

# HISTORICAL MEMORY CRUSADE OR MADNESS?



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*Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it (Ha 2,2).*



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### Prologue

Seventy years after the *coup d'état* that meant the start of the Civil War, and the subsequent dictatorship, Spain faces a burning problem, the recovery of **historical memory**.

There are diverse and conflictive positions. For some it is a way of re-opening old wounds.

For others it is a way of closing them. There is a known phrase by Winston Churchill: “Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it”. According to a survey made by the Opina Institute, 64.5 per cent are “in favor of investigating everything related to the Civil War, uncovering common graves and rehabilitating everyone affected”.

Antonio Elorza, Professor of Political Science at the University of Madrid-Complutense, believes that the moment is good: “The problem is that a war mentality persists in some sectors. The key is to replace condemnations and reproaches with **dialogues** and **analyses**. It is good that the taboos and fears of the war be done away with. That there be freedom of expression and that the people remember their dead”.

José Antonio Martín Pallín, magistrate emeritus of the Supreme Court, adds one aspect: “The victors also suffered unjust executions, but they had 40 years to pay homage to their dead. The other side did not have that opportunity”.

In the transition to democracy, fear of a new Civil war clashed with the desire to know the past. The official renunciation of vengeance, essential condition for change, was shaped into **political amnesty** which covered not only those who had opposed the dictatorship, but also those guilty of crimes committed in its service. The spirit of reconciliation and of

consensus inspired the Constitution (1978) which regulated social harmony among all Spaniards.

Now we are before a proposed law which attempts to rehabilitate victims of the Civil War and of the dictatorship. Many demand the application of **International Law** for this issue: no statute of limitations, the right to know, the right of justice, the right of reparation. In the last thirty years some measures have been taken, but others await action.

We know more and more about what happened seventy years ago. And it is good to know it: *All discovery is light* (Eph 4, 14). As in **Galilee of the Gentiles**, the Gospel bursts onto a land in chains, in darkness, in need of redemption: *People who lived in darkness saw a great light; a light shined on those who dwelled in a place of shadows of death* (Mt 4, 16).

But what did the Church say, and what does it say now. The Civil War had a profound religious character. It was lived as a holy war, as crusade, but was it a crusade or was it madness? It's not the same. They are two visions of the past, not only distinct but also in opposition.

### 1. Review of the Past

On Sept. 30, 1936, then Bishop of Salamanca **Enrique Pla y Deniel** published his pastoral letter *The Two Cities*. This is how he saw the Civil War: “on Spain’s soil a fierce battle is being waged between two concepts of life; two sentiments, two forces”, two cities, the city of the godless and the city of the children of God; “on the surface it is a civil war; but in reality it is a crusade”, “a crusade for religion, for country and for civilization”.

In August of 1945, following the defeat of the fascist powers in the Second World War, Pla y Deniel, being Archbishop of Toledo, said: “Let the time of world peace be as well the time of the consolidation of internal peace in Spain. The past civil war and Crusade amounted to an armed plebiscite that put an end to religious persecution. No one wants an unnecessary revision, which could take us to a new civil war”. In 1960, October 19, he would say in the Pontifical University of Salamanca: “It was a crusade for God and for Spain”.

A government decree dated 17 Nov., 1938, established, “pending agreement with the ecclesiastical authorities”, that “on the walls of each parish church figure an inscription containing the names of its Fallen in the present Crusade, victims of the Marxist revolution”.

A few months after the end of the war, a *History of the Crusade* in weekly episodes presented it as a **religious crusade** against Communist barbarism.

Later, on April 26, 1942, the Franco government put into operation the *General Cause*, whose prime objective was gathering evidence of Republican crimes. The aim was to justify the military coup, the slaughter that provoked the subsequent dictatorship.

In fact, for forty years a **single vision of the past** was imposed, as the English historian **Paul Preston** says in *The Spanish Civil War*. But **another vision** existed and exists. The Civil War was a “war between children of the same birthplace, of the same mother country” (Pius XI), and a passionate undertaking of hate and violence” (Gumersindo de Estella), a “useless fratricidal slaughter” (Esteban Pinilla), a **madness**, as it says in Psalm 85:



Remembrance of the Crusade

*God declares peace so that they do not return to madness.*

Furthermore, “that civil war was not provoked by the Republic, nor by its leaders”, it was well-identified military groups who made “a full assault on power” (Julián Casanova). The myth of the crusade was “one of the pillars of the regime, which was untouchable even with the *Caudillo* already in his grave” (Hilari Ragner). Well, if the Civil War was not a crusade, but a slaughter among brothers, a madness, we must examine the position of the Church: was it belligerent? did it legitimize the coup, the Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship?, what did anticlerical violence signify? is a national confession needed, and an ecclesiastical confession? The Civil War is a “demon” that must be expelled from our house: *Every kingdom in civil war is headed for ruin* (Lk 11, 15-26). One thing is to give one’s life for Christ and another very different thing is take it away from others in the name of Christ. You can’t evangelize “a clean blow for Christ”. The so-called re-christianization of Spain could not have been carried out by force, with weapons. That is precisely the temptation of power (Mt 4,9), the way that he who *came to give his life so that others are saved* did not want to follow (Mk 10, 45). He said so clearly: *My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom was of this world, my people would have fought* (Jn 1836).

## 2. Some antecedents

On April 14, 1931, after municipal elections of the 12th, the **Republic** was proclaimed. For the first time, political power was passed on to a moderate left, which was formed by socialists and a wide range of people from the lower middle class. King Alphonse XIII abandoned the country: “The elections held on Sunday clearly reveal that today I do not have the love of my people”, he declared.

The hostility of the right towards the Republic was displayed very soon. Three principal organizations believed that the Republic, in one way or another, must be overthrown: the **Comunión Tradicionalista** with its Requeté militia; the old supporters of Alphonse XIII and of the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera with his political party **Renovación Española**; the **Falange Española**, which in provoking street disturbances with “the dialectic of fists and pistols” allowed the other groups to denounce the “unrest” of the Republic.



King Alphonse XIII and the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera.  
*Ullstein/CordonPress.*

The Republic also was confronted by **fundamentalist bishops**, partisans of a confessional State that would impose the Catholic religion by force and prohibit any other. Among them was the Cardinal Primate and Archbishop of Toledo, **Pedro Segura**, and the bishop of Tarazona, **Isidro Gomá**. The day after the proclamation of the Republic, Bishop Gomá wrote to Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer the following commentary about the dethroning of the king: “I can’t understand the monstrosity that has occurred. I don’t believe that there are examples in history, which is filled with examples.

May God preserve our house, and peace over Israel”.

A few days later, on April 24, the Vatican’s nuncio **Federico Tedeschini** sent a letter to the Spanish bishops, in which he said: “It is the wish of the Holy See that Your Excellencies recommend to priests, to monks and nuns, and to the diocesan faithful, that they respect the constituted powers and obey them, for the maintenance of order and for the general welfare”. After all, that is what St. Paul says: *Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves (Rm 13, 1-2)*. However, on May 1, **Cardinal Segura** issued a pastoral letter directed not only at diocesans but all the bishops and faithful of Spain, in which, practically calling for mass mobilizations, he asked for “not only private prayers for the needs of the homeland, but also solemn acts of worship, devotions, pilgrimages of penitence”. He also delivered warm praise for the dethroned king, Alphonse XIII, who, “throughout his reign, new how to conserve the old tradition of faith and piety of his elders”. For the fundamentalist bishops, the **old regime**, the union of throne and altar, had collapsed.

The *Royal March*, which during the monarchy was heard in mass at the moment of consecration, became a sign of identity for the reaction and, in reality, a provocation. On May 10, a group of young rightwingers, meeting in an apartment on Alcalá Street in Madrid, placed a gramophone in the window playing the royal march, just at the moment that many Madrid residents returned home from Retiro Park. Some of those who heard it went to protest outside the monarchist daily ABC and the Interior (Gobernación) Ministry. There were two deaths as a consequence of confrontations with the Civil Guard.

