

# PEDRO ARRUPE REMEMBERED

*Michael Campbell-Johnston*

**H**OW RELEVANT ARE FR ARRUPE, his words and his life today? A biographer subtitles his work, ‘witness to the twentieth century, prophet of the twenty-first’, and has this to say:

The ideas and proposals put forward by Arrupe are relevant more than ever to the problems and the challenges of the new millennium. Perhaps for that very reason this successor of Ignatius Loyola was misunderstood by some of his contemporaries and even by the Church hierarchy. He was ahead of his time, and he loved to repeat: ‘We cannot respond to today’s problems with yesterday’s solutions’.<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that Fr Arrupe has been, and will continue to be, one of the most important figures—if not the most important—in twentieth-century Catholicism. As another writer affirms:

Father Arrupe lived out a profound spirituality. He was a man of prayer. He was, at once, daring and prudent. He made prophetic visions compatible with the practice of the ‘discernment’ that Ignatius recommended. He made efforts to propel the Church forward. But he always submitted himself humbly and sincerely to the Church. He will always remain a shining beacon for our time.<sup>2</sup>

My main credential for writing about him is that I had the privilege and honour of knowing and relating to him over a period of 23 years.

<sup>1</sup> Pedro Miguel Lamet, *Arrupe, testigo del siglo XX, profeta para el siglo XXI* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2007), ii. This is the tenth edition; the first was entitled, *Arrupe, una explosión en la iglesia* [Arrupe, an explosion in the Church] (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1989). This is generally recognized to be the best biography of Arrupe, unfortunately not yet available in English. For an anthology of Arrupe’s words, see Hedwig Lewis, *Pedro Arrupe Treasury* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2007), containing ‘Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes’, and my own contribution, ‘A Retreat with Arrupe’ as a final chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Delumeau, in his contribution to *Pedro Arrupe; Superior General of the Society of Jesus: New Contributions for his Biography*, edited by Gianni La Bella, translated by Michael Campbell-Johnston and others (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2008), 338.

For nearly nine of these I lived in the same community, our General Curia, and worked with him fairly closely.

### **What Sort of Person Was Arrupe?**

I still think the best general description of Pedro Arrupe is the introduction written by John Harriott<sup>3</sup> in what was the first collection of his writings in English, *A Planet to Heal*, published in 1977:

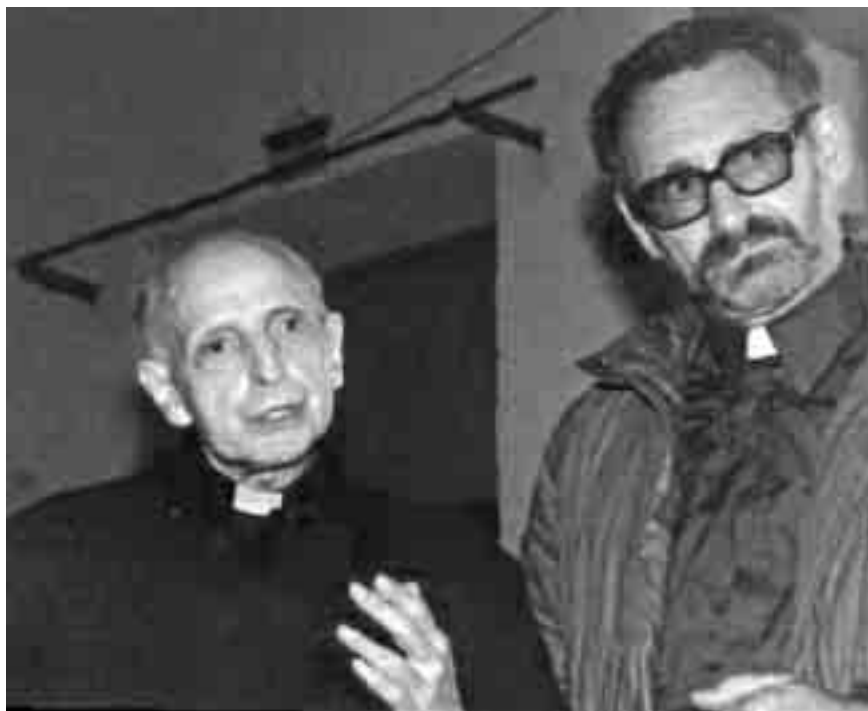
On balance Pedro Arrupe is probably one of the most genuinely loved and admired Generals in Jesuit history. The plain fact is that the General is a captivating human being. Few people can leave his presence without feeling more spring in their step. He is a charismatic figure who has no need of the conventional props and trappings of authority. He assumes no airs and graces, and is devoid of affectation. He is direct, sincere, unassuming, without a hint of patronage or playacting. As a public figure he has learnt, sometimes from mistakes which he looks back on with wry amusement, the need for diplomacy, but he has no natural taste for politics. He drives himself hard, gets along on five hours' sleep, is up early for his morning prayer, but scarcely looks the grim-visaged ascetic. He bubbles with high spirits, laughs a lot, loves jokes against himself. Those who worked with him in Japan still remember the gaiety of the 'Arrupe picnics' he used to organise on the grassy hills outside Tokyo. He also enjoys singing. His attractively youthful speaking voice is matched by a beautiful singing voice, and he has a wide repertoire of Basque folk songs and lieder. He speaks and writes Japanese, English, French, Italian, German and, of course, Latin and Spanish.<sup>4</sup>

