

# LESSONS FROM THE SPIRIT OF PEDRO ARRUPE

**For the Seventieth Anniversary of Hiroshima**

*James Menkhaus*

ON 6 AUGUST 1945 an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan by the United States. This was the first time a nuclear weapon was used in war. Three days later, a second bomb was detonated on the outskirts of Nagasaki. These military strikes are credited with bringing a swift end to the Second World War, as the unconditional surrender of Japan quickly ensued. Seventy years after the bombings, it is appropriate, perhaps imperative, to contemplate whether humanity has learnt anything since using these weapons of mass destruction.

One of the survivors of Hiroshima was Pedro Arrupe, who is well known for being the Jesuit Superior General who realigned the Society of Jesus towards the vision of St Ignatius and the spirit of Vatican II. But, twenty years before Arrupe would ascend to the highest levels of Jesuit governance, he was a young missionary learning about the Japanese language and customs. Arrupe's descriptions of the fateful morning in August 1945, as well as his reflections 25 years after the atomic bomb, challenge humanity to pause. Arrupe wrote: 'History is truly the teacher of life, but only on condition that we know how to interpret her'.<sup>1</sup> Now, as then, humanity needs to continue interpreting its lessons.

## ***The Japanese Missionary***

In 1927 Pedro Arrupe left the medical studies that he had been pursuing to enter the Society of Jesus. Early in his Jesuit training he decided he wanted to go to Japan to be a missionary, in the footsteps of Francis Xavier.

<sup>1</sup> Pedro Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections of Pedro Arrupe*, translated by Yolanda T. DeMola (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), 54.



*Pedro Arrupe, shortly after his arrival in Japan*

In 1938, while in the United States, Arrupe received a letter telling him that his request to be sent to Japan had been approved. Upon his arrival he quickly strove to learn Japanese calligraphy and the tea ceremony, and also adopted a Japanese prayer posture by squatting on a small mat.<sup>2</sup> Arrupe knew that he had to find out as much about the Japanese as possible in order to work with them. Despite his background in languages, he struggled to learn Japanese. He continued to study diligently because he knew, as his biographer George Bishop points out, ‘Without assimilating the culture and without speaking the language there was no possibility of preaching Christianity’.<sup>3</sup>

As the tension increased between Japan and the United States, eventually resulting in war, Arrupe’s recent visit to the USA drew attention from the Japanese military police, the *Kempetai*. In December 1941 Arrupe was arrested on suspicion of espionage. The letters written by Jesuits from all over the world that were found among Arrupe’s personal effects did not help his cause. He was put into a cell with an area of four square metres, containing a dirty straw mat, a metal receptacle and rats. The walls were stained with blood. Describing his first night,

<sup>2</sup> Hedwig Lewis, *Pedro Arrupe Treasury* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2007), 28.

<sup>3</sup> George D. Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe, SJ: Twenty-Eighth General of the Society of Jesus* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2000), 8.

Arrupe later reflected, 'It was very cold. One could not sleep; I was shivering and my teeth were chattering. There is absolute silence. The hours pass with the increased slowness of waiting.'<sup>4</sup>

Arrupe's time was spent either alone in the quiet cell or under interrogation from the *Kempetai*, who thought he would eventually admit to being a spy. Guards would come to speak with him about his religion and Arrupe enjoyed preaching to them about God. During interrogations, Arrupe often told his life story, how he was a doctor and became a priest after witnessing miracles at Lourdes. While interesting to his interrogators, his stories could in no way prove his innocence.

Beginning at midnight on 11 January 1942 Arrupe underwent 37 hours of continuous interrogation in which he was questioned about politics, religion and numerous other 'inconsistencies' concerning his beliefs. After this interrogation he returned to his cell, fearing that his execution was imminent. A short time later he was escorted to the prison governor's office and, to his surprise, was told that he was being released. The governor informed Arrupe that he had been imprisoned because of rumours against him, but that the Japanese people believed 'one of the best ways of judging the innocence or guilt of the accused is to examine him closely in his everyday actions'.<sup>5</sup> It was not his theological arguments that had saved his life, rather, 'his internal completeness, his simplicity, his transparency of soul'.<sup>6</sup>

Upon hearing this news, Arrupe thanked his guards and the governor, telling them they had done him a service. To their astonishment, this man who had been mistreated and isolated for over a month was not angry or spiteful. When the flummoxed governor asked him to explain, Arrupe replied,

You have taught me to suffer. I came to Japan to suffer for the Japanese people. Jesus Christ suffered more than any other man. The believer is not afraid to suffer with or like Christ. You have helped me to understand this.<sup>7</sup>

The policeman fought back tears as he told Arrupe he was free to preach his religion. After the war, US war crimes investigators asked Fr Arrupe for the names of those who had held him captive, but he refused to

<sup>4</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 75.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 76.

divulge the information. He did not want revenge on those who had done him wrong, but to move on to forgiveness and healing.

