

# FAITH AND JUSTICE AS A TASK OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS

*A conference delivered by Father Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in the Pauluskirche in Frankfurt, Germany, November 21, 1976, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Sankt Georgen Institute for Higher Philosophical and Theological Studies.*

Distinguished Listeners,

At the close of a conference on the subject of "Hunger in the World and Evangelization" that I gave at the International Eucharistic Congress of Philadelphia in August this year, a journalist asked me: "Father Arrupe, didn't you have the feeling that you were exaggerating a bit in your talk?" On that occasion, among many other things, I had said: "We cannot properly receive the Bread of Life without sharing bread for life with those in want." From Philadelphia I then set out for Honduras, Guatemala, and Venezuela, and there I found myself being asked continually about what I had said in that large city of the United States, where in fact, television had shown only the pictures of great processions and of the evening liturgical celebrations in the stadium. And precisely the people we had been talking about, the hungry of the world, were not there. I visited some of my confreres who live in dilapidated hovels among the poor, and I celebrated the Eucharist in makeshift churches in the slums where I distributed the Bread of Life to starving marginalized people. After the Mass, many came up to me, among them a mother of eight children. I shall never forget her face, marked by hunger and suffering. She said to me: "Father General, I have nothing left to give my children. Pray for me, that God may send us some bread." In that moment I understood even more clearly than ever before that I had not exaggerated, either at Philadelphia or at any other place where I had talked about hunger in the world. Perhaps you will understand why that most recent experience should come back to mind when I was thinking of what I ought to say here at Frankfurt on this solemn occasion.

I know that in this short period of time you do not expect a learned discourse from me. You know as well as I do that there are no ready-made answers for the great problems confronting mankind today. But by virtue of our identity as Christians we have the duty to look for an answer and each time, in a new way, try to find at least a partial answer, through concrete deeds. I shall attempt to make a contribution in this respect, calling on my personal experiences and convictions.

## I. THE DATA OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I confess quite frankly that in the last ten years, since I took on the governance of the Society of Jesus, I have gone through a learning process. Before that, I had lived for twenty-seven years outside Europe, in Japan, and had come to know the oriental world. But Japanese civilization, shaped by modern industrial economy, has much in common with Europe. During the past ten years, I have discovered, through personal encounters and many conversations, the full greatness and the problems of the Third World: the world of India, the Arab countries, Africa, and Latin America. I have experienced the poverty and the hunger of these lands. I will not burden you with statistics. Today they come to us in such vast volume that they no longer make much of an impression on us. Encounter with starving men has been decisive for me; I have met them not only individually, but also in groups, in masses, in entire countries. I was struck by the state of helplessness and the lack of prospect in which these people find themselves. Many people have a passing experience of poverty, but permanent poverty goes much deeper and can destroy a person's self-confidence. Nor shall I ever forget the deep mistrust, the suspicion lingering in these people that the industrialized countries bear an essential part of the blame for the fact that any progress toward changing their wretched condition is so slow.

But I have discovered also the richness of this Third World: the richness of a genuinely human culture, hidden beneath the poverty and misery. I have experienced the natural energy of these peoples and their unshattered spiritual vitality. Their ability to experience God and to love their brothers selflessly is a treasure that I had looked for elsewhere in vain. That encounter has taught me a great deal. I have corrected some of my earlier ideas and have shifted the focus of my personal outlook on the world. I am deeply convinced that the future of the human race is decided in large part in these lands and, in any event, no longer without them. I am likewise convinced that we have much to learn from this world and from these peoples. Does not all this sound self-evident? I too believed that for some time. But then I told myself that it is one thing to know theoretically and on the basis of controlled information, but another thing to transform this reality into personal conviction and decision, and to draw all the consequences from it.

The second distinctive mark of my learning process is the experience of the pressing lack of time. Rapid social change is a worldwide fact today. But in the Third World it has taken on unforeseen proportions, causing profound shock and disorder. The development of our European culture, material, social and spiritual, was a process of centuries. In the lands of the Third World, on the other hand, it seems to be a matter of an upheaval, rendered all the more intensive and explosive by being so condensed in time. I still have a vivid memory of my visits to the more than twenty Universities and Colleges of Latin America that our Society established for the most part after the

Second World War. Less than twenty years ago the impression was that here a young generation was growing up that knew what it wanted and that would restructure the future of its native land with a sense of Christian responsibility. Today, a good part of the students is Marxist and no one knows what lies in store for tomorrow. It is time to act quickly if we wish to forestall a catastrophe.