The next day, protests turned into torching of churches, religious schools and convents, without the government using force against the perpetrators. Agitation extended to other communities. About a hundred religious buildings were affected by the blazes. Naturally, the

violent response is surprising, “but the burning of convents was scarcely repeated during the Republic, except during the revolutionary days of October, 1934, in Asturias, and the nearest precedent, the so-called Tragic Week of July, 1909, in Barcelona, had occurred under the monarchy and had a more far-reaching effect than the burnings of 1931”, says **Julian Casanova**, professor of Contemporary History at the University of Zaragoza, in his book *Franco's Church*.

Cardinal Segura maintained a resistance against Republican authorities that ended in open conflict. On September 30, expelled from Spain and under pressure from the Vatican, the cardinal renounced his position as primate of Toledo, which would be occupied by Bishop Gomá.

**Angel Herrera**, editor-in-chief of *El Debate*, founded at the end of April, 1931, an association called National Action (later Popular Action), which had as objective “propaganda and political action under the slogan of Religion, Family, Order, Work and Property”. In two years Catholicism took root as a political mass movement. The Salamanca lawyer **José María Gil Robles** created the **spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights** (in spanish, CEDA), which resulted in the merging of Popular Action and some forty groups more.

The Republic faced **great problems**: military reform, the religious question, the agricultural problem, equal rights between women and men. On October 31 in the Congress of Deputies **Clara Campoamor** achieved recognition of women's right to vote. A few days later, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, while article 26 of the Constitution was being debated Minister of War **Manuel Azaña** pronounced the famous words: “Spain has ceased to be Catholic”, which was interpreted thus: “the political problem that follows is to organize the State in a way that it fits this new and historical phase of the spanish people”.

The **Constitution** was approved on December 9. Here are some aspects: “The Republic constitutes a unified State, compatible with the Municipalities and the Regions” (art.2), “the State has no official religion (art. 3), “Spaniards are equal before the law, without any discrimination for reasons of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion, or any other personal or other social condition or circumstance.” (art. 25), “all religious faiths will be considered as Associations subject to a special law”, “a special law will regulate the total extinction, within a period of two years, of subsidies for the Clergy”, “those religious orders that statutorily impose, apart from the three canonical votes, another special obedience to an authority distinct from the legitimate State will be dissolved” (art, 26), “all denominations will be able to observe private worship. Public manifestations of worship will have to be, in each case, authorized by the Government” (art. 27), “marriage is based on equal rights for both sexes, and it can be dissolved by mutual agreement or a petition of whichever of the spouses, with allegation in this case of just cause” (art. 43), “the property of all class of goods can be object of forced expropriation in the name of social utility with adequate compensation” (art. 44), “cultural service is an essential attribute of the State”, “education will be secular”, “the Church has the right, subject to State inspection, to teach its respective doctrines in its own establishments” (art. 48).

On August 10, 1932, the **uprising** of Gen. José Sanjurjo in Seville was brought under control. The law of Faiths and Religious Congregations, of May 17, 1933, caused commotion. Pius XI in his encyclical *Dilectissima nobis* denounced the law that tried to “tear out traditional Catholic sentiments from young souls”, “against the imprescriptible rights of the Church”. On January 11, 1933, in the village of Casas Viejas, Cadiz Province, a group of anarchists tried to seize the Civil Guard barracks. Twenty two peasants and three guards lost their lives in the tragic revolt. The elections of Nov. 1933 gave power to the right. The new government decreed an amnesty for everyone implicated in the coup attempt of Gen. Sanjurjo.

On October 6, 1934, Lluís Companys, president of the Generalitat (regional

government), declared a Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic. The Catalan Government was arrested in full session by troops led by Gen. Batet. During the war Companys led the Catalan Government. Exiled in Paris and handed over to the GESTAPO, he was executed by firing squad in Montjuic on October 15, 1940.

Barbarous and horrifying was the **Asturias revolt** in October of 1934. Thirty four priests, seminarians and monks of the Christian Schools were assassinated, and 58 churches, the bishop's palace, the seminary and the Holy Chamber of the cathedral were burned or dynamited. Minister of War Diego Hidalgo, entrusted leadership of operations to Gen. Franco: "The Foreign Legion committed atrocities, killed many women and children, and when Gijón and Oviedo, the principal Asturian cities, fell, the Army carried out summary executions among leftists", says Julián Casanova.

In the second half of 1935, Manuel Azaña held a series of mass meetings in Bilbao, Valencia and Madrid. Enthusiasm for unity of the left led to formation of the **Popular Front**. Elections of February 1936 gave power to the left.

The Institute of Agrarian Reform fomented the settling of rural people in new lands, but it did so slowly because of the judicial actions filed by the owners. "During the first half of March, farm laborers began occupying estates in Madrid, Salamanca and Toledo and at sunrise on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 60,000 peasants took over properties in Badajoz and began to till them. During the following weeks similar actions occurred in Cáceres, Jaén, Seville and Córdoba", "in one of the scuffles with the peasants, a civil guard was killed in Yeste. The guards retaliated by killing 17 farm laborers and injuring many more", says the English historian **Antony Beevor** in *The Battle for Spain*. During the government of the Popular Front "somewhat less than 200,000 farm workers were settled on some 756,000 hectares of land".

On July 12, Falange gunmen killed José Castillo, officer of the Assault Guards. His fellow guards killed José Calvo Sotelo, a rightwing parliamentarian.

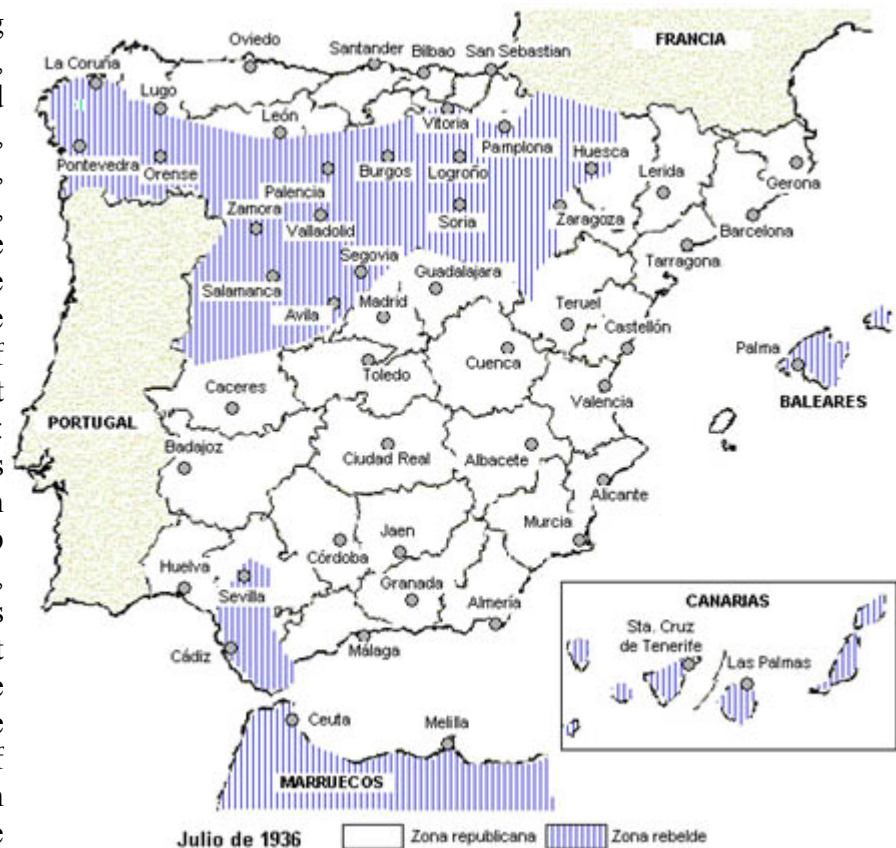
### 3. Civil War Erupts

On July 18, 1936, a military coup is staged against the legitimately constituted order of the Republic. Franco starts it in the Canaries, Mola in Pamplona, Queipo de Llano in Seville, Cabanellas in Saragossa. It is presented as a **national uprising**, as "the defense or re-establishment of order". With improper exclusivity, the revolutionaries or rebels call themselves nationals. They call the Republicans reds, synonymous of revolutionaries.