On 9 March 1942 Father Lasalle, his superior, asked Arrupe if he would like to go to Nagatsuka to become the new novice master. Although fearful that his knowledge of Japanese language and customs was not yet strong enough for him to serve in such an important role, Arrupe accepted the position. Two days later, he said goodbye to his parishioners in Yamaguchi and journeyed to the outskirts of Hiroshima. Staring at the valley he had called home and which had been the beginning of Xavier's journey, he 'left part of his heart behind in Yamaguchi'.<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Day of the Atomic Bomb***

The Jesuits had two houses in Hiroshima: one was a parish church in the city and the other the novitiate in the hills outside at Nagatsuka. Arrupe was charged with the care of 35 young Jesuits in the novitiate house. The morning of 6 August 1945 began like any other. Arrupe said Mass on the Feast of the Transfiguration at 5:30 a.m. At 7:55 he heard the sound of a B-29 circling above, but he assumed the planes were making their usual patrols. Around 8:10 a.m. he walked into his study with another Jesuit and, no longer hearing the planes, assumed they had left.

At 8:15 a.m. a blinding flash of light filled the house. Some Jesuits were thrown across the room from the power of the blast. While the explosion was instantaneous, Arrupe reflected, 'Three or four seconds seemed an eternity because when one fears that a beam is about to crash down and flatten one's skull, time is incredibly prolonged'.<sup>9</sup> He immediately checked on those in the house and was relieved to find no one had been seriously injured. Suspecting a bomb had fallen just outside the house, the men went out to investigate.

Continuing to search for the cause of the explosion, they looked down towards the city and saw smoke. Moving to high ground to ascertain what was going on, Arrupe recalls, 'From there we could see a ruined city: before us was a decimated Hiroshima'.<sup>10</sup> The entire city was engulfed in flames. Many of the homes were built of wood, paper and straw, and at the time of the blast families were lighting ovens to cook their morning meals. These two aspects ensured the city would be

<sup>8</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 23.

consumed in a lake of fire. Clouds gathered in the sky above the city and a black, heavy rain fell in the north. Arrupe and his novices tried to enter the city, but were prevented for twelve hours by the sea of fire.

Not knowing what to do in the face of tragedy, the men did the only thing they could think of: 'We fell on our knees,' Arrupe recalled, 'and prayed for guidance, as we were destitute of all human help'.<sup>11</sup> 200,000 victims of the blast needed aid, yet there was no water to put out the fires and the wounded began to stream out of the city. Arrupe recalls that God answered his prayers 'in a very special way' with a 'simple and essential idea'. The men cleared as much room as they could in the chapel and made it into a hospital. They were able to care for 150 people. Arrupe's expertise as a doctor gave him the ingenuity to work with the sparse means at his disposal.

Because neither Arrupe nor any other human being understood the type of burns that appeared on the bodies of the victims, he was unsure how to treat them. Most of his patients would tell Arrupe that they were not directly burned. They described a flash of light, but then thirty minutes later burns appeared on their bodies. Arrupe began to lance the blisters that covered people's bodies and kettles and basins were used to catch the liquid that flowed from these wounds. He described the situation, 'The suffering was frightful, the pain excruciating, and it made bodies writhe like snakes, yet there was not a word of complaint'.<sup>12</sup>

Thousands of people lay in the streets begging for help. Arrupe recalls a child with glass in his eye, a man caught between two pillars with his legs calcified up to the knees, people burning alive, and children searching for their parents. When they reached the house of the other Jesuits, all five were badly wounded. They tried to escort them to Nagatsuka, one being carried on a home-made stretcher. As they left the city they saw thousands of people near the river, trying to put out the fires and cool their bodies. As the evening approached the tide slowly rose and many were unable to move, half buried in the mud. Arrupe recalls, 'The cries of those drowning are something I shall never forget'.<sup>13</sup> The fires burned throughout the night.

One of the most moving stories from Arrupe's reflections is his encounter with Nakamura, a fervent Christian who received communion

<sup>11</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 31.



*A church destroyed by the Hiroshima blast*

every day at the 6:30 a.m. Mass with Fr Arrupe. As he was passing through the streets in the days following the bomb, he entered what was left of her home. There, lying on a table in the room was Nakamura. She was burned, and pus oozed from the sores on her body. She had been lying there for fifteen days, only moving to get rice for her wounded father. Her muscles were hollow and rotten, and maggots were already eating her body. When she saw Fr Arrupe she asked him weakly, 'Father, have you brought me Communion?'<sup>14</sup> She died shortly after receiving the Eucharist.