A brief account of my various contacts with Fr Arrupe will, I hope, add to the picture of the man he was and how he operated.

I first met Fr Arrupe in the summer of 1968 when I went to Rome to present a report on the Social Survey requested by the 31st General Congregation and, in my case, drawn up after a whistle-stop tour of Guyana. Its principal recommendation was to close down the Caribbean Leadership Training Centre founded by Fr Paul Crane in Barbados—where I had just spent a year trying to teach sociology and economics to a motley group of trade unionists from the region—and to open a social

<sup>3</sup> John Harriot was a co-novice of the author who left the Society some years after ordination; he had been editor of *The Month*.

<sup>4</sup> Pedro Arrupe, *A Planet to Heal: Reflections and Forecasts*, edited by John Harriott (Rome: International Center for Jesuit Education, 1977).



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*Pedro Arrupe and Michael Campbell-Johnston*

institute in Guyana where most of the Jesuits were working. Fr Arrupe accepted the report and, to my astonishment, added: 'You suggested it, so you go and do it'. I realised later this would not have been an off-the-cuff decision but prompted by the English Provincial of the day who had also accepted my report.

I was in Guyana by the year-end trying to set up GISRA (Guyana Institute for Social Research and Action). Less than two years later Fr Arrupe came out for a packed one-day visit. He spent an hour in GISRA meeting our newly appointed board of directors and encouraging us to establish close relations with the social institutes in Latin America (CIAS), by which he set great store. He had breakfast with the Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, but told us he did not feel up to sharing the 'prairie oyster' with which Burnham started his day: a beaker full of neat rum mixed with two raw eggs, pepper and hot chillies.

In 1975 I was summoned to Rome by Fr Arrupe to take over our Social Secretariat in the Curia. After living for five years on my own in a wooden house in Middle Road, La Penitence, a poor area of Georgetown,

Guyana, I found the abrupt change to a community of over 100 Jesuits in a huge barracks-like institution within sight of St Peter's traumatic and disconcerting. After a few months I wrote a note to Fr Arrupe asking permission to go and live in a poorer part of Rome and come into the Curia each day to work. His handwritten reply ran as follows: 'Your idea is an excellent one and I would like to come with you. But my advisors will not let me and I cannot let you.' I did not know at the time he had already considered doing the same.

Working with him on a document or talk was a challenge, since he was continually getting new ideas and would phone at all hours to share them. On one issue, that had better remain off the record, I asked him for an interview. He told me to compose some questions. When I took them in, he said: 'The questions are good, now you go and write the answers'—which he accepted almost without change.