In his "instrucción reservada número uno", the Director (Mola) said in April of that year: "Action must be extremely violent to reduce the enemy as soon as possible". The rebels counted on meeting resistance, but hoped to crush it in two or three days. Those who opposed were eliminated: "The uprising was carried out over the bodies of generals Batet, Romerales, Caridad pita, Campins, Nuñez del Prado Vice Admiral Azarola, Salcedo and many chiefs and officials", "the uprising began with the process of physically liquidating enemies.

And the response was in the same vein", says **Manuel Tuñón de Lara** en *La España del siglo XX, La guerra civil*.

On the morning of July 19, Navarre, Avila, almost all of Old Castille, Salamanca, Zamora, Caceres, Alava, Cordoba, Baleares and the Canaries were in the power of the rebels. The German in charge of Business in Madrid sent this telegram to Hitler: "The expected uprisings took place yesterday in all of Spain". The coup d'etat fractured Spain, consumed the State's resources, but it did not triumph with the predicted ease. In the last week of July, all of Spain was enmeshed in the tragic gears of the **Civil War**.



"The slaughters did not take place in the areas where there was resistance. It is worth noting that in places where the military coup triumphed immediately violent deaths were counted in the thousands", says Paul Preston. In the Canaries, Ceuta and Melilla "the rebels killed 2,768 people; in Galicia, 3,000; in Zamora, 3,000; in Valladolid, 3,430, and in Navarre, 2,789".

Antonio Bahamonde, who was press chief for Gen. Queipo de Llano and who fled to the rebel zone, left horrifying testimony of the repression carried out by the revolutionaries in his book *Un año con Queipo* (A Year with Queipo): "In the city of Seville alone, and independently of all warring action, they have assassinated more than 9,000 workers and peasants. In the working-class neighborhoods, Moroccan *regulares* and Spanish infantrymen combed the streets of very modest, one-storey homes and threw bombs through the windows, destroying and killing women and children. The Moorish hordes freely dedicated themselves to pillage and rape".

In Madrid many sympathizers of the rebel band were arrested at the outbreak of the war and many were assassinated in the course of the "sacas" or transfers of prisoners. Some 1,200 prisoners were shot at Paracuellos del Jarama and Torrejon de Ardoz. They included many priests and monks.

The total number of **dead**, according to historians, approaches some 600,000, of which 100,000 correspond to violence let loose in the rebel zone, and 55,000 to violence in the Republican zone. Moreover, “not less than 50,000 people were executed in the ten years following the official end of the war,” says Julián Casanova.

At the end of the war, says Antony Beevor, “close to half a million people” crossed the French frontier”, “another 60,000 did not arrive in time and were seized by nationalist troops”. Concentration camps sprang up all over Spain. In all, including provisional ones, there were “190 concentration camps, through which passed between 367,000 and 600,000 war prisoners”.

Amidst so much madness, Fernando Berlín gathers various profoundly human testimonies in his book *Héroes de los dos bandos* (Heroes from Both Sides): “Hidden within the two sides there were anonymous heroes who placed sense of humanity before whatever political ideology, brave people who, at some moment, placed their security in danger and, many times, that of their family offering protection and shelter to refugees and did not ask them of their affiliation”.

The historian Américo Castro would write, from distance and suffering, that “it is false that there are two Spains”. That duality was only the “result of a sinister mirage in which the hallucinator tries to kill his double and commits suicide”. The writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry says it another way: “A Civil War is not a war, it is an illness. The enemy is within. One fights against oneself”.

#### 4. Mixed Reactions

We witness mixed reactions to the Spanish civil war. On July 31, 1936, the Vatican’s Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli, future Pius XII, presented a **formal protest** to the ambassador of the Republic to the Holy See, Luis de Zulueta, for the “reproachable violences” against sacred persons and things. The ambassador responded to the cardinal deploring the excesses committed, although excusing them because of the attitude of the clergy which, according to him, had sided with the rebels, in some instance even with the firearms, and insisting on the efforts of the Government to end the misfortunes.

The Archbishop of Saragossa, Rigoberto Doménech, declared on August 11: “Violence is not carried out in the service of anarchy, but licitly in favor of order, the Nation and Religion”.

The canonical magistrate of Salamanca, Aniceto Castro Albarrán, had published in 1934 his book *El derecho a la rebeldía* (The Right to Rebellion), which was an incitation to rebellion against the established legitimate order. In 1938 he published another, *Guerra Santa* (Holy War), with a prologue by Cardinal Gomá, who several times referred to as holy the civil war begun by Mola and Franco. Albarrán strains to demonstrate that the Church has blessed the war and encouraged everyone in the battle. The cardinal says in the prologue: “A holy war (like this one) demands at least a holy effort so that the blood that it sheds be not sterile”.

The capuchin monk **Gumersindo of Estella** comments in his memoirs, published in the book *Fusilados en Zaragoza* (Executed by Firing Squad in Saragossa): “And then try and tell a doomed prisoner that priests are not arbiters of the war and of death sentences...and that we do not take pleasure in shedding blood and shooting the accused. Cardinal Gomá would not have written those words during his final illness. I attended him spiritually those last 12 days of his life. Prudence seals my lips”. Marceliana, sister of the cardinal, sent some books to the capuchin postmarked July 10, 1941, appealing to him to accept them “in proof of my gratitude for the spiritual counsel that with so much love and affection you gave to my deceased brother...who also knew how to value and be thankful for all that you did for him”. For health

reasons, Gumersinde was in Pamplona during the month of August. He was there at the same time as the cardinal, whose health had got worse and who would die in Toledo on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. According to the capucine historian Tarsicio of Azcona, the cardinal “resided at the convent of St. Joseph in the Magdalena neighborhood, visited the nearby capucine convent of Pamplona Extramuros and confessed there”, “he went up to reception and asked for a confessor”. It stands out that, prior to his death, the cardinal primate also would confess with Gumersindo that he he had heard the confessions of many executed prisoners.

Gumersindo of Estella is the religious name of Martín Zubeldía Inda (1880-1974). He was in Pamplona when the war broke out. He had just celebrated mass. He picked up a book and heard “a savage shout of joy”, which came from outside. A rural guard screamed things like these: “The cat is now in the bag!”, “last night they killed the civil guard captain in the door of the barracks because he wouldn’t join the Movement against the Republic”, “early this morning they grabbed some Republican councilmen of Pamplona and gave it to them good”, “the Movement is now all across Spain”. Several monks, who were in the garden, heard him with surprise, mixed with a delight that they could not hide”. Gumersindo reacted another way: “I confess that I felt my spirit overcome with fear. And from the depths of my soul burst forth a protest against the murders. Violence is not Christian. God cannot bless a revolution that begins with slaughter”.

On August 15, the abbot himself, presiding over a community of more than 70 capuchins, granted dispensation from silence, saying with visible pleasure: “Today we eat hens confiscated in Guipuzcoa by our brave *requetés* [Carlist militias]”, “when the Movement began, each day twenty-five, thirty or more *requetés* ate in the community’s refectory.” Says Gumersindo: “Meanwhile the slaughter continued. I went out to preach almost every Sunday to various towns of the province. And I became aware of the hecatomb. It was discussed in public and with the number of dead who were going to be buried in the mountains, by the roadsides---On Sept. 8 I preached in Uterga.

I returned on foot.

I crossed the El Perdón mountains. And I was horrified at seeing on both sides of the road and in the interior of the mountain pools of blood and mounds of earth that covered cadavers, some of whom’s feet were sticking out at ground level...I arrived at the convent with strong impressions that shook my spirit and during the night pounded in my brain.

