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Beatification of Fr. Bernardo de Hoyos

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TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear brothers,

On April 18, 2010 in Valladolid, Spain, Fr. Bernardo de Hoyos (1711-1735) will be beatified. He is considered the first apostle of the Sacred Heart in Spain. To recapture who he was and what he contributed, I offer some biographical information that should be understood in the religious and cultural context of the 18th century.

Bernardo de Hoyos was born in Torrelobatón, (Valladolid) on August 21, 1711. He studied in the Jesuit Colleges of Medina del Campo and Villagarcía de Campos, and in 1726 he entered the novitiate of the Society that was part of the latter college. Because of his young age (he was not yet fifteen years old) and his frail constitution, he had to seek the permission of his family and convince the Provincial before he could enter. While he was in the novitiate (1726-28), Aloysius Gonzaga and Stanislaus Kostka were canonized. Both saints were proposed as models to young Jesuits, but above all Bernardo was influenced by the example of Saint John Berchmans, whose canonization process was well underway.

During the novitiate years Bernardo was initiated into the mystical life. Philosophy studies (Medina del Campo, 1728-1731) were a time of interior purification tested by the dryness of the *dark night of the soul*.

Bernardo studied theology (1731-35) at the College of Saint Ambrose of Valladolid. This is where the process of his spiritual life reached its culmination, making him a true mystic. In the extensive *account of conscience* he gave to Father John de Loyola, his Spiritual Director, in October 1732 he said: “*I see that everything in my heart is moving towards God, drawn like iron to a magnet. It desires only God, searches only for God, and longs only for God...*” Because of the clarity with which Bernardo was able to perceive and describe his inner life, his Director insisted that this young man was “far more advanced than a man of his age, with more knowledge than he could have acquired from books.”

References in the internal reports of the Society (*Catálogos trienales*) speak of a strong temperament that he was always able to master, of his brilliant intelligence, of his tenacity in overcoming difficulties, of his capacity for cordial relationships, and of his qualifications for all ministries, especially for preaching.

On May 3, 1733, when Bernardo was 22 years old, he experienced the Lord giving him a mission that would become the only objective of his life: to propagate devotion to the

Sacred Heart as a means of personal sanctification and as an effective means for accomplishing the apostolate. When his friend, Fr. Agustín de Cardaveraz had to preach on the feast of Corpus Christi in Bilbao, he asked Bernardo to send him some notes that could be found in the community library in a book by Fr. José Gallifet: “*De Cultu Sacratissimi Cordis Dei Jesu.*” When Bernardo read the book, he said, “*I felt in my spirit an extraordinary motion—strong, gentle, not abrupt or impetuous. I then placed myself before the Blessed Sacrament, offering myself to His Sacred Heart in order to cooperate as much as possible... in propagating devotion to it.*”

The first thing that Bernardo then did was to consecrate himself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on June 12, 1733, using the same formula written by St. Claude La Colombière fifty years earlier. However, this was not a grace received to be lived only interiorly. Bernardo believed that God was asking him to be an instrument communicating to others the riches of the Heart of Christ.

Aware of the importance of the task and realizing that his main duty was to pursue his theological studies seriously, Bernardo formed a group of qualified companions who were fully engaged in pastoral activity. Among his collaborators were Fathers John de Loyola and Agustín de Cardaveraz. Father John was in charge of writing about “*the essence and the soundness of this devotion.*” The outline and the core of this book, entitled *Hidden Treasure*, belong to Bernardo. After overcoming not a few difficulties, it was finally published on October 21, 1734.

His apostolic approach would consist in distributing leaflets and prayer cards everywhere, founding confraternities and associations in honor of the Sacred Heart, asking that this theme be included in talks and preaching. He wrote to bishops and even to King Philip V asking for support in requesting the Holy See’s approval of a special liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart.

On January 2, 1735 Bernardo was ordained a priest in Valladolid and on the 6th of the same month he celebrated his first mass in the chapel of St. Ignatius College. A few months later, Bernardo began tertianship there, but he was unable to finish because he contracted typhus and subsequently died on November, 29 1735.

