

Professor Pedro Zarco Gutiérrez. In Memoriam

Carlos Sáenz de la Calzada

Servicio de Cardiología, Hospital 12 de Octubre, Madrid, Spain.

It is an honor for me to be asked by the Editors of the REVISTA ESPAÑOLA DE CARDIOLOGIA to write a tribute to Professor Zarco. This opportunity to express my affection and admiration for him publicly is a source of deep satisfaction.

As noted by Ortega y Gasset, there are professionals who possess one great virtue and one great defect. Their virtue is their great expertise in their field; their defect is the limitation of their expertise to one field. Pedro Zarco had two virtues: he was a great cardiologist as well as a person of subtle intelligence and uncommon merit. Below I will analyze both of these features of his character and life's work.

ZARCO, THE CARDIOLOGIST

His love of knowledge—one of the salient features of his personality—led him on his first trip to Great Britain in 1957, where he studied with Paul Wood at the National Heart Hospital. His links with British cardiology and friendships with outstanding specialists in the United Kingdom were enduring. In 1959 he traveled to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where he worked with prestigious cardiologists such as E. Corday, B. Hoffman, and T. Winsor. Zarco was undoubtedly part of the English school of cardiology. In his semi-annual travels to the United Kingdom and the United States, he continued his constant quest for knowledge. As a result of these experiences, Zarco became a brilliant cardiologist under the direction of Professor Casas at the University of Madrid.

Later he founded and directed the Cardiopulmonary Exploration Laboratory at the renowned San Carlos Hospital. He was the laboratory's heart and soul, and the origins of his own school of cardiology are to be found here, where he trained his many followers from



Fig. 1. Professor Zarco taught from a young age (and until the end).

Spain and elsewhere (Figure 1). It was at the Cardiopulmonary Exploration Laboratory where he began his own contributions to the demarcation of cardiology from internal medicine.

Many of us became cardiologists because of him. All Spanish cardiologists have, directly or otherwise, benefited from his teachings through his classic—and hence still current—*Clinical Exploration of the Heart*. Zarco was a brilliant expert and teacher. A major difference between experts and teachers is that the former have colleagues whereas teachers create

Correspondence: Dr. C. Sáenz de la Calzada.
Servicio de Cardiología, Hospital 12 de Octubre.
Crtra. de Andalucía, km 5,400. 28041 Madrid, España.
E-mail: csaenz.hdco@salud.madrid.org

Full English text available at: www.revespcardiol.org



Fig. 2. Pedro Zarco, Fellow of the Real Academia de Medicina, Spain

disciples. As a teacher, Zarco had an impact on others' lives, instilling in them systems of thought and conduct both as physicians and as human beings. This would not have been possible without his outstanding personality. Although I have never worked under his wing, I consider myself a member of his school by affinity, devotion and friendship. Having been influenced by him in many ways, I am truly one of his «metastases.»

A detailed account of his many books, articles, lectures and academic and other awards is out of place here. Nevertheless, the following deserve mention:

- Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine,
- Member of the British Cardiac Society,
- Member of the New York Academy of Science,
- Member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science,
- Member of the WHO consultive group for cardiovascular diseases,
- Fellow of the American College of Cardiology,
- Member of the national medical societies of Chile, Cuba, and Venezuela.
- Honorary Professor of the Universities of Santo Domingo and Valparaiso,
- Member of the editorial board of many Spanish and foreign specialty, journals, notably *Cardioscience*.

– Finally, as many of us know, he was Chairman and Full Professor of Cardiology at the University of Madrid School of Medicine and a member of Spain's Royal Academy of Medicine (Figure 2).

He authored over 10 books and made numerous contributions to those by other authors. In addition, he published more than 250 articles in Spanish and foreign journals. Aside from his publications, he participated in an even larger number of conferences and panels. Thus his professional life was full and fruitful. Pedro Zarco was, as Dante said, among those who always sought to soar amid the peaks of great endeavors. He was, and shall forever remain, one of the great teachers of Spanish cardiology.

In spite of all his accomplishments, I feel that neither the University of Madrid School of Medicine nor the Spanish Society of Cardiology realized how to profit from his vast knowledge and merit, or how to duly recognize his contributions to Spanish cardiology.

ZARCO, THE INDIVIDUAL

Some special traits are possessed only by certain people—those who create a school. Pedro Zarco's personality had many of the necessary characteristics. He was **coherent**. Coherence is inherently polemical (for others); thus some saw him as a polemicist. Nothing could be further from the truth. All coherent persons are polemical, as a consequence of their coherence. Attempting to ridicule an opponent for any virtue one lacks is a Machiavellian technique. Hence controversies that touched Zarco were initiated by those who could not accept his coherence or his personal and professional ethical rectitude. This caused him professional difficulties during his lifetime. His **honesty** was the logical consequence of his coherence and rectitude. His political and ethical stands led to his separation from the University in the 1970s. His adherence to principle cost him his work and livelihood. Few people have this fortitude of character.

He was criticized by some for having been a member of the Communist Party in his youth, then voting Socialist and finally leaning toward the center. As an independent idealist, Zarco's nature was unchanging. His goal, pursued relentlessly, was to live ethically. His political thinking changed as he sought both higher ethics and better political performance in other parties. Nevertheless, in my opinion Pedro Zarco was always a leftist, because intrinsically, idealist cleave to the left while egoists cleave to the right. His intellectual drive was not to be confused with a lust for personal power, which he never sought. For Pedro Zarco, the only worthwhile power resided in knowledge—knowledge based on Socratic ethics.

He was, above all, an **enthusiast**. His vitality is



Fig. 3. Pedro Zarco, sportsman and young at heart cardiologist

illustrated by the habit, which he continued after he had retired, of riding his bicycle to the hospital and arriving at 6:00 A.M. There he attended and took notes on lectures and classes that interested him. An enthusiast indeed! He was lucky enough to remain young and enthusiastic throughout his life (Figure 3).

Those who knew him well were also fully aware of his **generosity**. Those who knocked on his door were never turned away. Many cardiologists, in difficult times, found refuge in his hospitality.

I would like to make particular mention of his **undaunted courage**. Courage is the cornerstone of liberty; liberty is the key to a life worth living. His lifelong courage made Zarco a free man in the broadest sense of the word.

The traits I have described above portray Pedro Zarco as a coherent, honest, enthusiastic, generous, brave and free human being. He was always committed as a human being and as a physician, eager to learn wherever knowledge was to be found. He was also tender, hardheaded, naive and timid. Zarco's timidity led some to perceive him, wrongly, as aloof. Commonplace persons need one or perhaps two adjectives to describe them; many adjectives are needed to convey the uniqueness of Pedro Zarco.

Although we have all been saddened by his untimely and unexpected passing, it can truly be said he died suddenly while still young, as he had always wished. For me, talking and being with him was like finding a cool, clear fountain on a long dry trek.