What else could I do but express my feelings? I couldn’t help it”.

The abbot reproached him for his “defeatist campaign” against the Movement.

On Sept. 11 he appeared in his cell and told him: “You’ve been transferred to the convent in Saragossa and you must leave today on the first train”. “Very well, I answered him,...I will be better there than here because here I am not among brothers, but among spies and false accusers”. There I would live between 1937 and 1941 the tremendous drama of executed prisoners, which I describe in my memoir. On Sept. 14, **Pius XI** received in Castelgandolfo some five hundred spanish fugitives, the majority priests, monks and nuns. The Pope delivered a speech, which began with a lamentation for the victims and a condemnation of Communism. He praised the “splendor of Christian and clerical virtues, of heroism and of martyrs, true martyrs in the fully sacred and glorious meaning of the word”. He spoke of his horror for that fratricidal war, “the Civil war, the war between children of the community, of the same nation”, “it has been said that the blood of a single man is already too much for all the centuries and for all the land; what to say then in the presence of fraternal killings that are still being declared?” He also said: “Our blessing is directed in a special way to those who have assumed the difficult and dangerous mission of defending and restoring the rights and honor of God and of religion”, “difficult and dangerous, also because the effort and difficulty of the defense has been excessive and not fully justifiable, besides the fact that

unprincipled interests and egoistic or political intentions are introduced to confuse and alter the morality of action and all responsibility”.

On Sept. 30, Bishop of Salamanca Pla y Deniel publishes his pastoral *The Two Cities*. He turns over his palace to Gen. Franco and sends donations to the Defense Junta “without official publicity, so that the Government of Madrid cannot declare them rebels”. He consults Cardinal Gomá by letter on August 31 and he responds on Sept. 7: “I did the same. All my support, but without publicity”. Of the collection by Gomá, comments the benedictine Hilari Ragner, there is no mention by his biographers, “which makes one think that they did not consider it too glorious”. Nevertheless, Gomá himself published in the ecclesiastic bulletin of Toledo the correspondence that he had exchanged with Franco and the primate of Ireland, Cardinal MacRory, about the collection. From that correspondence, from the restricted files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the archive of Cardinal Vidal I Barraquer, the following can be deduced. Gomá’s collection is presented invoking as a principal goal “the reconstruction of temples and liturgical trappings in churches looted and destroyed in the zones liberated by the national army”. For the Franco government, the collection reflected a double purpose: first, obtain foreign currency for the purchase of “military supplies”; second, denounce to Catholics throughout the world the atrocities committed by the reds and attract the sympathy of foreign Catholicism toward the nationals.

In response to the request of Gomá, the primate of Ireland, Cardinal MacRory, raised from all the churches of the country 44,000 pounds sterling. Of this sum, 32,000 was delivered to the rebel army. There’s no mention of what happened to the rest. On Nov. 7, 1936, Gomá wrote to MacRory about the destination change for the 32,000 pounds sterling, “so that, if it meets with your approval, that act of charity and patriotism that the Spanish Church does in favor of our victorious Army, is used in its totality to purchase sanitary material with which our injured and ill soldiers can find relief”.

When Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer appealed to all the cardinals of the world for aid for the priests of Catalonia, MacRory replied that he had done a collection (that of Gomá) and, being a poor country, he did not dare do another: “I believe,” he said, “that the major part of the money deposited in the account of Cardinal Gomá has been spent on munitions”.

On Oct. 12, *Día de la Hipidad y de la Raza* (Day of Hipic Brotherhood and Race), there was an academic act at the University of Salamanca, at which various personalities attended, such as Carmen Polo, wife of Franco, Bishop Pla y Deniel, and Gen. Millán Astray, founder of the Legion. Prof. Francisco Maldonado launched a tremendous diatribe against Catalan and Basque nationalisms, “cancers of the nation” that had to be cut out with the implacable scalpel of fascism. At the back of the hall, someone gave the legionnaire shout of “Long live death!” and Gen. Millán Astray delivered two automatic responses of “Viva”, while Falangists saluted with arms raised.

Miguel de Unamuno, rector of the university, took the podium and, among other things, said: “I want to make some comments on the speech, if you can call it that, of Prof. Maldonado. I will leave aside the personal offense that his sudden explosion represents against Basques and Catalans. I myself, as you know, was born in Bilbao. The Bishop, whether he likes it or not, is Catalan born in Barcelona”, “I have just heard the necrophilic and senseless shout”. Millán Astray screamed at the top of his lungs: “Death to intelligence! Long live death!”. Falangists and military men reached for their pistols. Unamuno added: “This is the temple of intelligence. And I am the high priest. You are profaning its holy territory. You will win because you have more than enough brute strength, but you will not convince. To convince you have to persuade. And to persuade you need something that you lack: reason and law in the struggle”.

The Protestant Church of Geneva published its position in *Journal de Gêneve* on April

17, 1937: “The civil war that bloodies Spain is the object of our concerns. Mourning reigns everywhere, ruins accumulate. It can be predicted that after the period of destruction will come a period of profound misery. From now on, whatever the final result is, we know for certain that our fellow church members will be severely affected. All the Protestant churches have the duty to prepare to alleviate and help our people, in the measures of their possibilities, as soon as peace is established. We should foresee the reconstruction of destroyed temples, parishes and pastoral centers. Principally, we should not neglect charitable works, material aid to all the families whose homes have been wiped away on in which the head of family has disappeared”.



Franco with generals Mola and Cavalcanti (Oct. 1, 1936). *Topham/CordonPress*.

#### In European Catholic circles

Franco's cause was criticized, especially after the northern offensive of Gen. Mola would leave the marks of cruel and massive bombings to break the morale of the civil population. Catholic Europe deplored: “that a mask of holy war covers up a war of extermination”.

After the occupation of Guipuzcoa, a thousand people were executed.

Among them were 16 Basque priests, 13 diocesans and 3 religious. Cardinal Gomá met with Franco in Salamanca.

The general promised him that there would be absolutely no executions of priests “without joint respect for military laws and dispositions of the Church”. The Condor Legion bombed Durango on March 31, 1937. 127 civilians died during the bombing and an equal amount from injuries. Among the victims were 14 nuns and 2 priests. Even crueler was the bombing of Guernica on April 26. Although the figures have been debated, the Government of Euskadi estimated that there were more than 1,500 killed and a thousand injured.

The *lehendakari* José Antonio Aguirre denounced the bombings on the morning of the 27th. “German pilots, at the service of the Spanish rebels, have bombed Guernica, burning the historic city venerated by all Basques”. Franco's general headquarters issued a communiqué which said: “Guernica is destroyed by fire and gasoline. The red hordes at the service of the perverse and criminal Aguirre have burned it and converted it to ruins,” “he has spread the infamous lie – because he is a common delinquent – to attribute that crime to the heroic and noble aviation of our national army”, “Aguirre prepared the destruction of Guernica to blame it on the adversary” (ABC, April 29, 1937). Two days after the bombing, George Steer published in *The Times* and in the *The New York Times* a report of the bombing that went around the world.

In July of 1937, the French thinker **Jacques Maritain** published a statement in the *Nouvelle revue française* in which he criticized “the violence of both sides”: “It is a sacrilege,” he wrote, “to profane sacred sites and the Holy Sacrament (...) and it is a sacrilege to shoot as in Badajoz hundreds of men to celebrate the day of Assumption, or crush under bombs, as in Durango (...) the churches of the town and the people who fill them (...), or as in Guernica, an entire city, with its churches and tabernacles, machine-gunning the poor masses who flee”, “in the name of Holy War, that [terror] is carried out under the insignias and pennants of religion,

and the Cross of Jesus Christ shines as a symbol of war over the agony of the executed”.