It was my privilege to preside over what turned out to be Arrupe's last active meeting as General, which took place in Bangkok on the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1981. At the end he gave an impromptu talk, fortunately recorded by an Indian Jesuit. It was only on replaying the tape next day, after his stroke in Rome airport, that we realised the significance of his insistence on the need for prayer which he declared to be his 'swan song for the Society'. I remember he used the Spanish



*Arrupe's last meeting as Superior General*

expression '*canción de cisne*', which we had to translate for him. Did he have any premonition of what would happen the following day?

I was in the Curia when the Pope appointed Fr Dezza as his delegate to govern the Society, with Fr Pittau as a replacement should there be need. It was a tense time, with everyone bewildered and not knowing what to say or do. Fr Dezza inaugurated his mission with a community Mass in the house chapel. At the greeting of peace Fr Arrupe, attending in a wheelchair in the corner, began to get agitated and make signs. Since his infirmarian failed to calm him, Fr Dezza went over to see what was the matter. Fr Arrupe stretched out his arms and embraced him in front of the whole community. It was his way of saying he accepted the Pope's decision and of inviting us to do likewise.

I was also present at the 33rd General Congregation, which accepted Fr Arrupe's resignation and elected Fr Kolvenbach as his successor. Fr Arrupe waived his right to attend the Congregation, but came in to the *aula* immediately after the election, leaning on his infirmarian's arm and peering around trying to see who was the new General. But Fr Kolvenbach walked across to meet him and they embraced to a huge standing ovation. It was a magic moment and there were not many dry eyes among the delegates. The same was true when his moving farewell message was read out by Fr Iglesias. It fell to me to provide the English version and I had the greatest difficulty keeping my voice steady.

Arrupe spent ten years in the little Curia infirmary slowly dying. At first we did not know how seriously ill he was and even hoped for a recovery. I remember acting as translator for him at a meeting he had with Son Sann, the former Prime Minister of Kampuchea, who came to thank him for the work the Jesuits were doing in the refugee camps on the Thai-Kampuchea border. He spoke in French and Arrupe replied in Spanish, which I had to translate. But it soon became obvious that Arrupe's words made no sense at all and I had to make up what I thought he would like to say, hoping I would not run out of ideas. I was somewhat disturbed when I saw Son Sann's son carefully noting what I was saying and had to explain the situation to him afterwards. I then reported to Fr O'Keefe and, as far as I know, this was the last interview Fr Arrupe gave. But many people still came to visit him. I remember taking Archbishop Chakaipa from Zimbabwe to see him and, when he delayed, I looked into the room to see him on his knees with his hands in Arrupe's and tears streaming down his face.

One thing Fr Arrupe did appreciate in the early days of his illness was visiting the Eritrean refugees we were trying to help in the Centro Astalli, underneath the old rooms of St Ignatius. I drove him there several times, as well as to a camp we set up in a city slum, always accompanied by Brother Bandeira, his faithful infirmarian.

Don Pedro finally died on 5 February 1991. I went to Rome for his funeral, a typically Italian occasion with the Gesù packed with civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries, including the Prime Minister, a row of ambassadors, eight cardinals, numerous bishops and some 500 concelebrating priests. The Pope was represented by Cardinal Martínez Somalo, who did the final absolutions. Following an old tradition, the chief celebrant at the Mass was Fr Damien Byrne, Master-General of the Dominicans. In his sermon, Fr Kolvenbach stressed Arrupe's attraction to the figure of Abraham, called by God to set out for an uncharted land, and showed how this has been true at several moments in Arrupe's life. But, in spite of the massive crowd which overflowed the church, the funeral service was in many respects a low-key affair, which would have appealed to Fr Arrupe. Only the thunderous applause which erupted as his coffin was carried out at the head of the procession of dignitaries showed that this was something out of the ordinary. We knew we were burying a saint. As the man next to me put it, 'he belonged not to the Jesuits but to the entire people of God'.