In Africa at the expense of great toll and sacrifice, we Christians have built up an educational system and we have helped to form intellectual and spiritual leadership among the people. Today the schools in great part have been nationalized and not a few people regard Christianity as something repressive and foreign to their race. Will we be on time to find a way to African culture and to an African Church? In India the Church has, in spite of its small numbers, succeeded in securing for itself a firm position in the spiritual and cultural life of that vast people. But the social and spiritual revolution of that continent is only just beginning on a grand scale and already one notices the force of the challenge facing the Christians.

In all these experiences and all these encounters I have always felt myself becoming preoccupied by the shortage of time. Do we Christians not delay too much and too long? Do we not often plan too much on a long-range term and too cautiously? Do we not remain too willingly attached to what is presumably tried and true, and do we not lose courage too easily in the presence of what is tentative or an open risk? I certainly do not intend to advocate aimless action or panic. But if according to Sacred Scripture we are called to interpret the signs of the time, then I think a real indication of this is that we must discern that time runs out fast nowadays, and we must be ready for quick action.

Permit me to speak now of that part of my experience that is closest to my heart. There are clear indications that the socio-cultural revolution of the Third World is falling increasingly under the influence of atheistic ideology. You will understand that this is a matter of special interest to our Society, since Pope Paul VI expressly charged us with the task of doing all we can to overcome atheism. It is clear that atheism has many causes, and it would be fatal to overlook that. However, we cannot deny, and actually I would say it is becoming more and more evident, that the growing influence of atheism in the Third World is essentially linked with the social situation there. Or, putting it in another way, many of these countries are convinced that the Christian faith, as it is preached and still more as it is lived, is incapable of eliminating the existing economic, social and cultural misery and of bringing about those more human conditions that Paul VI spoke of in his Encyclical on the development of peoples. Important groups in those countries, especially the young, moved by a great idealism, are convinced that it is not Christianity but only a Marxist social doctrine that is able to initiate and orient social change. In view of the existing social misery, quite a few people are now beginning to find it unimportant that this social doctrine is wedded to an atheistic worldview, even as a focal point. How many times I

heard during my travels: "Father Arrupe, we are tired of being satisfied with the fact that votive candles still burn in our churches and our dead are buried with ecclesiastical blessings. We must be concerned with the needs of the living, especially those who are exploited and who gave up on our faith a long time ago." If I had heard such remarks only once or twice, I would leave them for what they are worth. But when I hear them over and over again, and when I know that they express an opinion held by the vast majority of mankind, then you will understand that this experience does not leave me.

The same experience worries me so much also because the threat of this growing atheism is by no means limited to the Third World alone. It has become the great challenge of the industrialized countries, especially in Europe. It dominates Eastern Europe as a political and ideological power. As a lived materialism, it determines to a large extent the practical behavior of western man, progressively undermining his institutions and structures. I am not trying to over-simplify the complex causes and backgrounds of European atheism. But I do take very seriously the words of Gandhi: "I love Christ, but I despise Christians because they do not live as Christ lived." In other words, they do not live like Christ in their personal lives and do not act like Christ in structuring their economic, social and political institutions. The emigration from Christianity strikes Europe at the very time in which it would be called upon to contribute to the new structuring of the world, not only with technological know-how but also with a credible insistence on moral values.

## II. IMPERATIVES TO EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS

Every challenge demands a response. Toynbee, the English historian, saw in the clarity and strength of such a response precisely the criteria by which to decide on the viability or the decline of a culture. In a certain sense this is also true for the challenge facing Christians today, specifically European Christians. Precisely because of my personal experience of the non-European world and my personal responsibility in its regard, I am profoundly convinced that this world needs Europe today and will need it tomorrow. Personally, I do not particularly like the pessimistic ideas about the weariness of Europe or the intellectual and spiritual emigration from Europe to the world of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the only world they would say that has a proper future. I say it once again: because the non-European world has become for me a personal challenge I believe in the unconditional support by Europe and by European Christians for the construction of the future.

