

Pedro Arrupe: Inspirational Jesuit Leader

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Introduction

Does it seem strange that the role model for a centre for business ethics and for a hostel for the homeless is the same person?

The centenary of the birth of Pedro Arrupe has brought new interest in his life and work, which are being celebrated and commemorated this November, especially in his native Spain.

High schools and colleges have been named after him, centres for business ethics, for community-based learning, for creative leadership and for refugees have been named after him, as have scholarships and international solidarity programmes, institutes for human rights, university chairs, and societies and hostels for the homeless. From Dublin to Melbourne, Tokyo to Colombo, Washington to El Salvador, Manila to Nairobi, the name Pedro Arrupe is to be found wherever there are Jesuit institutions or works. What is it about this man, born 100 years ago, on 14 November 1907, and who died on 5 February 1991, Superior General of the Jesuits from 1965 to 1983, that has inspired, and continues to inspire, so many people, Jesuits and others, across the world?

Like Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe was a native of Spain's Basque country. His life was buffeted by some of the major events of the twentieth century. Exiled from Spain in 1931 by the socialist government, as were all Jesuits, he studied in Belgium and Holland, worked in the US and Mexico, found himself removed from the war in Europe only to experience arrest, interrogation and solitary confinement at the hands of the Japanese, and subsequently to experience the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. By the time he was elected Superior General of the Jesuits in 1965 it must have seemed as if his life had at last settled down. But not so: his time as Superior General of the Jesuits coincided with the major period of renewal in the history of the Catholic Church that was Vatican Council II, and saw him lead the Jesuits through some of the greatest changes in their four hundred year history, leaving a legacy that it seems is only

beginning to be felt and understood across the world. *Time* magazine, thirty-four years ago, carried a sketch of Pedro Arrupe on its front cover with the leading article entitled, 'The Jesuits' Search for a New Identity'.¹ The article described him as: 'a career missionary ... the first Basque to head the order since Ignatius himself. Something of a mystic, also like Ignatius, Arrupe, now sixty-five, presides over the troubled order today with disarming calm and good cheer.' It is difficult for people today to have a sense of the turbulence that was widespread in the Catholic Church during and after the Vatican Council. Pedro Arrupe was thus at the 'coal face' of the renewal of the church and of the Society of Jesus. He has been described as the re-founder of the Jesuits.

Who was Pedro Arrupe?

Pedro Arrupe was the fifth child, and only son, of Marcelino and Dolores Arrupe. His father was an architect; his mother, who came from a medical family, died when Pedro was ten years old. He is remembered as being happy, good at soccer and an excellent student.² He studied medicine in Madrid and during his time at university he was greatly affected by his involvement with the Society of St Vincent de Paul and his experience as a medical assistant in Lourdes soon after his father had died. The effects of poverty on the one hand, and of strong faith on the other, left an indelible impression on him. Returning to the very secular scientific atmosphere of medical school in Madrid, Arrupe made the decision to abandon his graduate studies in medicine and join the Jesuits. This decision was supported by his sisters but received with dismay by a leading member of the medical faculty, Professor Juan Negrín, later Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic. His professor tried to persuade him to continue with what was sure to be a brilliant medical career.³ In short, it seems Pedro Arrupe fell in love. Later, words attributed to him say:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide

*what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.*

The Route to Japan

From the beginning, Arrupe had wanted to follow St Francis Xavier as a missionary in Japan. Denied in the short term, his wish would be ultimately granted by means of a very circuitous route. Exiled from Spain, he continued his studies in Belgium and Holland focusing on medical ethics at a time when the rise of National Socialism in Germany was giving new urgency to questions of racial enhancement by means of eugenic sterilisation. Participation in a conference on eugenics in Vienna in 1936 taught Pedro Arrupe the critical importance of scientific work and the implications it can have for society. Here too he realised that theologians should engage scholars on moral issues only after acquiring a command of their disciplines.⁴ And here also he experienced ‘the virulence of racism that was gripping Nazi Germany and Austria’.⁵

Ordained in Belgium in 1936, just before the outbreak of civil war in Spain, which meant that none of his family was present, Pedro Arrupe was sent to the US to complete studies and Jesuit training where he worked with prisoners and immigrants before being sent to Japan as a missionary in 1938. In Japan, he was novice master in the Jesuit house outside Hiroshima when the first explosion of an atom bomb took place and he converted the house into a field hospital. His writings describe the events of 6 August 1945 when Hiroshima was destroyed – the blinding flash, being thrown to the ground by a hurricane blast, then seeing from a hill Hiroshima enveloped in a lake of fire and a mushroom-like cloud billowing up into the sky.⁶ His efforts at rescue and treatment of victims in the aftermath have been documented, and as a survivor of the bomb he later went on speaking tours in Western Europe and Latin America describing the reality of what he had seen. Hiroshima became a symbol and reminder that the nuclear annihilation of the human race was a real possibility.