Arrupe often recalled how much she had taught him about faith and Christ's consoling presence in the Eucharist.

Although many people needed aid, the Jesuits continued to say Mass in the chapel with bodies strewn across the floor. Arrupe recalled the puzzled looks of the wounded, staring at him inquisitively as he said Mass. Arrupe recollected, 'In spite of it all, I do not think I ever said Mass with such devotion'.<sup>15</sup> He explained,

I can never forget that terrible feeling I experienced when I turned toward them and saw this sight from the altar. I could not move. I stayed there as if I was paralyzed, my arms outstretched, contemplating this human tragedy.<sup>16</sup>

Nearly every person who was treated by Arrupe and his novices survived. Even more powerful for Arrupe was the number of survivors who were so inspired by his actions that they later asked to be baptized.

<sup>14</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, 157.

Pedro Arrupe's encounters with the victims of Hiroshima taught him many lessons about the human person, the power of destruction and the helplessness of not being able to save everyone. It is impossible to divorce his actions and words as Superior General from the formative lessons he learnt in the months following August 1945. His challenge to Jesuits and all people to consider the poor and defenceless before acting was made concrete by his presence at Hiroshima.

### ***The Seventy Years after the Bomb***

In 1970, now the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Arrupe wrote a reflection, revisiting the experience of being a survivor of the atomic blast. His insights were not only appropriate for the changes in the world during that decade, but are still prophetic for the twenty-first century. For Arrupe, the dropping of the bomb was an experience stuck in history, frozen in time. He wrote, 'It is not just a memory, but a perpetually vital event outside history, which does not go away with the ticking of the clock'.<sup>17</sup> In the same way, the injustices Arrupe highlighted in his reflection do not go away with the ticking of the clock. He specified unjust social structures, racism and atomic weapons of mass destruction as three central issues that afflict humanity.

#### *Unjust Social Structures*

Throughout Arrupe's reflection he returned to the unjust social structures that cause people to remain in conditions of marginalisation and hunger. 'More than half of humanity is undernourished', Arrupe wrote, 'and the situation of these underdeveloped countries becomes daily more intolerable'. He went on to conclude that the responsibility for the 'sin' of the current situation rests with 'a large segment of human society'.<sup>18</sup> While an individual may have a moral perspective, the interests of the development of a country or economic system often take precedence over responsibility to the poor and outcast in society.

Arrupe's words in 1970 closely mirror the strong denunciation of modern society by Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pope, whose Jesuit formation occurred while Arrupe was Superior General. For example, in *Evangelii gaudium*, the Holy Father writes about the new economy of

<sup>17</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 62.

exclusion that treats people as leftovers in society. 'How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion.'<sup>19</sup> The Pope also challenges people, as Arrupe did, to be more observant about the waste of food and resources in society. Pope Francis refers to this modern mentality as a 'globalization of indifference' that is 'incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain ... as though all this were someone else's responsibility'.<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis's strong condemnation of contemporary ideologies of indifference echoes Arrupe's criticism of the way in which civilian casualties caused by the atomic bomb were treated as merely incidental.

Pope Francis has continued to emphasize similar themes in his recent encyclical *Laudato si'*. He applies his critique of the globalisation of indifference to environmental degradation, challenging people to be more aware of how their actions affect the common good and the earth, humanity's common home. Francis warns, 'The [global] warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world'.<sup>21</sup> His concern for the poor and their particular susceptibility to the effects of climate change is evident throughout the document. The problem of climate change was not as well understood in Arrupe's time, but Pope Francis's concerns closely correlate with his own reflections on the responsibility the rich nations have towards the poor and marginalised.

### *Racism*

The second issue Arrupe cited as destructive in society is racism. He writes, 'It is truly inconceivable that in the twentieth century the worth of a person or of a people is measured by the color of the skin'.<sup>22</sup> Arrupe's observation remains pertinent to recent events in many parts of the world. A number of violent incidents have demonstrated that Arrupe's concern is not anachronistic.

In the USA alone, controversy over police brutality against African Americans has led to riots in St Louis, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland.

<sup>19</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 53.

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 54.

<sup>21</sup> *Laudato si'*, n. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 64.

In August 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old African American, was shot multiple times by a police officer, Darren Wilson. The civil unrest that followed lasted over a week and made international headlines. Months later, a grand jury failed to indict Wilson and his actions were found to be warranted. In April 2015 another incident in Baltimore again led to riots and civil unrest. A 25-year-old African American man named Freddie Gray was arrested and sustained fatal injuries while in police custody. Six officers have been indicted on charges ranging from illegal arrest and misconduct to assault and involuntary manslaughter. Even more recently, in July 2015, a police officer from the University of Cincinnati named Ray Tensing shot a motorist, Samuel DuBose, fatally in the head after pulling him over for not having a front number-plate. Tensing's body camera indicates that DuBose made no threatening moves towards the officer and he was unarmed. Tensing is currently awaiting trial.