Let me point out some ways in which such a responsibility could be concretized today. Perhaps I will not say much that is new, and certainly I can only speak about what strikes me personally. I would really not like to compete with those who, particularly in this country, have spoken so significantly about this responsibility.

1. It seems to me that a prime duty of European Christians is to have a faith-vision that is adapted to the needs of our times. I was profoundly impressed when I read in the conclusions of the Common Synod of the Dioceses of the Federal Republic of Germany the following: "If the eschatological renewal of the world, in the individual and in the social structures, should indeed begin through our present action, then all Christians must work decisively and constantly...to eliminate every form of slavery. Such a transformation of the world belongs to the truth of the Gospel that we must live (Jn. 3, 21), (Entwicklung und Frieden, Development and Peace, preamble).

I was particularly pleased with these words of the Synod because they express the same concern around which the Jesuit 32nd General Congregation centered its conclusions when it said: "What is at stake here is the fruitfulness of all our apostolic endeavors, and notably of any coherent attempt to combat atheism. The injustice that racks our world in so many forms is, in fact, a practical atheism, a denial of God in practice, for it denies the dignity of man: man, the image of God: man, the brother of Christ" (Decree 4, No. 29).

Both texts are concerned with the same thing: a faith-vision adapted to the times. It is not a matter, therefore, of transforming the Christian message of eternal salvation into a program of social and political action. It is simply a matter of drawing coherently from the Christian message of salvation the consequences for a time and a world that reject such a message precisely because it is not lived out in a radical and consistent way by its representatives and is, therefore, not a credible witness to the fundamental commandment of brotherly love. Let us not say too quickly that all that is already put into practice.

It does not suffice to explicitly live this link between a confession of the faith and the service of justice only now and then, on some special occasion such as a collection for the Third World. Much more is at stake. What is required is that this intrinsic link between the two becomes consciously interiorized, a holy restlessness which determines our prayer and action. When I speak of this, I have a constant preoccupation, a concern that people may consider this new insight into faith as the private opinion of a group of theological outsiders, Christian advocates of development-aid, and Third-World enthusiasts, that by branding it as idealistic and utopian, they do damage to this insight. I wonder whether the European Christian will be able to resist this danger.

Another concern that I find hard to set aside is that it is absolutely imperative that the Third World Christian himself should also be convinced of the truth of this insight of faith. Quite frequently, in the course of my travels in Latin America, I have noticed that young people, in their utopian notions about needed changes in society, have recourse to European

spokesmen and ideologists--non-Christians, of course. and on the other hand, I also have often met others who tried to justify their social passivity and their blindness in the face of existing injustices with theological arguments imported from Europe. I am convinced that European theology today has more to offer than that sort of truncated ideologies. It is in this area that I see a great responsibility and task for theological research. We need a theology that grasps the world-shaking theme of faith and justice, studies it in interdisciplinary collaboration, and sensitizes man's conscience for concrete action.

2. This brings me to the second task of the European Christian, which is probably best described as the initiatives of praxis. There is no doubt that the relation between faith and justice has a fundamentally theological aspect. I referred to that just a while ago. But in the end the decision lies in action based on praxis. If at this point I express a personal word of appreciation and thanks, this is by no means intended as a diplomatic gesture, but it is dictated by genuine personal experience. One of the most credible and impressive testimonies to the responsibility of European Christians for justice in the world is the aid, both by personnel and finances, rendered by German Christians for the progress of peoples. I know that you do not expect me to mention numbers and organizations, but I would like you to realize that this is a lasting testimony, more profoundly effective than non-committal theories. What deserves special mention is that in the execution of this task, the spirit of cooperation and of ecumenism among European Christians has been confirmed anew.

We all know that even such assistance as that can deteriorate into mere routine. We also know that some gifts flow from superabundance and that only rarely the gift is joined by an experience of great self-denial and conscious poverty. And yet, why should we Europeans not also be prepared for just that? There is today also the danger of a certain fatigue, of discouragement, and of resignation, especially because visible results are not forthcoming, and perhaps also because people have become too used to distress and need. On behalf of the millions of people who depend on this aid and who believe in this testimony of European Christians, I ask you not to falter in these initiatives of praxis.