Pedro Arrupe was appointed Superior (Vice-Provincial) over all the Jesuit missions and ministries in Japan – 200 Jesuits from nine

different nations – and then, in 1958, Provincial. ‘The Jesuits he supervised in those days came to describe him as an indomitable optimist, perhaps too trusting of people, a visionary with great ideas who needed to be surrounded by realists, hard on himself, but always kind to others’.⁷

‘In my whole life, if there is one man whose cause for canonisation I would support it is Pedro Arrupe.’⁸ So says Fr Gerry Bourke, an Irish Jesuit now in Dublin, who was sent to Japan in 1951 and remembers Arrupe well, having served under him for twelve years. He remembers that Jesuits in Japan were surprised at his appointment as Superior General. He had been considered conservative by many, very loyal to the church in the dramatic period after Vatican Council II, while some believed him to be liberal because he was Spanish. At the human level, in Gerry Bourke’s opinion, it was hard for Pedro Arrupe to leave Japan for Rome as he was very attached to Japan and the Japanese people.

Later, Gerry would have further experience of the missionary zeal of Pedro Arrupe. In November 1977, he received a letter from Arrupe, who was now Superior General, asking him to make a study of ‘the feasibility and advisability’ of the Society of Jesus accepting an invitation from the Bishop of Honolulu to establish a ‘Newman Centre’ at the University of Hawaii. Gerry recalls how over the next six years Fr. Arrupe manifested his continuing interest in the development of the project, particularly because of the opportunity that it offered the Society of Jesus to make a contribution to, and to learn from, the dialogue that was going on between East and West at the East-West Center on the campus of the University of Hawaii. In May 1980, he was invited to be present with Fr Arrupe at a meeting of the American Provincials in Spokane, Washington, where it was agreed to support the Hawaiian project. Thanks to the cooperation of the Sisters of St Francis of Syracuse, the Centre was built on East West Road, and now flourishes as the Church of the Holy Spirit, a non-territorial parish of the Diocese of Honolulu.⁹

Superior General in Rome

It is for his exhortation to the service of faith and the promotion of justice that today’s generation of Jesuits, and those who have contact with them through family, work, education, best connect with Pedro Arrupe.

He was characterised by his promotion and defence of social justice, which led him to be misunderstood even within the church.¹⁰ He had participated in the 1971 Synod of Bishops led by Pope Paul VI, at which a primary focus was the issue of social justice. The ensuing Vatican document, *Justice in the World*, with its pivotal statement on action for justice, was a turning point for many in the church in the renewal initiated at Vatican II. Perhaps the vision, enthusiasm, and optimism of Pedro Arrupe in regard to the core message of this document gave the Jesuits a head-start in implementing it. Their thirty-second General Congregation in 1975 enshrined it as follows: ‘The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.’¹¹

This decree is the basis on which centres all over the world, such as the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Dublin, were founded, and, perhaps even more importantly, the basis on which the issue of justice has been brought to the centre of all Jesuit works – schools and universities, parishes and spirituality centres, associations of alumni, houses of writing and publishing – in every continent. This is not being achieved without its costly implications being experienced, most notably in the murders of five Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in 1985, but also in many other ways such as the censuring of liberation theologians, and even the divisions it has caused among Jesuits themselves in particular houses and Provinces.

In an address to American Provincials, Fr Arrupe, noting that the Gospel has social and economic dimensions that make it impossible for the church or its priests to be completely apolitical, said: ‘We cannot remain silent, in certain countries, before regimes which constitute without any doubt a sort of institutionalised violence.’¹² And in a talk in 1981 to participants in an Ignatian course in Rome, later addressed to all Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe, speaking about the relationship between justice and charity, said:

Obviously, the promotion of justice is indispensable, because it is the first step to charity. To claim justice sometimes seems revolutionary, a subversive claim. And yet it is so small a request: we really ought to ask for more, we should go beyond justice, to crown it with charity. Justice is necessary but it is not enough. Charity adds its transcendent inner dimension to justice and, when it has reached the limit of the