Franco, concerned about the repercussions produced abroad, summoned Cardinal Gomá to an interview held in Burgos on May 10. He ordered the Spanish episcopate to publish a **paper** which, addressed to episcopates of the entire world, “could manage to make the truth heard”. Shortly before, in mid April, the Cardinal did not see it clearly: “Our country does not lend itself to collective Documents”, he wrote to Cardinal Vidal I Barraquer (April 16, 1937).

As for the rest, Pope Pius XI had just published two encyclicals: one against national socialism, *Mit brennender Sorge* (March 14, 1937) and the other against Communism, *Divini Redemptoris* (March 19, 1937). In Spain the first was ignored. No daily newspaper published even a fragment and not until February of 1938 was it published completely in ecclesiastical bulletins.

### 5. The Collective Letter

While Picasso was painting **Guernica** for the Paris International Exposition (1937), Cardinal Gomá was preparing the **collective letter** of the bishops. It was a different painting. In effect, dated May 15, the Cardinal wrote to the Metropolitans about the “indication that I had received a few days ago before the head of state,” requesting their views about the convenience of supporting it.

The answer was affirmative. The Cardinal submitted to the bishops “a copy in proofs” of the projected collective letter, so that they would read it “with close attention” and reply “as soon as possible”. Supporting that high-level initiative meant “giving authoritatively our criteria of the national movement and, especially, repress and contrast adverse opinions and propaganda which, even in a large sector of Catholic press, have contributed to shape an atmosphere totally adverse to it abroad.” The letter was dated July 1, it was sent in August.

The bishops did not define the Civil War as **crusade**, but it made it understood: “The Spanish war is product of the clash of irreconcilable ideologies”, “being war one of the most tremendous blows of humanity, it is at times a heroic remedy, unique, to focus things on the hinge of justice and restore them to the rule of peace. For that reason, the Church, still being daughter of the Prince of Peace, blesses the emblems of war, has founded military orders and has organized crusades against enemies of the faith”, “the Church has not wanted this war nor has it sought it”, “one of the belligerent parts was heading for the elimination of the Catholic religion in Spain”.

The bishops issued a declaration on the **cause** of the war. According to them, it isn’t found in those who staged the coup against the legitimate, constituted government, but the legislators and rulers of the Republic: “This war has been brought on by the temerity, the errors, perhaps the malice or cowardice of those who could have avoided it by governing the nation according to justice”, “it was the legislators of 1931, and later the executive power of the State with its ruling practices, which insisted on sharply twisting the path of our history in a totally opposite sense in violation of the demands of nature and the national spirit, and especially against the religious sentiment predominant in the country. The Constitution and secular laws that underline their spirit were a violent and almost continuous attack on national conscience”.

The bishops **justified the uprising, the war and the national movement**. For them it was a type of preventive war: “Russia, linked to the communists from abroad, through theater and films with exotic rituals and customs, by intellectual fascination and material blackmail, was preparing the popular spirit for the outbreak of revolution, which was timed almost to the moment”, it refers to “the doctrine of St. Thomas on the right of defensive resistance by force”, “the military uprising didn’t happen, since from its beginning, without the collaboration of decent people, who joined the movement in masses, which, by itself, should

be considered civic-military”, “the war is, then, like an armed plebiscite”, “by the natural demand for defense and for considerations of international character, arms and men from other countries have come in aid of traditional Spain”.

The bishops denounced the **excesses of the communist revolution**, but silenced the others. Furthermore, as anyone can see, there are many numerical errors. Of the murdered priests, they say, “only secular clergy would add up to 6,000”, “the number is calculated to be more than 300,000 laymen killed, only for their political and especially religious ideas in Madrid, and in the first three months more than 22,000 were assassinated. There is hardly a town in which the most outstanding rightists have not been eliminated”.

Apparently, the bishops have a **twin consolation**. The communists die in reconciliation, the nationalists (by the thousands) die in martyrdom: “At death, confirmed by the Law, our communists have reconciled themselves in the immense majority with the God of our fathers”, thousands of Spaniards gave their blood to the shout of “Long Live Spain!”, “Long Live Christ the King!”, “within the national movement there was the marvellous phenomenon of martyrdom – of true martyrdom, as the Pope has said – of thousands of Spaniards, priests, religious and laymen”.

At the same time, the bishops **respond to some objections**: “The Church is accused of temerity and partisanship in getting involved in the fighting that divides the nation. The Church has always been on the side of justice and of the peace, and



Cardinal Isidro Gomá with the sword offered up to the Holy Christ by Franciscans of the church of Santa Bárbara, Madrid (May 20, 1939). EFE Archive

has worked with the powers of State, in whatever situation, for the common good. No one has been bound up, whether parties, people or tendencies”, “it is said that this war is of classes and that the Church has placed itself on the side of the rich. Those who know its causes and nature know that it is not so. Even recognizing some neglect in the fulfilment of judicial duties and charity, the Church has been the first to urge that the working classes be strongly protected by the law”, “the Spanish war, they say, is not more than an episode of the universal struggle against democracy and statism... we affirm that the war has not been undertaken to create an autocratic State over a humiliated nation”, “they accuse the leaders of the national movement of crimes similar to those committed by the Popular Front”, “all wars have their excesses; the national movement would have them, without doubt; no one defends with total serenity the madness committed by an enemy without feelings”, “all our admiration for the civic and religious virtues of our Basque brothers...but our reprobation for having failed to listen to the voice of the Church and be realistic about the words of the Pope in his encyclical on communism”.

## 6. Some limitations

The collective letter fulfilled the condition that Bishop Pla y Deniel had imposed previously, dated March 5, for a similar project: the collective document should ratify “the general ideas expressed individually by all bishops of the liberated zone in respect of the

character of the present war”.

However, Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer refused to sign the letter. It displeased him to “accept suggestions from people outside the Hierarchy in its own matters”. Detained in Poblet on the previous July 23, the Cardinal left a few days later for Rome under the protection of the Generalitat.

The Bishop of Vitoria, Mateo Múgica, also refused to sign the letter and was expelled from his office in October, 1936. In a letter to

the Holy See, in June of 1937, he explained his motives for not signing the collective letter: “According to the Spanish episcopate, justice is well administered in the Spain of Franco, and this is not true. I have long lists of fervent Christians and exemplary priests assassinated without trial and without judicial formality by people who go unpunished.”

On Nov. 23, **Pius XI** summoned Franco’s ambassador, Antonio Magaz, and told him: “In nationalist Spain priests are being shot as in the Spain of the other side”. Magaz responded: “Holiness, I have only one thing to say to you. That your words and your attitude, as a Spaniard and as a Catholic, give me great pain.”. The Pope replied: “Ambassador, either I have not explained myself well or the ambassador has not understood me”.

The Jesuit **Alfonso Alvarez Bolado** in his book *Para ganar la guerra, para ganar la paz* (To Win the War, to Win the Peace) points out some limitations of the collective Letter: “trivialization of the social conflict that underlines the war”, the Church had identified itself with rightwing movements, which opposed all social reform, workers and peasants could rightly view the Church as a political enemy; “simplification of the Basque problem”, the Church legitimizes the coup d’etat, while condemning Basque nationalists who remain faithful to the Republic and defend its freedoms; “there is a lack of sensitivity for the values of democratic order”, you can’t identify the entire Republican side with the communists, the democrats could see the Church identified with fascism (in the Letter Russia is mentioned but not Germany or Italy); “the insufficiency and the dissembling in respect to repression on the national side”, the Republicans could see the Church as accomplice, because a programmed repression was in order and in operation at the very moment that the Letter was written.

In the Civil War there are “many wars”. It is the culmination of a series of struggles between the forces of **reform** and of **reaction**: between regionalists and centralists, anti-clericals and Catholics, farmworkers and large landowners, workers and owners, republicans and monarchists, democrats and fascists.