Numerous examples of racial distrust in the US have caused a re-examination of the relationship between blacks and whites in the country. Perhaps emblematic of this new analysis is the controversy about the flying of the Confederate flag over the State House building in South Carolina. After the horrific racially motivated murder of African Americans worshipping at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, the call to take down the flag sent shock waves through the country. The Confederate flag is viewed by many in the US as a symbol of slavery and the racial divide that remained in the pro-slavery states during and after the Civil War. Therefore, protesters feel it has no place on a US state building in the twenty-first century. Balancing historical remembrance and the healing of the racial wounds that have marked the US since its founding is a difficult process.

### *Weapons of Mass Destruction*

The third issue Arrupe addressed was violence and war. 25 years after Hiroshima, Arrupe warned against weapons of mass destruction remaining in the hands of the militaries around the world. 'The only sure guarantee that they will not be used is their non-existence.'<sup>23</sup> Nuclear weapons are now accessible to more nations than ever before, who have stockpiled the potential for mutually assured destruction. Negotiations during the

<sup>23</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 65.

summer of 2015 between Iran and the Western powers over the Iranian nuclear programme underline the importance of preventing nuclear proliferation that is ever-present in this debate.

While nuclear weapons are still available to many countries around the globe, there is a new form of technology that perhaps presents an even greater immediate danger. The skies over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries contain thousands of drones sent by the US and other Western countries in an attempt to fight against militant groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Drones have resulted in civilian deaths in these countries, despite the fact that no official declaration of war has been made. Estimates vary widely, but drones have certainly been responsible for hundreds of civilian deaths in Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Many civilians in the West are in favour of using drones in war because they decrease the likelihood of losing their own soldiers in battle.

Atomic bombs have not been used in war since 1945 because of their enormous power and the threat of mutual destruction. The Hiroshima bomb killed over 100,000 people in a single blast, and modern nuclear warheads are many times more powerful.<sup>25</sup> Countries understand that the use of one of these bombs is likely to invite instant retaliation. While the possibility of a rogue nation or a suicidal dictator using nuclear weapons remains, there are more checks and balances than in the time when Arrupe was writing. Drones, however, have become the new silent killer: they are safer for soldiers, make fewer headlines—but still result in the deaths of innocent people. Unlike nuclear weapons, whose function is to be self-limiting, their use will tend to redouble as more and more countries gain the technology needed to kill from great distances without leaving the safety of home.

### ***The Challenge for the Next Seventy Years***

Unjust social structures that lead to hunger and marginalisation, racism that devalues people because of the colour of their skin, and weapons

<sup>24</sup> Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic and Center for Civilians in Conflict, *The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions* (2012), 20. Available at: <http://web.law.columbia.edu/human-rights-institute/counterterrorism/drone-strikes/civilian-impact-drone-strikes-unexamined-costs-unanswered-questions>, accessed 1 August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> 'By late 1945, the death toll at Hiroshima stood at 120,000 to 150,000 .... Many tens of thousands died years later due to complications from exposure to radiation.' (*International Encyclopedia of Military History*, edited by James C. Bradford [New York: Routledge, 2006], 608)

that kill faceless victims on the other side of the globe are all still challenges for humanity in the twenty-first century. In his reflection, Arrupe narrowed down the causes of injustice, explaining, 'The diagnosis of war as well as that of violence is the result of a single violence, hatred'. It is not that bombs or drones are evil, nor developing the technology that makes them possible. The enemy is in the hearts of human beings who preach hatred and use it as a weapon of control and destruction. Arrupe continues, 'The antidote for hate is called love ... which is the most precious quality of the human person'.<sup>26</sup>



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*Children praying at the Hiroshima memorial*

While establishing a culture of love may be a difficult task, the lesson we need to learn from Arrupe may ultimately be to return to the insights of his Japanese internment. There, he learnt the power of silence, the importance of listening and a sense of internal completeness that transformed his captors into his friends. In a world where war and hatred have not decreased in the past seventy years, Arrupe challenges us to offer the love of Christ to all people, regardless of their religion, culture or skin colour. Perhaps it is a simple lesson from history that humanity is just not yet ready to learn but, as a starting point, we cannot forget what was taught on 6 August 1945.

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<sup>26</sup> Arrupe, *Recollections and Reflections*, 68.