3. There is another task of European Christians that I cannot pass by in silence: the establishment of justice in the world today has also an essentially institutional aspect, in other words: injustice and exploitation are not only caused by individuals or groups. They are caused also by economic, social, political, and cultural structures. This is clear also from the encyclical on development by Pope Paul VI. The last General Congregation of the Jesuits formulated it as follows: "In a world where the power of economic, social, and political structures is appreciated and the mechanisms governing them understood, to serve according to the Gospel is also to change the structures." I have personally experienced this, and I experience it all over again in my concern for my fellow Jesuits who are laboring and suffering in the service of the Church. Without a doubt Christian love of neighbor entails the duty to care for the wounds of those who have fallen victims to robbers and are left bleeding by the wayside. But it is likewise the duty of

the Christian to see to it that innocent people no longer have to fall victims to robbers. At present a special appeal is made to this duty, and when this applies to all Christians, it applies especially to the Christians of Europe.

You have the duty to speak courageously and openly wherever people are enslaved and exploited in political and economic systems. You must do whatever you can to have social structures in your own country formed in such a way that injustice is eliminated and a commonwealth established that is worthy of man. It is one of your primary Christian responsibilities to engage yourself precisely in those positions where decisions are made concerning the future of mankind, both on the national and the international level. I know full well that a commitment for changing social structures is unpopular and that, as the saying goes, it "yields little" to the person who thus commits himself. But it would be a complete betrayal of the tasks of Christians in the world today if we should not in all seriousness confront Christians with that decision.

4. Allow me to indicate one more task of the European Christians in the service of the faith, a task on which in my opinion everything depends: the decision to live the faith radically. Europe's history is full of examples that show that great reforms and world-wide movements have been introduced and set in motion by people who unconditionally committed themselves to the Gospel message, such as Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Charles de Foucauld.

Christianity is not a this-worldly power structure imposing itself according to a set of laws. Christianity is not a strategy that merely has to be applied according to the rules in order to be successful. Christianity is the breakthrough of God in time and in the world, a breakthrough that happened historically in Christ and continues to happen again and again in every true Christian. Humans can obstruct or prevent this breakthrough of God, and, in fact, we are very clever in finding obstacles. When this happens, the Gospel remains a dead letter, and we will be unable to hear the radical message of the Gospel because we distort it through our unbridled selfishness. We will not be capable of undertaking the necessary personal and social changes because we are afraid of the consequences this would entail for ourselves personally.

I am deeply convinced of one thing: without a profound personal conversion we shall not be able to answer the challenge facing us today. If, however, we succeed in tearing down the barriers within ourselves, then we shall have a new experience of God breaking through, and we shall know what it means to be a Christian today. Why should we not succeed in this? Why should this Europe of the great Christian examples no longer be able to set a new symbol of its deepest energy and power: the decision for a radical living of the faith.

We are assisting at a very festive gathering. If in this address I have spoken about matters that most moved me in the past ten years and about my hopes for the future, I did not lose sight of this celebration of the fiftieth anniversary

of the Sankt Georgen Institute for Higher Philosophical and Theological Studies. At the beginning of this celebration we heard church and public officials state their appreciation of this Institute. I am very happy about this, and express my gratitude for all that has been done in the past fifty years. In a very special way I thank all who were our true friends and helpers in these tempestuous years. They are many, I know, and I feel very close to them.

Yet, this celebration is at the same time a reminder of a task to be done. Through its teaching and research in the service of the Church, this Institute of Higher Studies is called upon to find an answer to the challenge of the modern world. The Institute is called to provide this answer in scientific research and publication as well as in the formation of the young who, in a radical faith, are ready to witness to that reply through action.

Cardinal Newman once spoke of the sorrows of the times and the distress of the Church. Today we are aware of this again, and that on a world-wide scale. The same Cardinal Newman, however, also spoke of the new presence of God and of a new breakthrough of His Spirit. Some may find that utopian, especially when considering the despair of the present. But for us, that is the reality of Christian hope, of which Saint Paul writes: "Hope does not disappoint us." (Rom. 5, 5)

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