A German researcher, **Kristina Kayatz** has compared the collective Letter with the speech delivered three years earlier by Hitler, on Feb. 1, 1933. In both texts one detects the same speech: if they win, the country will return to what it was in an ideal past time; there is an appeal to the supreme values of order, harmony and truth instead of the anarchy, ruin and lies of the enemies; they are not normal political adversaries, but mortal enemies rising from hell to destroy the Homeland; Germany and Spain face a grave danger of communist revolution.



Pla y Deniel succeeded Gomá as cardinal primate. Here he appears at the San Jerónimo church in Madrid, after a funeral for three parliamentary deputies (Dec. 2, 1943). EFE

Archive.

On Oct. 1, 1937, three decrees from the Office of the Chief of State bestowed the **Crusaders Cross** on these individuals: King Victor Manuel of Italy, Benito Mussolini and Adolph Hitler. It was the supreme honor of the new State to those who took part in the “crusade against communist barbarity”.

In reality, the **Communist Party** counted on few militants at the outbreak of the war. The Montserrat nun **Hilari Ragner** says in her book *La pólvora y el incienso* (Gunpowder and Incense): “In the Parliament of 1931 there was not one single communist deputy; in that of 1933, there was one, and in 1936, despite the triumph of the Popular Front, communist deputies numbered only 17 of a total of 473. Franco’s later propaganda released, as one of the key pieces of the so-called ‘Juridical treatise on the legitimacy of the Uprising’, some documents which claimed the communists were preparing a revolution and even detailed the horrible crimes that they planned, and so the military had no option but to rush ahead with its blow against the revolution. But all historians today agree that those documents were false”.

María Luisa Rodríguez Aisa in her doctoral thesis *El cardenal Gomá y la guerra de España* (Cardinal Gomá and the Spanish War) comments on the interview that took place in Lourdes on May 22, 1937, between Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo, secretary of the Congregation of Special Ecclesiastical Affairs, and Cardinal Gomá. There were moments of tension between both: “Gomá came to say to his interlocutor that his dignity and his office was at the disposition of the Holy See”.

Ricardo de la Cierva in his book *Francisco Franco. A century of Spain* underlines the importance of the bombing of Guernica in the attitude of the Vatican in that interview and in the position of French Catholic intellectuals such as Bernanos, Mauriac and Maritain.

From Pamplona, on May 25, Gomá writes to Pizzardo that on his arrival “a red plane dropped several bombs on the quiet city, which caused eleven deaths and a score of injured. It is another proof of the barbarity of those who do not know the most elemental principles of the rights of people and the laws of war”.

## 7. Bestial Excesses

“Every War has its excesses”, said the bishops. In a forceful denunciation of them, Julián Casanova writes: “They were so enthusiastic about the ‘religious upsurge in the country’, with the ‘excellent Christian spirit of the troops’, that they did not hear the screams of the tortured, the gunshots at dawn, the moans of the widows”. One can understand that angry poem of León Felipe in *Español del éxodo y del llanto* (Spaniard of Exile and Tears): “I’m going to tell you / in another way; / the bishop / is he who covers up the Tragedy, / the man of deceit”.

Only in Mallorca, the number of Republicans assassinated in August and September of 1936 exceeded 1,700. **Georges Bernanos** in *The Great Cemeteries Under the Moon* (Paris 1938) gave witness to this violence. From Bishop José Miralles the massacre at the cemetery of Manacor “produced not a word of censure, nor the slightest reservation”. 200 residents were dragged out of bed in the middle of the night, murdered with a bullet to the head and then burned on a mountain. The Bishop sent to the spot “one of his priests, who, with his shoes covered in blood, gave absolution between firings”.

On June 8, 1937, notes Hilario Ragner, the priest Jeroni Alomar Poquet was executed by firing squad in the cemetery of Palma, Mallorca, for having hidden a young man who had fled from the mobilization and because his brother Francesc was member of Ezquerra Republicana.

The destruction of Guernica has remained a symbol of the atrocity of the war. It was market day. “Eyewitnesses,” writes Antony Beevor, “described the resulting scenes in terms of hell and the apocalypse. Whole families were buried in the ruins of their houses or crushed

in the *refugios*; cattle and sheep, blazing with white phosphorus, ran crazily between the burning buildings until they died. Blackened humans staggered blindly through the flames, smoke and dust, while other scabbled in the rubble, hoping to dig out friends and relatives”. Those fleeing to the town from Bilbao “had their original disbelief at the news changed by the orange-red sky in the distance”.

Between July of 1936 and December of 1937, the bodies of 2,005 men and women, including adolescent boys and girls, were thrown down the mineshafts of Caudé (Teruel), one of which has an opening of 2 square meters and a depth of 84 meters.

In his memoir, **Gumersindo de Estella** relates terrible experiences he had lived through during his years as spiritual adviser to the executed prisoners in Saragossa. For example, that of Mariano Sebastián, of Molina de Aragón, who told him “with a tone of bitter complaint that the town priest was to blame for his execution, because he and the mayor gave bad reports of him”. The Capuchin adds: “How much damage certain clergymen do to the religion of Christ. And later, if there is a revolution and they kill priests, ah!, then we are martyrs of Christianity...! And they want Christianity and the Church to defend them and raise them in honor to the altars! People like that are martyrs? But they are the ones who provoked the slaughter!!! Christianity subsists despite the bishops”.



Guernica after the bombing. Ullstein/CordonPress.

Gumersindo de Estella denounces the complicity of the clergy: “More than a few priests have insisted on certifying a passionate enterprise of hate and violence with a divine stamp”, “I say it with pain, I’m ashamed to say it, but it would be worse to remain silent. In Spain, the Church has had occasion to prove itself before its adversaries. And it has lost the opportunity. We could have convinced those of our left that a duel to death is not declared against them by the Church. Unfortunately and by the unforgivable faults of many bishops, those of our left continue believing that such a duel to death is a reality, and that we are those who have armed the power that crushes them and we have blessed the weapons that have taken away their lives and destroyed their towns”.

On a certain occasion, a young military man, a judge for executions, approached the capuchin and told him: “If one of the prisoners expresses to you the wish to speak to the judge, I beg you not to call me”, “now nothing can be done for a prisoner. I have not intervened in the trials; I am designated only for this act. And then you have to take into account that if in whatever town they insist on eliminating a person, whether he is a delinquent or not, they eliminate him, because the tribunals, despite their good intentions, can make mistakes in very urgent summary trials”. The judge withdrew without waiting for any reply.

The taking of **Malaga** by the Franco and Italian forces was atrocious. A minimum of 1,500 people were assassinated in the following months. From Feb. 6, 1937, an authentic stampede towards Almeria was bombed. The road was covered with dead and injured, while many families lost children in the flight. Some 40,000 people were able to arrive at Almeria. It was one of the most tragic episodes of the civil war, “the calvary from Malaga to Almeria, the

pitiless crime” (Rafael Alberti).

The bombing of **Barcelona** between March 17 and 20 was also terrible: 875 killed, among them 118 children, and more than 2,500 injured. “During the course of the war,” writes Anthony Beevor, “Barcelona was bombed 113 times by the Aviazone Legionaria, 80 by the Condor Legion, (40 times between 21 and 25 January 1939) and once by the Brigada Aérea Hispana. Altogether, these bombing attacks caused 2,500 deaths”.

After the taking of **Valencia**, on March 30, 1939, the so-called Column of Order and Occupation Police initiated a cleanup that, until 1956, took 4,714 to their graves, as well as the 1,165 prisoners who died in jails and concentration camps. Between the years 1939 and 1945, at least 2,663 people were executed by firing squad against the walls of the East Cemetery (now, the Almudena) of **Madrid**.

José María Pemán, in his book *Mis almuerzos con gente importante* (My Luncheons with Important People), comments on an interview with Gen. Miguel Cabanellas, when the officer presided over the Defense Junta and Pemán headed the Commission of Culture and Education. Speaking about the formulation of a decree that would prohibit wearing mourning dress, Pemán said: “My general...I believe the nationals have killed and are killing too many people”. Cabanellas thought for almost a minute and replied gravely: Yes. “In Republican Spain,” explains Pemán, “people were killed for personal motives, in the savage form called *paseo*. On the national side military tribunals almost always intervene”.