### ***What Did He Do That Makes Him So Important?***

Fr Arrupe himself used to say that the most important thing he did as General was to convoke the 32nd General Congregation only seven years after the 31st, which had elected him. This was a surprise decision that many Jesuits opposed at the time. Why did he do it? Because the previous Congregation took place while the Second Vatican Council was still in progress. And it was this Council that called on all religious orders to update themselves, along with the whole Church. Arrupe was convinced that the 31st General Congregation was not a full reply of the Society to this call and that his principal task as General was to implement it. The modern mission of the Society had to be redefined to meet the needs of a world that had changed and was changing so dramatically.

This redefinition was expressed especially in the famous Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation, which stated: 'The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of

justice is an absolute requirement'.<sup>5</sup> This was a new challenge that even led to a new description of a Jesuit.

What is it to be a companion of Jesus today? 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.<sup>6</sup>

As one biographer has commented:

General Congregation 32 was the most important General Congregation of the century, especially in its Decree 4 which not only set the mission of the Society in contemporary terms but also in continuity with the mission of the Society as expressed in its foundational document, *The Formula of the Institute* .... Decree 4 of the General Congregation 32 was for Arrupe a dream come true.<sup>7</sup>

This was a very significant change, and Fr Arrupe spent the rest of his generalate trying to put it into effect throughout the Society, as did succeeding generals and General Congregations. He led the Society along a new path that put it in much closer contact with the problems and needs of today's world.

His relevance stems from the fact that these needs have not diminished but grown since his death. Never has there been so much injustice in the world. In the whole of history, never has there been so much wealth and never has it been so unequally divided. Arrupe's greatness was to see clearly that this was not God's plan for the world and to realise that the Society of Jesus was perhaps more ideally equipped than any other organization in the Church to try to combat injustice by helping to build a new world based on love. And he propelled the Society in this direction. Closing a seminar in the Curia in 1980 on 'The Social Apostolate in the Society Today', he declared:

Our struggle for justice is something quite different from and much superior to any type of merely human promotion or to purely philanthropic social or political work. What moves us is the love of God in himself and the love of God in men. Thus our work is

<sup>5</sup> Decrees of the 32nd General Congregation, decree 4, n.48, in *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), 411.

<sup>6</sup> Decrees of the 32nd General Congregation, decree 2, n. 12, 401.

<sup>7</sup> George Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe, SJ, Twenty-Eighth General of the Society of Jesus* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2007), 259.

apostolic in every sense, fully Jesuit and in accordance with our charism.<sup>8</sup>

Pedro Lamet sums up the process as follows:

No other religious order or Catholic organization experienced in these years so radical and profound a metamorphosis as the Society of Jesus. So much was this the case that many who specialize in the Order's history, such as Manuel Revuelta González, Jean Lacouture and Jean-Claude Dhôtel, view this important moment as working in the institution such a decisive conversion that, with Arrupe's election and the process begun by GC 31 and completed in GC 32, there actually came in to being a third 'renewed' Society, very different from the second 'restored' Society of 1814, and much more faithful to the original intuitions of the 'old Society'.<sup>9</sup>

This amounts to saying that Fr Arrupe is the founder of the modern Society of Jesus.

Decree 4 is a long and very important decree. The Society is still struggling to put into practice. For fear that many today will be unfamiliar with it, I have made a summary of its key ideas in six points, each of which deserves prayer and meditation:

1. The great injustice in the world is a new challenge, not only personal but institutionalised. Experts know what to do, but nothing gets done.
2. We now have the knowledge to make the world more just, but do not seem to want to. Yet without promoting justice, we cannot preach Jesus Christ.
3. Service according to the gospel includes a planned effort to influence unjust structures. Are we too insulated from injustice and the world as a whole?
4. The promotion of justice is for all Jesuits because, without it, we cannot preach a gospel meaningful to today's world.
5. Our personal lives and backgrounds tend to cut us off from the problems and aspirations of the deprived.
6. We need the patience, humility and courage to walk with the poor and learn from them.

<sup>8</sup> *Promotio iustitiae*, 18 July 1980, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Lamet, *Arrupe, testigo del siglo XX, profeta para el siglo XXI*, 285.





