said of St. Ignatius that one of the most significant facts of his personal history is that he readily went to school as an adult. He was a good listener, with a receptivity that went beyond mere intelligence, and which he himself called "interior knowledge." But there was much more than that to the similarity between Ignatius and Pedro Arrupe. Ultimately they were at one in what may be regarded as the core of the charisma of the founder: the paradox of loyalty as liberation. Loyalty is something that binds, but loyalty to Christ is a release, a redemption from all that hinders true and total growth, for it leads into the experience that the man Jesus had of his Father, of God as Absolute and all else as relative.

This is the truth that makes us free, and enables us to embrace everything: the church and her many institutions, the world and all its messy problems—not as a burden or a bondage, but rather as opportunities for greater service, for a larger liberation.

In a homily on the occasion of his golden jubilee as a Jesuit, Father Arrupe made a simple profession of the triune loyalty that ruled his life: to Christ, to the church, to the Society of Jesus. He named them in reverse order and called them his loves—three loves, flowing one from the other, feeding each other, and united in one loyalty that took in everything and everyone. It pained him to see people, Jesuits especially, caught in a conflict of loyalties. His concern as General was to bring the Society to an ever greater unity and effectiveness through a deeper understanding and a more meaningful practice of Ignatius's ideal of loyal service; and he could not hide his profound emotion and fierce pride on the several occasions when his men met with violent death in fidelity to their mission among the poor.

The men, for the most part, were proud of their General, who led by example and an infectious optimism rather than by mandate. His gift for communication transcended the mere command of many languages. A story that had a long life because Father Arrupe himself kept it going is that as he addressed an international meeting of Jesuits, everyone understood what he was saying but no one knew what language he was speaking. Others, too, found it easy to communicate with him because of his simplicity and genuine interest. Yet one of his heaviest crosses was a communication gap between himself and some ecclesiastical authorities. This led in one way or another to difficulties with the popes—yes, even with John Paul I—that were all the more painful because of his deep-felt attachment to the person of the Vicar of Christ.

**N**EEDESS TO SAY, the fault was not all on the other side. For one thing, in any dialogue he tended to create an atmosphere that was so bright and promising that unpleasant facts seemed to fade out of sight. His close collaborators, who dealt familiarly with him, could hold him down to the grim or grimy reality; but it is understandable that in more formal conversations the interlocutor felt embarrassed, then frustrated and finally annoyed, while appreciating the man all the time.

There was also the problem of differing perceptions of the rapid changes taking place everywhere, and not least within the church. Father Arrupe once said that unlike the more conventional means of transport, such as cars and trains, a space ship once launched cannot be halted for repairs or any adjustment; whatever has to be done must be done while it is speeding on its course, perhaps a

deviant course. Not everyone caught the point of his remark. The fact is that the Catholic Church as a whole, and churchmen in particular, have long been familiar with a pattern of history wherein healthy change came gradually from within, while rapid change came from the outside and was seen as a violent intrusion to be resisted or a natural calamity to be counteracted. But today, with a vastly accelerated pace of life, rapid change comes from within; and though it may seem violent, it is not necessarily destructive. It may need guidance or even correction, yet it should be treated with sympathy and patience rather than anxious hostility. But the tendency is to regard it as a threat from the outside, or to erect fresh barriers to place it on the outside. One might say that for Father Arrupe, as for Pope John XXIII, nothing—and especially no one—was ever simply on the outside. He would rather extend boundaries to make them more in-

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clusive. This could explain his very cordial ecumenical relations and his special contacts with prelates of the Russian Orthodox Church.

But within the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus, his approach to the challenges of the postconciliar period was often criticized and sometimes opposed. He persevered cheerfully, ready to heed advice and even admonition, but with unabated enthusiasm—though he began to feel the effects of age and of a change in ecclesial climate as he advanced beyond his 70th year and moved through the eventful autumn of 1978. Finally, he initiated the process for resignation, but the way was blocked by a papal veto. The objection, it would seem, was not to the resignation as such, but to the large top-level gathering of Jesuits that it would require: a meeting like the one that brought great distress to Pope Paul VI in 1974-75. Father Arrupe accepted in faith the awkward position in which he was placed, and even came up with bright new ideas, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service. Then he collapsed with a stroke, and though he had named a vicar, the Pope appointed his own delegate to take over the government of the order.

Back in 1965, when the term of office of the General was being discussed, an argument that was brought against those like Father Arrupe, who held that the General should be elected for life but with the possibility of resigning, was that a man elected for life would not easily see reasons for resigning even if he could or should do

*(Continued on p. 185)*

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**PARMANANDA R. DIVARKAR**

*(Continued from p. 155)*

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so. Father Arrupe was keen on having an opportunity to show that the new legislation was effective. In the end he did resign, but in circumstances that he had not at all foreseen.

These circumstances are sufficiently known and too painful to bear recounting. But what many will not have realized is that he was put into a situation that was exactly the opposite of what he had envisaged and looked forward to. He had wanted to be General as long as he could function, and to cease from office when he could not. Now he could not function, not just because of physical disability but because he was deprived of authority while retaining the title—and he could not renounce the title because he was prevented from calling a General Congregation, or plenary assembly, that alone could accept his resignation. This was not merely a fresh cross to carry; it was crucifixion.

It is a bitter-sweet consolation, and a potent inspiration, to reflect that what Father Arrupe could not entirely achieve in a decade and a half of sustained effort, he in large measure obtained by his sufferings. When in the wake of his crippling stroke there came the papal intervention in his government, quite a few people, Jesuits and others, thought that the move would split the Society of Jesus—would, in fact, splinter it, with bits flying in all directions. Nothing of the sort happened. Rather the contrary. The reaction, led by Father Arrupe but universal, was one of faith and fidelity. Moreover, divisive controversies suddenly became irrelevant, old wounds were healed. There was a new sense of belonging together, and a general rallying to the ideal of Ignatius: “Serve the Lord alone, and His bride the church, under the Roman pontiff.”

Today there are many who believe that the generous response to the challenge to identify themselves with a Society that lay in pain and humiliation was for countless Jesuits a supremely purifying and enlivening experience: an experience of loyalty as liberation, with a wholesome impact on the church at large. Thanks to Pedro Arrupe. ■