Pemán added: “My general, the experience is not difficult to carry out. Make a test with whatever Spanish cities whose inhabitants you know well, almost one by one. Say, for example, Saragossa for you and Cadiz for me. Get them to give you a nominal list of everyone executed by the national side, for this sad, but no doubt necessary, function as example or warning. Look at both lists. I can assure you that you would arrive at the conviction that the aim of warning would have been sufficiently fulfilled with four or five per cent of the dramatic and excessive list that fields seventy or eighty”. The general, an old liberal, dismissed himself with these words: “Some day we will realize that, as always occurs in these exalted episodes, there are shootings that backfire”.

## 8. Shameful Silence

“Between July 1936 and early 1937 the nationalists allowed ‘discretionary’ killing under the flag of war, but, but soon the repression became planned and methodically directed, encouraged by military and civil authorities and blessed by the Catholic Church,” denounces Antony Beevor.

The repression began as soon as a zone was conquered by the nationalist forces. The first to fall, apart from front-line defenders who were assassinated as they surrendered, were the authorities of the Republic, civil governors and mayors, councilmen, political leaders and trade unionists, even though they had not taken part in the repression by leftists: “Once the troops had moved on, a second and more intense wave of slaughter would begin, as the Falange, or in some areas the Carlists, carried out a ruthless purge of the civilian population,” not only among the working masses, but also among the progressive middle class that did not support the uprising.

On December 22, 1936, José Antonio Aguirre, president of the Government of Euskadi, denounced on Bilbao radio the killing, persecution and exile of priests “for the mere fact of loving their Basque country”, as well as the silence of the Church hierarchy. Cardinal Gomá in his “open letter to Sr. Aguirre”, which was made public on the following January 13, lamented the fact, because the execution of a priest, as one of “God’s chosen”, is “something horrible”, but noted that “the priest should respect the design of holiness, ontological and moral, in which his consecration to the highest ministries places him.”

Anthony Beevor claims that, “Even though most modern military chaplains carry sidearms to protect the wounded, it would appear that only a few, if any, Basque priests were given a pistol, and there is no evidence they used them. The primate also chose to overlook the fanatical Carlist chaplains on his own side,” many of whom used to absolve prisoners en masse before shooting them.

The Bishop of Avila **Santos Moro Briz**, published a circular in the diocesan bulletin on Nov. 9, 1936, in which he gave parish priests this singular recommendation: “When it is simply a case (as frequent as lamentable...) of the sudden appearance in the countryside of a cadaver of a person apparently victim of the revolution, but there being no official report or knowledge that he has been condemned to death, simply let it be known that “his body was found in the fields... and he received ecclesiastical burial”, but parish priests should be careful not to reveal the author or the cause of that tragic death”.



Common grave in the cemetery of Torrero (Saragossa)

Similar guidelines were sent by the Bishop of Teruel, **Anselmo Polanco**, on Aug. 10, 1937, to priests and Church laymen. Deaths caused by “revolutionaries” had to be described as “assassinations”. If the death was the result of an “order by a military authority”, the exact word was *fusilado* (shot by firing squad), but only “when this is reported officially as such or is well-known”. In reality, says Julián Casanova, rarely was it described as “officially” or “well-known”, because instead of *fusilado* a variety of euphemisms were used: “accident related to the war”, “internal hemorrhage”, “injured by firearm”. Polanco was assassinated shortly before the end of the war. **Hilari Raguier**, the monk of Montserrat, says: “Prior to the elections of February, 1936, he had published an incendiary exhortation, with crusade terminology (metaphorical then, but soon to become literal)”, “with the uprising, converted to civil war, Bishop Polanco organized and financed, certainly with funds from the Bull of the Holy Crusade, a **guerrilla** force which from Albarracín by way of the discontinuous front of Lower Aragon, penetrated the Republican zone to carry out acts of sabotage”. The Montserrat monk adds: “I learned of Bishop Polanco’s guerrilla activity from Rev. Juan Antonio Martínez García (q.e.p.d.), of the diocese of Tortosa, nephew of the canon of Albarracín Javier García Blasco, who was captured in Teruel together with his prelate and the General Vicar of the diocese Felipe Ripio Morata”. Furthermore, Amador del Fueyo, in his hagiography, let slip out that when Msgr. Polanco was made prisoner they removed from him some money that perhaps came from the Bull of the Crusade, a fund which “usually was destined for famous guerrillas”.

The Republic was prepared to release the bishop on the single condition that he remain in Rome “in a discrete attitude, until the end of the war”, but “such a generous offer did not receive an answer from the Vatican”, “indirectly it was said that the Holy See found no canonical motives to impede Polanco’s return to his diocese”. Polanco was beatified by John Paul II on Oct. 1, 1995.

## 9. Anticlerical Violence

The anticlerical violence in the Republican zone produced 6,832 victims: 4,184 secular,

2,365 priests and monks, 283 nuns. The figure was given by **Antonio Montero** in his book *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España* (History of Religious Persecution in Spain). The author points out that “in all of the history of the universal Church there is not one single precedent, not even among the Roman persecutions of bloody sacrifice, in little more than a semester, of 12 bishops, 4,000 priests and more than 2,000 religious. It is a religious fact of the first magnitude and it would be near-sighted to want to reduce it to the narrow limits of Spanish history”. It is noteworthy that the author, in time, would become Bishop of Badajoz, where the mass slaughter carried out by Franco troops was indescribable: “the blood flowed in rivers through the streets”, “militia captured in the choir of the cathedral have been executed before the altar”, “the rebels have celebrated the Assumption with a terrible slaughter”, says Tuñón de Lara.

In the case of Badajoz, where resistance was fierce, the nationals killed almost 4,000 people in one week. “The repression also was bloody in the working-class sections of Seville, where workers opposed the coup, but in Huelva, where the right took over with relative ease, the repression took more than 6,000 lives,” comments Paul Preston.



The battle of Belchite (Saragossa) was horrible

Of the 2,365 religious assassinated, 794 fell in Catalonia and 454 in Madrid. The greatest slaughter took place on Nov. 30 in Paracuellos del Jarama, closing out that month of mass executions, brought to a halt by the naming of the anarchist Melchor Rodríguez as head of prisons. 73 clergymen were buried that day next to 175 prisoners. There were 51 Augustines from El Escorial, the order who suffered the most killings in Madrid: 120.

Alfonso M. Thió, who was superior of the Jesuits imprisoned at the Modelo Jail in Barcelona during the war, was leading spiritual exercises outside the city when an anarchist patrol searched his house. The Jesuit could escape and hide himself in a nearby wood. There, alone in the night, he thought about **the roots** of that persecution: “It was evident that the new society emerging in those days totally rejected Jesus Christ and his ministers. I asked myself: do they reject the ministers because of Jesus or reject Jesus because of his ministers? The first hypothesis is very gratifying, but the second is also possible, and in such rejection wouldn’t there be something of Pharisaism?” This valuable testimony was preserved by the author of *Los Jesuitas en el Levante Rojo* (The Jesuits in Red Levante), the historian Miquel Batllori. “It doesn’t appear to be an insignificant coincidence that the Little Sisters of the Poor were spared persecution”, observes Julián Casanova.

### 10. Franco Honored by the Church

On April 16, 1939, the war ended, Pope **Pius XII** delivered a congratulatory radio message to Spain *Con inmenso gozo* “for the peace and the victory”.

On Feb. 9, with the Law of Political Responsibilities, the examining magistrate must “request the urgent presentation of files of the person presumed responsible to the Mayor, the

Local Chief of *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS*, the Parish Priest and the Commander of the local Civil Guard Station where that person dwells or has as a last residence, in reference to the political and social background of same". This way, the parish priest was implicated in a state system of repression.