*realm of justice, can keep going even further. Because justice has its limits, and stops where rights terminate; but love has no boundaries because it reproduces, on our human scale, the infiniteness of the divine essence and gives to each of our human brothers and sisters a claim to our unlimited service.*¹³

Fr Cecil McGarry, an Irish Jesuit now based in Nairobi, who worked and lived alongside Pedro Arrupe in Rome, writes: ‘One couldn’t live long with Father Arrupe without realising the grasp he had of the characteristics of our age and the consequent apostolates required of the church. He attributed this gift to his presence to and reflection on the dropping of the first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. These events revealed to him how our century had lost its sense of the dignity and value of every human person. Out of reflection on this experience grew his strong sense of the injustices of our world and the need to proclaim and live a faith that does justice.’

To claim justice sometimes seems revolutionary ... And yet it is so small a request: We really ought to ask for more, we should go beyond justice to crown it with charity.

‘He would have been very happy if the Society of Jesus could have become a kind of commando force that put itself at the disposal of those dying and being destroyed by earthquakes, tsunamis and so many other tragic happenings. The Jesuit Refugee Service was one effort to achieve this, with the collaboration of many who were not Jesuits. He used often tell us that our apostolates would become infinitely more creative if we made our daily prayer with our eyes on the world and the dire needs of so many people. He was truly a prophet of the Lord in the twentieth century.’¹⁴

Theologian Fr Gerry O’Hanlon, of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Dublin, recalls his meeting with Pedro Arrupe in Milltown Park in 1980, not long before Arrupe’s illness. He writes: ‘I felt as if I knew Arrupe well even if I had never met him personally before that point. Through pictures, writings, stories he had become an

inspirational figure for me and for many other Jesuits. In addition, I had just come across a piece he had written on “The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism” which interested me greatly. In it, he had reflected on the Trinitarian experience of Ignatius and related it to the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus involving the service of faith and the promotion of justice. I took the opportunity to go over to him before the grace was said at the meal in the Milltown Park refectory and told him that I had read his piece and found it very useful. I remember his radiant smile, his intelligent, sparkling eyes, his accented English and the great warmth which came from him. He wanted to know how the piece could be developed further: his smiling presence did not conceal that energy and dynamism which he exuded and which personified a sense of the Ignatian *magis*. This ‘more’ as communicated by Arrupe, was never moralistic in a burdensome way, but was attractive; it drew one outwards and forwards without sitting down first to count the cost. I left him with my heart singing.’¹⁵

A Vision for the Wider Jesuit Family

An example of the ‘more’ that Fr Arrupe invited people beyond the immediate Society of Jesus to consider is present in the notable address he gave to the Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe in Valencia, Spain in 1973.¹⁶ In this powerful and inspirational address, he pointed out that education for social justice is not simply about theory but requires change on the part of those who hear it. In strong terms he called for the education of ‘men (now we would say men and women)-for-others’: men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. He points out that making very concrete decisions in accordance with God’s will is possible because at the centre of the Ignatian spirit is the spirit of constantly seeking the will of God and this is their shared heritage. In his address he conveys simultaneously teaching, exhortation to action, and love for his audience as much as for those who suffer at the hands of unjust people, systems and structures. He calls his hearers to three things:

First, a basic attitude of respect for all people, which forbids us ever to use them as instruments for our own profit.

Second, a firm resolve never to profit from, or allow ourselves to be suborned by, positions of power deriving from privilege, for to do so, even

passively, is equivalent to active oppression. To be drugged by the comforts of privilege is to become contributors to injustice as silent beneficiaries of the fruits of injustice.

Third, an attitude not simply of refusal but of counter-attack against injustice; a decision to work with others toward the dismantling of unjust social structures so that the weak, the oppressed, the marginalised of this world may be set free.



Pedro Arrupe’s vision – Jesuit Refugee Service

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The question ‘What can/should I/we do?’ so often asked by well-intentioned people is here clearly answered by Pedro Arrupe: a determination to live more simply; a determination to draw no profit from clearly unjust sources and to diminish our share in the benefits of systems favouring the already rich while the cost lies heavily on the poor; a resolve to be agents of change in society, resisting unjust structures and actively undertaking to reform them in cooperation with those who are oppressed and who must be the principal agents of change. The reality, as Pedro Arrupe sees it, is that we cannot separate personal conversion from structural social reform.

