



A nun walks past Peruvian security forces on patrol in Huancayo, Peru, where the Shining Path guerrillas, also known as “Sendero Luminoso,” were very active. This picture, taken in 1989, at the height of the conflict between the government and Sendero Luminoso, became an all too familiar site in Peru.

Lighting Fires

PERU’S UNIVERSIDAD ANTONIO RUIZ DE MONTOYA
FORMS JESUITS AND THEIR LAY PARTNERS

by George Kearney

In the late 1980s, the Peruvian terrorist group Sendero Luminoso or “Shining Path” started increasing the frequency and severity of its attacks in Peruvian cities. Prior to 1980, Shining Path, which hoped to wipe out the Peruvian government and establish a socialist regime, had been active in mostly rural areas.

In response to the increasingly violent attacks, the Peruvian govern-

ment launched a ruthless campaign to root out terrorists. These attempts to quell the revolution incited more violence from the terrorists. The government became more aggressive in their hunt for terrorists, capturing, interrogating, torturing, and sometimes killing those they suspected of participating in the attacks. Shining Path responded by carrying out more bombings, more assassinations.

In 1988, at the height of the vio-

lence, three Jesuits from Peru, Fr. Daniel F. Hartnett, SJ (a Chicago Province Jesuit who’d been working in Peru since 1968), Fr. Ernesto Cavassa, SJ, and Fr. Vicente Santuc, SJ, met in Chicago to formalize plans for a school of philosophy they’d been asked to open.

“Peru was going to hell in a hand basket,” says Fr. Hartnett. “People thought it a little strange that the Jesuits would respond by forming a



Scenes from the campus of UARM in Lima, Peru



school of philosophy. Some thought we should've been doing something more tangible, setting up a soup kitchen, or taking care of all the bodies coming down the river."

But for many reasons, the Jesuits opted to open a college instead of a more grass roots local ministry. The main reason, according to Fr. Hartnett, was to respond to the crisis gripping the country in a profound and productive way. "Peru was a country in disintegration, and we felt it was vital to start asking some of the big questions. We had to start thinking about the Peru of tomorrow. We knew Peru would survive, but we had to think about what we'd do when the violence was over. How could we use social philosophy to understand the world we were living in? What did it mean to make Peru a home for everyone? What did it mean to be a citizen of Peru, with its history? We wanted to create a place where students could come to think seriously about those questions."

There were also many practical reasons. The original motivation for the school came from the fact that the Peru Province didn't have its own school of philosophy and was sending its young Jesuits to Chile for five years of their formation. "Our feeling," Fr. Hartnett says, "was that there was value in having them in Peru for their formation." Additionally, there was—and is—a shortage of quality higher education institutions in Peru.

Unfortunately there weren't enough Jesuits in formation in the Peru Province to justify the substantial expense of opening such a school. To make the school a reality, the Jesuits decided to open it to laypeople and members of other religious orders, too.

The result, Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (UARM), is a remarkable fusion of formation initiatives that's currently train-

ing Peruvian Jesuits, members of 12 other religious orders, lay students, and groups of dedicated teachers from Fe y Alegria—a Jesuit-run network of schools designed to serve students in impoverished regions throughout Peru and other South American countries. UARM's goal is to form people to understand the world, so they can eventually change it for the better.

The school, which opened in 1991 with fifty students, now has more than 700 students and was recently granted status as a university by the Peruvian government. It grants degrees and licenses in philosophy and education. According to Fr. Rafael Fernandez Hart, SJ, a philosophy student at UARM from 1993–1996, the school has become exactly what Fr. Hartnett and the others hoped it would be. Fr. Hart entered the Jesuits after completing three years of university studies at Universidad Catolico (UC) in Lima. “The philosophy at UC was very theoretical. At UARM, philosophy was always something social. We always thought about and talked about society. It was philosophy for the world, for the human world. It was always very real.”

UARM's commitment to a “real” philosophy is manifested in its outreach to faculty members of Peru's Fe y Alegria schools. “Most of the Fe y Alegria teachers have few economic resources,” Fr. Hart said. “Similarly, their schools have very little in the way of resources. They're usually located in areas of great poverty. They teach in terrible conditions, and very often their students can't buy pencils or notebooks. They must be many things with few resources. It's the work of heroes they're doing. Those teachers are heroes.”

“What we want,” Fr. Hartnett said, “is for Ruiz Montoya to be the center for formation for the Fe y Alegria schools.” Each of the country's 136 Fe y Alegria schools is staffed by incredibly dedicated and caring people, but many of them have never been formally trained to teach. So, every year, UARM extends a number



When he was in Jesuit formation, Rafael Fernandez Hart, SJ, was a student at UARM. Now he's a professor of philosophy there. He's pictured here at Loyola University Chicago.

of scholarships to teachers from Fe y Alegria schools who are pursuing the equivalent of American teaching certificates. During summer break and school vacations, UARM holds workshops and classes for teachers from Fe y Alegria schools in Lima and around the rest of the country.

“What we really want is for the Fe y Alegria schools to have good faculties,” Fr. Hartnett explained. “Very few places in Peru offer good formation for people who want to become teachers. We want to train the faculty at these schools not just to give the students exercises, but to have something substantive to say. When they leave here, we hope they've learned to think, to have an opinion.”

Fe y Alegria's goal is to educate

young people throughout the country not just to overcome poverty, but to be capable of leading others, leading them away from the violence they so recently experienced.

UARM goal is similar, to change the world, to make a better Peru. Lofty goal? Certainly. Too lofty? Probably not. For 460 years the Jesuits have been changing the world. They've never done it alone. They've succeeded by lighting fires in the hearts of others, their partners.

UARM seeks to do the same by lighting fires in the hearts of lay students, Fe y Alegria teachers, and young Jesuits. These fires, the Jesuits hope, can provide light for the world. ■

If you wish to contribute to Peruvian Jesuit formation, UARM, or the Fe y Alegria schools, please use the enclosed envelope or contact Jeff Smart at (800) 922-5327.