In a letter of December 6, 1735 informing the communities of the Castile Province of Bernardo’s death, Fr. Manuel de Prado (Bernardo’s Rector who had also been his Novice Master) emphasized: “his perfection was more than ordinary, a very special gift of prayer through which during these last years God revealed to him the most hidden mysteries of the divinity and a tender and particular devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

His reputation for holiness spread immediately after his death. However, because of the difficult situation in which the Society found itself opposed by the Jansenists, the cause for beatification was not introduced at that time. Later the suppression of the Society would leave many projects unfinished.

When the Society was restored in 1814 by Pope Pius VII, a strong devotion to the Sacred Heart emerged in the whole Church. In accord with the religious sensibilities of the time, the reborn Society dedicated itself to the spread and propagation of this devotion with significant results.

In 1965 the 31st General Congregation insisted on the appropriateness of conducting serious theological studies regarding the foundations of this devotion with special attention to pastoral ways for proposing it, taking into consideration the diversity of times and places as well as the undeniable symbolic values included in this devotion. Decree 15, no. 2, reads: “Devotion to the Sacred Heart, as proposed by the Church, pays tribute to ‘that love which God has shown us through Jesus, and is also the exercise of the love we have for God and for our fellow-men’ (*Haurietis Aquas*, 1956), effecting that interpersonal exchange of love which is the essence of Christian and religious life.”

This impetus for renewal was very present in the teaching of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, as he expressed it in his numerous articles, talks, homilies, and in the new text of the Consecration of the Society to the Heart of Jesus, which he personally composed during a day of prayer in the chapel of La Storta.

Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach showed the same interest. In a conference in Paray-le-Monial (July 2, 1988), he reminded us that “the entire problem with the indispensable figurative representation of the Heart of Jesus is well summarized” in number 26 of decree 4 of GC32: “We must find a new language, a new set of symbols, that will enable us to leave our fallen idols behind us and rediscover the true God: the God who, in Jesus Christ, chose to share our human pilgrimage and make our human destiny irrevocably His own. To live our lives ‘in memory of Him’ requires of us this creative effort of faith”.

Years ago Karl Rahner wrote that there are some basic terms in theology and spirituality, which are suggestive, creative, and open to change “if one does not want to fall into the arrogance of a-historicity.” Today symbols multiply; they complement, correct, and substitute for each other with significant speed, without any one of them claiming to impose itself as having permanent and universal value.

The spiritual heritage proper to the devotion of the Sacred Heart, rooted in the faith of the Church, retains full validity today within the manifold images present in each culture and tradition. This devotion expresses the boundless richness of the love of God, manifested in Christ. It is in harmony with a theology based on the Scriptures, a theology that continually gives light to the message of the merciful and compassionate Father of the Gospels, richly expressed and made visible using the heart as a living symbol in which the mystery of humanity becomes the mystery of God.

Bernardo de Hoyos’s passion for the Heart of Jesus faithfully corresponds to the devotion that Saint Ignatius felt for Jesus poor and humble, before whom he asks that our affections be moved in order to accompany Him in each step of His life: “As companions with him on mission, his way is our way” (GC35, D. 2, n° 14), so that “in what we do in the world there must always be a transparency to God (GC35, D. 2, n° 10).

On the occasion of this beatification, I invite the whole Society, together with our collaborators, to renew our personal love of Jesus Christ and to open ourselves to the grace of identifying ourselves with Him, so that in Nadal’s words, “we might understand with His understanding; will with His will; remember with His memory; and that our entire being, living, and doing be not centered in us, but in Christ” (MHSI vol 90. p.122; GC35, D. 2, n°14), as the cornerstone of the particular vocation to which each of us has been called.

Bernardo de Hoyos was a man of God, an apostle with ideas and strategies for planning. He was enthusiastic about “companionship with others” (GC 34, D. 26), a faithful son of the Church to which he tried to transmit the fire of his ardent fervor. Dead at the age of 24, along with the other young Jesuit saints, he shows us that from early on in life and from our first years in the Society we can and should allow Christ to dwell in our hearts, take root in us, and build us up in His love.

May the Father who has “hidden these things from the wise and the learned and has revealed them to the childlike,” (Mt 11, 25) through the intercession of Blessed Bernardo de Hoyos, grant the Society the grace of accomplishing its mission of being in the Church a loving response to Him who was pierced by the pain and the aggressive injustice of a world in need of forgiveness and reconciliation.

With fraternal affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Nicolás, S.I.", written in a cursive style.

Adolfo Nicolás, S.I.
Superior General

Rome, 12 April 2010

(Original: Spanish)