Inculturation – not treated in this article – and integration of faith and justice would become hallmarks of Pedro Arrupe’s tenure as Superior General. He challenged Jesuits to risk the personal shock of being immersed in cultures or subcultures foreign to them, whether they be the worlds of outcasts and slum dwellers or those of artists and intellectuals. And so finding Jesuits at the forefront of work with homeless people, or refugees, or the *Dalit*, the so-called ‘untouchable’ people in India, or of significant conscientisation in regard to the place of women in the church and in the world, or more recently with those living with HIV/AIDS in Africa and elsewhere, comes as no surprise but rather as something that Pedro

Arrupe would have hoped and expected in addition to their more traditional work of education, parish ministry, and spiritual guidance.

Many Jesuits who took his challenge seriously opted for solidarity with the poor and oppressed in a variety of ways, some making the move from Jesuit houses to life in disadvantaged communities in towns and cities all over the world. Others have engaged in the attempt to give life to the teaching and example of Pedro Arrupe in whatever is their field of work. The leadership offered to Jesuits, and to the wider Jesuit family, by Pedro Arrupe is hugely significant for the work of justice in the world today. His own experience of living and working among different groups of suffering humanity, whether the sick in Lourdes or survivors of Hiroshima, prisoners in New York or exiled Spanish children in Mexico, remained central to his desire for justice and equal dignity for all human beings.

And yet to someone from the outside, who never knew or even met him, reading many of his addresses and reflections for the first time, it is Pedro Arrupe's closeness to his God in the person of Jesus that is the most striking feature. His own actions in respect of caring for people who are suffering, and his encouragement and exhortations to others in respect of action for justice, seem held at the centre by what can only be described as a two-way transparent love – his love of God and his love for all people, and the implicit certainty of God's love for him and for all people, especially those suffering human beings whose dignity and rights are denied them. Somehow, he comes across as the embodiment of that falling in love that will decide everything. And maybe this is his real significance for the work of justice today in whatever field, this justice with love which goes beyond rights and which distinguishes the charity of faith from the activism of justice without love. Certainly for the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice to attempt to live up to the model of work for justice proposed by the life and teaching of Pedro Arrupe is no small challenge. And as we meet with others from Jesuit works around the world in the course of that work, it is impossible not to have a sense that Pedro Arrupe is in some way strongly present in the people and the new structures, and willing and shaping the hopes and ideals of St Ignatius into the reality for the whole of creation that he believed is God's desire.

On 7 August 1981, Pedro Arrupe suffered a stroke

which left him unable to continue in his role as Superior General. He died in 1991. The time of his illness and before he resigned in 1983 was exceptionally difficult for the Society of Jesus. Gerry O'Hanlon, in Rome during some of that period, recalls fascinating accounts of what was going on in the Jesuit Curia at that time but most of all he remembers 'that sense of intense loyalty and affection which Arrupe clearly inspired in those around him. He made holiness seem attractive.'¹⁷

Notes

1. *Time*, 23 April 1973 (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine>).
2. Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century*, Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004, p. 245. The account in this article of the life-stages of Pedro Arrupe is taken largely from Modras.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
4. This lesson was to have great impact on the work for social justice, with many Jesuits studying social sciences and economics before entering the field.
5. Modras, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
6. Modras cites three works here, Pedro Arrupe, *Memorias del Padre Arrupe: Este Japón Increíble*, pp. 156–73; Pedro Miguel Lamet, *Pedro Arrupe: Un Explosión en la Iglesia*, Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1994, pp. 187–214; George Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe: Twenty-eighth General of the Society of Jesus*, Gujarat, India: Gujarat Shaitya Prakash, 2000, pp. 117–56.
7. Modras cites Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, p. 26.
8. Fr Gerry Bourke SJ, in conversation with Cathy Molloy, at 37 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin, October 2007.
9. Fr Gerry Bourke SJ, by email, October 2007.
10. Universidad de Deusto website (<http://www.deusto.es/servlet/satellite/noticia>), accessed 25 September 2007.
11. Society of Jesus, *Documents of the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, English Translation, Washington DC, 1975, n. 4, p. 17.
12. Modras, *op. cit.*, p. 270.
13. Pedro Arrupe, 'Rooted and Grounded in Love', Address to Participants in Ignatian Course, and later addressed to all Jesuits, Rome, February 1981, par. 57.
14. Fr Cecil McGarry SJ, by email, October 2007.
15. Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, by email, October 2007.
16. What follows gives just a flavour of the content of 'Men for Others: Education for Social Justice and Social Action Today', Address by Pedro Arrupe SJ to the Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, Valencia, Spain, 31 July 1973.
17. Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, by email, October 2007.

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