*Arrupe visiting New Delhi*

Fr Arrupe also provided an important service to other religious congregations. For five successive three-year periods he was elected President of the Union of Superiors General in Rome, which brought together the leaders of almost all the religious congregations in the Church and represented some 300,000 male religious throughout the world. In the fifteen years he held this position, he had enormous influence and helped many congregations, male and female, to follow the example of the Society. Many superiors came to the Curia to consult him. And because of this office he attended and spoke at three Synods of Bishops and important conferences such as Medellín and Puebla.

Nor should it be forgotten that his leadership led to the rediscovery of Jesuit spirituality, and especially of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. In the Curia he founded CIS (Centre of Ignatian Spirituality) in 1969 which led to the creation of Centres of Spirituality in a number of Provinces. These in turn led to a renewal in the giving of the Spiritual Exercises and the involvement of lay people. For Arrupe, Ignatian spirituality was the key both to his governance of the Society and its apostolate in the world.

If contemplating the mystery of the Trinity enabled Ignatius to reach certain practical decisions that his day needed, for example the foundation of the Society with its specific charism, then shedding light on that fact and its relevance today will enable us to live that charism

in all its purity and to be more adequate to our day's needs. If we can do that, we shall have managed that *aggiornamento* that Vatican II asked for, by going back to the sources of our birth as religious.<sup>10</sup>

Fr Arrupe's final initiative as General was to set up the Jesuit Refugee Service. He and his consultors were having an informal discussion one day about world problems, at a time when the plight of the Vietnamese boat people was much in the news. His immediate reaction was 'What would St Ignatius have done in such a situation?', and he sent out an appeal to several Provinces for help and support. The response was immediate and so generous in offers not only of financial assistance but of places willing to receive them and Jesuits to work with them that he decided to call a special consultation in the Curia, which I was asked to organize. We spent three days looking at what was already being done and what more the Society, in particular, might be able to do. As a result I was asked to draft a letter to the whole Society announcing the setting up of the Jesuit Refugee Service. At first this was an addition to my own Social Secretariat, but it grew so fast that it soon became an independent Secretariat in the Curia with Dieter Scholz, now Bishop of Chinhoyi, in Zimbabwe, as its first director.

Fr Kolvenbach, Arrupe's successor, sums up his contribution to the Society in these words:

Don Pedro was among those men who do not need words to communicate; his mere presence proclaimed a message of a man sent by the Lord to help the Society renew itself in the spirit of the Vatican Council. It is not enough to say that Fr Arrupe guided the Society through the turmoil following the Council. He did his utmost to throw the Jesuits into the midst of the whirlwind, fostering experimentation and insertion, exposure and change. He wanted the Society to be forged into an apostolic instrument by the all-renewing spirit—with all the trials and errors, criticisms and misunderstandings that this renewal implied.<sup>11</sup>

### **How Did He Do It?**

The simple, and perhaps complete, answer is that Arrupe was a man of very deep prayer, a man of God. Frank Ivern, my predecessor in the Social

<sup>10</sup> Pedro Arrupe, 'Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism', *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, 18/1 (1980), 159–160.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hedwig Lewis, *Pedro Arrupe Treasury* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2007), 93.

Secretariat, who worked closely with him for eleven years, describes him in these words:

I don't call Arrupe a 'man of God' just because of the quantity or duration of his prayers, but above all because he was always thinking in terms of God and God's reign. God was what was absolute in his life. All the rest was relative. His long prayers were both a source and an expression of his familiarity with God and of his profound religious experience, which was manifest in many other forms. Arrupe is generally known and quoted for his positions and his writings on questions of apostolic work, education, social problems and justice; but if we examine all the things he said and wrote during his years as General, we must recognize that his principal concern was in areas that were explicitly religious and spiritual. For him the identity of Jesuits was rooted first of all in their religious attitudes and their spiritual manner of proceeding. For him this was really the soul of the Society's apostolate.<sup>12</sup>

This is more than confirmed in the notes of the first retreat Fr Arrupe made as General in 1965.

