



## Remembering Hiroshima: Pedro Arrupe's Story

### Who is Pedro Arrupe?

This year is the centenary of the birth of Pedro Arrupe, the last Jesuit Superior General. He was present at Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and has described what he saw. In both what he said and what he does not say he provokes reflection on the meaning of Hiroshima. As we come to know him we find our sensibility stirred – our moral, intellectual, environmental and religious sensibility.

Pedro Arrupe was a Basque. He studied medicine and then entered the Jesuits. In his noviceship he felt a call to become a missionary in Japan, a nation of special interest to Jesuits, who were drawn there from many nations. It was not until after he was ordained that he had the opportunity to go there. Although he was tolerated as a citizen of neutral Spain, he was imprisoned for some time on suspicion of spying. But he was able to serve as novice master in Hiroshima, and was there on August 6, 1945. Later he became Superior of the Japanese mission, and spent much of his time raising interest in Japan among Jesuit and general audiences in Europe. He was subsequently elected Superior General of the Jesuits, presiding over the demanding task of responding to the opportunities and challenges offered by the Second Vatican Council.

### Pedro's Account

Here is an edited version of his experience after the bomb fell on Hiroshima:

*I was in my room with another priest at 8.15 when suddenly we saw a blinding light, like a flash of magnesium. As I opened the door which faced the city, we heard a formidable explosion similar to the blast of a hurricane. At the same time doors, windows and walls fell upon us in smithereens.*

*We climbed a hill to get a better view. From there we could see a ruined city: before us was a decimated Hiroshima. Since it was at a time when the first meal was being prepared in all the kitchens, the flames contacting the electric current turned the entire city into one enormous flake of fire within two and a half hours.*

*I shall never forget my first sight of what was the result of the atomic bomb: a group of young women,*

*eighteen or twenty years old, clinging to one another as they dragged themselves along the road.*

*We continued looking for some way of entering the city, but it was impossible. We did the only thing that could be done in the presence of such mass slaughter: we fell on our knees and prayed for guidance, as we were destitute of all human help.*

*The explosion took place on August 6. The following day, August 7, at five o'clock in the morning, before beginning to take care of the wounded and bury the dead, I celebrated Mass in the house. In these very moments one feels closer to God, one feels more deeply the value of God's aid. Actually the surroundings did not foster devotion for the celebration of the Mass. The chapel, half destroyed, was overflowing with the wounded, who were lying on the floor very near to one another, suffering terribly, twisted with pain.*

### A View From Within

Pedro Arrupe's view of the bombing of Hiroshima is from within it. He is inside when it happens, tries to find out what happened, and then becomes preoccupied with tending to the injured. He was a doctor.

In his account, Pedro Arrupe says little of the day beforehand. It was apparently a lovely sunny day in a city that had become used to relative peace. Enemy planes regularly droned overhead unmolested but did not attack the city, so the arrival of the aircraft caused no great alarm. Then came the explosion.

To our contemporary moral sensibility, the barbarity of the bombing emerges more clearly from this outdoor view. A defeated air force, a completely unprotected city visited at will by enemy aircraft, a city full of people preparing breakfast about to be made a laboratory to test the effects of new weapons. It is an image of man's inhumanity to man.

Pedro Arrupe, however, reflected little on the morality of the bombing – for him, as for anyone who is the object of military action, lethal force was one of the necessities you had to endure in war. Nor did this question afterwards preoccupy the Jesuits in Japan – they had too much to do lighting candles to have time to curse the darkness. The larger issues they faced

were spiritual and cultural. Pedro Arrupe wondered how the Japanese people could recover from the cultural crisis of a total defeat that meant the end of their cultural order. He focused on how the Jesuits could be of service:

*Japan had just gone through a very deep-seated crisis. The Emperor was God and therefore invincible. Then suddenly came the unconditional surrender and the Emperor said: "I am not God". This was a complete material and spiritual rupture. And we Jesuits who did not recognize the Emperor as God (from whence came imprisonment, persecutions, and continual suspicions), we then defended the Emperor. "He is not God", we used to say to the Japanese, "but he is the representative of God, he holds the authority: you ought to follow him."*

## A View From A Distance

It was only slowly that the moral horror of the bombing became generally recognised. This was partly because those who had leisure for moral reflection lived mainly in the victorious nations. It was also partly because of the way in which Just War theory was commonly interpreted. One of the interlocked criteria in this theory was whether the harm caused was proportional to the intended action. When this criterion was taken alone, it could be argued that the bombing of Hiroshima was legitimate because its decisive contribution to ending the war saved many more lives than would have been lost in a continuing war. This argument, however, ignored the requirement that for military actions to be considered justifiable, the destruction of civil lives could only be the incidental consequence of what was intended. They could not be directly intended. The end could not justify the means.

Among Jesuits, United States moral theologian John Ford had earlier declared pattern bombing to be morally unjustifiable on these grounds. His consideration guided later discussion of the morality of using the atomic bomb.

## Pedro's Legacy

Pedro Arrupe's contribution to moral sensibility was not influential on the theoretical level. But it was significant in that he helped people to become aware of the human reality of the bombing. In his account the bomb is clearly seen to have contributed less to military strategy than to the suffering of innocent human beings. It created a world that needs to be healed. His insights into Hiroshima flowed into his contribution as Jesuit General. In his discussion of the ways Jesuits should serve the contemporary world, he focused simultaneously on the very large question of where God is leading us and on the small mystery in each human face.

Pedro Arrupe's account, too, encourages us to reflect on our intellectual sensibility. He leads us to recognise two forms of intellectual curiosity.

One form is the curiosity of the scientists who conceived and designed the bomb to see whether and how it would work, and what its effects would be.

The second form is seen in Pedro Arrupe's curiosity, that of a doctor as well as a priest - about the human effects of the bomb and how to address them. He noted the living conditions in the city, and the state of the survivors. He then turned his attention to the resources he had at hand to treat wounds and address pain, noting the importance of clean dressings.

Both forms of curiosity were scientific, but Hiroshima cast a long shadow over scientific reason. It made evident the conditions of the heart under which a passion for knowledge can safely be indulged. It requires an attention to the complex and deep human reality against which the value of one's research is tested. This insight has become dulled in our day, and the reality of Hiroshima needs to be remembered.

We may also see in the devastated plain that marked the centre of Hiroshima the beginnings of the contemporary environmental sensibility. It became possible to imagine realistically the capacity of humankind to devastate the world through the development of technology. For many years the threat of nuclear war, exemplified in the tests of the thermonuclear devices that could cause third degree burns some one hundred kilometres from the centre of the explosion, preoccupied public sentiment. But Hiroshima also suggested that even peaceful technologies could be destructive in the long term. An increasing number of people became interested in the environment. The movement has gathered force around the reality and threat of global warming.

Finally, in Pedro Arrupe's description of the Mass that he celebrated the day after the bomb fell, we can see a tension in religious sensibility that remains with us. He describes the presence of the sick and wounded as not fostering devotion. On the other hand his hospitality to the sick and wounded placed them at the centre of the mystery that he was celebrating. He leaves us with the question of how we bring together the different aspects of devotion: the presence of God in prayer and silence, and the presence of God in the world's wounded. He did not solve this question, but characteristically he modelled personally under great pressure how we might address it.