The post of General presupposes that one is an instrument, a representative and channel for God and His graces, in order to carry out His plans by means of the strongest organization in the Church .... Our Lord has to help me .... Union with Christ and His constant communication are absolutely necessary. On that depends the good of the Society.<sup>13</sup>

Three brief quotations will serve to illustrate Arrupe's character and convictions. The first comes from the impromptu talk he gave us in Hong Kong on his last working day as General:

Please, courage! I will say one thing. Don't forget that. Pray. Pray much! These problems are not solved by human efforts. I am telling you things that I want to emphasise, a message, perhaps my swan song for the Society! We have so many meetings and gatherings, yet we don't pray enough. We pray at the beginning and at the end. Well! We are good Christians! In our three-day meetings, if we spend half-a-day in prayer about our supposed conclusion or points of view, we will have such different lights, and such different syntheses,

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Pedro Arrupe*, edited by La Bella, 140.

<sup>13</sup> Pedro Arrupe, *Chosen by God: Pedro Arrupe's Retreat Notes 1965*, translated by Joseph A. Munitiz (Oxford: Way Books, 2010), 1.

in spite of different points of view, that we could never find in the books or in the discussions.<sup>14</sup>

The second quotation is his reply to Jean-Claude Dietsch, who asked him how he felt about his own death:

Death is one of the things I most desire, something that gives meaning to my life. It is not a leap into nothingness; it is throwing yourself into the arms of the Lord, the final Amen of my life and the first Alleluia of my eternity.<sup>15</sup>

Finally there is his message to the 33rd General Congregation:

How I wish I were in a better condition for this meeting with you! As you see, I cannot even address you directly. But my General Assistants have grasped what I want to say to everyone.

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 ....

In these eighteen years my one ideal was to serve the Lord and his Church—with all my heart—from beginning to end. I thank the Lord for the great progress which I have witnessed in the Society. Obviously, there would be defects too—my own to begin with—but it remains a fact there was great progress, in personal conversion, in the apostolate, in concern for the poor, for refugees. And special mention must be made of the attitude of loyalty and filial obedience shown towards the Church and the Holy Father, particularly in these last years. For all this, thanks be to God ....

I am full of hope, seeing the Society at the service of the one Lord and of the Church, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth. May she keep going along this path, and may God bless us with many and good vocations of priests and brothers: for this I offer to the Lord what is left of my life, my prayers and the sufferings imposed by my ailments. For myself all I want is to repeat from the depth of my heart:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All I have and all I possess—it is all yours,

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Pedro Arrupe*, edited by La Bella, 294.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Pedro Arrupe*, edited by La Bella, 324, n. 16.

Lord: you gave it to me: I make it over to you: dispose of it entirely according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, and I want no more.<sup>16</sup>

To close, a just tribute comes in some words of the great Spanish Cardinal Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, who played a key role in Spain's return to democracy:

Arrupe, an exceptional charismatic prophet, could see the future. For that reason, he was ahead of many who could not follow his footsteps. He was not only 'a man of his time' but he wished to prepare his men for the third millennium.<sup>17</sup>

*Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ* was Pedro Arrupe's right-hand man during the 1970s in developing the social apostolate world-wide. He then worked in El Salvador for some years, coordinating the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Central America, before being recalled to Britain to serve a term as Provincial. For the last few years he was parish priest in St Francis of Assisi parish in Barbados, before returning to the UK in 2010. He has published a memoir, *Just Faith: A Jesuit Striving for Social Justice* (2010).

## Available from Way Books



### Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ, *Just Faith: A Jesuit Fighting for Social Justice*

This extraordinary memoir bears witness to a life lived in the midst of social and ecclesiastical turmoil. It portrays someone keen to discover and understand new places and people, and capable of creating a rapport with those of all stations in life, from gang leaders in El Salvador to prime ministers and presidents. But it also shows a man who spoke truth to power, whether confronting the military during the civil war in El Salvador or preaching on social justice in front of Tony Blair. It offers a remarkable first-hand insight into key moments in twentieth-century history, and will motivate and inspire those convinced of the power of the gospel to transform our world.

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<sup>16</sup> *Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), 93–94. The final prayer comes from the Contemplation to Attain Love, Exx 234.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Lamet, *Arrupe, testigo del siglo XX, profeta para el siglo XXI*, 493.