The victory parade was held on May 19. The next day, in an act of rancid medieval flavor at Madrid's Santa Barbara church, Franco offered his victory sword to the Christ of Lepanto. At the door of the temple, he was received by the Bishop of Madrid, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, who handed him a bowl of holy water so he could bless himself. While the national hymn played, Franco walked to the altar under a ceremonial canopy held aloft by members of the government. A picture is worth a thousand words.



Franco honored in the Burgos cathedral (Oct. 2, 1961).  
Ullstein/CordonPress.

According to testimony of Ramón Serrano Suñer, the Bishop of Madrid said to Franco: "I have never spread incense with such satisfaction as I do now with Your Excellency". The general laid the sword at the feet of the Holy Christ, read a prayer and dropped to his knees before Cardinal Gomá, who blessed him.

They embraced. Control of education returned to the Church's hands.

The Republic's agrarian reform was abolished. The Church obtained the monopoly of religious practices. On November 9 State funding for worship and the clergy was reestablished. Women were relegated to housework, deprived of legal, economic and cultural autonomy. And in August of 1953 a new concordat with the Spanish State and Holy See reaffirmed the official religion, formally proclaimed the Catholic unity of Spain and recognized that the Chief of State had the right to propose bishops.

The Valley of the Fallen (basilica, monastery, mausoleum) is symbol of diverse realities. Franco conceived it as a "monument to Victory", as "National Monument of the Fallen", "destined to perpetuate the memory of those Fallen in the Crusade", in honor of those who gave their lives for God and for Country", as his own tomb. It is "the definitive consagrator of the memory of the crusade" (J. Casanova), "the commemorative memorial of a military victory", "presentation in stone of the marriage between the Church and the new regime", says Isaías Lafuente in *Esclavos por la patria* (Slaves for their Country). According to the decree of the Chief of State on Aug. 23, 1957, "the sacred duty of honoring our heroes and our martyrs has to be always accompanied by the sentiment of forgiveness that the gospel message imposes. Besides, the years of peace that have followed the Victory have seen the development of a policy guided by the most elevated sense of unity and brotherhood among Spaniards. This has to be, in consequence, the Monument to all the Fallen".

Working on the Pharaonic construction, which was inaugurated on April 1, 1959, were many political prisoners. According to the doctor Angel Lausín, "there were 14 deaths during construction", "and there were cases of silicosis, a great many. Almost all ended in death".

**Santos Juliá**, professor in the Department of Social History and Political Thought at the

open UNED university, makes this accusation in his book *Historias de las dos Españas* (History of the Two Spains): “The Church had triumphed in a civil war, which had meant a true hecatomb, but from which it had emerged reestablished in the fullness of its power. It had been, after martyr, executioner, completely without commiseration for the defeated; quite the opposite, not only victorious but vengeful: its clergy had attended the execution of tens of thousands of prisoners once the war was terminated, sustaining with its presence and its word a strategy of purging and cleansing”.

The journalist **María Antonia Iglesias**, in her book *Maestros de la República. Los otros santos, los otros mártires* (Teachers of the Republic. The Other Saints, the Other Martyrs), makes a simple homage to the teachers assassinated or victims of reprisals by the dictatorship. The former Minister of Education José María Maravall writes in the prologue that “in nine provinces where systematic figures exist, around 250 teachers were executed”, 25 per cent suffered some type of repression and 10 per cent were banished from teaching for life. In each one of the terrible stories collected here, says the author, there is always a priest, a priest who informs, who slanders, who with his deadly testimony – “of marxist ideas, atheist, doesn’t attend mass” – sends the poor teachers to his death.

### 11. House of Rebels

Vatican Council II (1962-1965) and pontifical documents like the encyclical *Pacem in terris* of Juan XXIII (1963) were the “authentic clarion that woke up many”. “The conciliar documents and, above all, the will prevalent in Rome and in the Church during the magna assembly upset what was defended and preached in our country during decades”, affirms the Church historian **Juan María Laboa**, in *El concilio del siglo XXI*. (The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Council).

On June 18, 1959, Cardinal Domenico Tardini, president of the commission preparing the Council, sent a letter to all the Council fathers in which he expressed the desire of the Pope to know their wishes, suggestions and observations. Among the replies from the spanish bishops concerns about Church and State relations appeared frequently. In no case did they express fear or worry for the way they functioned. Rather, they tried to clear up some official concepts or, even, export what they considered optimum relations. Cardinal Primate Pla y Deniel said that “not only individuals and families, but also States and nations were obliged to profess the true religion. In the nations where the Catholic unit exists socially, the State must confess and protect the Catholic religion.”

No small number of bishops wrote in the same sense. One understands their surprise and alarm on reading the declaration of the Council *Dignitatis humanae* on religious freedom, which clashes directly with spanish judicial laws: “Truth is not imposed by any other means than the strength of the truth itself”, “the human individual has the right to religious freedom”, this right “must be recognized in the judicial laws of society” (DH 1 and 2)

The Jesuit Matías García comments in *El concilio del siglo XXI*: “No one denies the perturbation that the Council and, more concretely, the DH declaration introduced into the regime born on July 18, 1936, obliging it to modify the civil regulation on religious freedom and the way of conceiving (/and, above all, of living) Church-State relations. With the Council, so-called National Catholicism was left mortally wounded at its root. The regime felt the blow from the first moment”.

The difficult evolution of the bishops was driven by the rapid transformation of the mentality of priests, and by the smooth but decisive actions of the nuncio **Luigi Dadaglio** who effectively helped with his episcopal selections for majority changes in the Conference of Bishops.

An important landmark was the **Joint Assembly of Bishops and Priests**, held in Madrid from 13 to 18 September, 1971. “The Joint Assembly,” writes Laboa, “signified in the spanish Church the predominance of conciliar tendencies and represents, in a certain way, the

official entrance of the spirit of the Council”, “a fundamentalist tradition which became monolithic had characterized the last century of our Church, tradition confirmed and touched by the terrible persecution of 1936 and by the years of Catholic exaltation, unity and withdrawal”.

The Assembly confronted the position of the Church toward the Civil War. The first speech, which dealt with the Church in Spanish society, includes this conclusion: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar of God, and his word is no longer within us (Jn 1,10). Thus, we humbly recognize and ask forgiveness for not knowing at the time how to be true ministers of reconciliation in the heart of our land, divided by a war among brothers”.

As Santos Juliá indicates, the word reconciliation had been adopted then by everyone. The socialist Indalecio Prieto, at least from 1942, spoke of reconciliation in a sense similar to that raised by the Communist Party in 1956; some words pronounced by Pla y Deniel on being sworn in as Primate of Toledo served him to put forward for the first time a policy of reconciliation, “confessing the complete truth and feeling shame for our crimes and those of others”.

But in the Joint Assembly, included with reconciliation was a recognition of guilt and a plea for forgiveness. And that was too much for 70 clergymen present who voted against it. The conclusion fell short of the two-thirds majority needed and could not be approved. A modification was introduced: “we have not always known how to be true ministers of reconciliation”. Submitted to another vote, the conclusion obtained 122 votes in favor, 113 against and 10 abstentions.

Cardinal **Vicente Enrique y Tarancón** in his *Confesiones* comments: “It was logical that that conclusion – of which the official media had spoken in sharp and agonizing tones – would raise hackles in the conference room. I foresaw this, but I believed sincerely and honestly that it was convenient that that voice be heard – approved by bishops and priests, although it did not obtain the necessary votes to be approved – in a meeting of that class in order to begin awakening the conscience of many”.

That voice meant a **national confession** and an **ecclesiastical confession**. Certainly, among other indicators, the civil war revealed the evangelization deficit of our country, which – even having an old Catholic tradition – is, nevertheless, a country of mission. The deficit was also revealed in the attitude, against peace and justice, adopted in the face of such madness.

The attitude of the prophetic proclamation is also evident now: *They and their fathers rebelled against me until this day. The children have a hard head and an incorrigible heart; I send you to tell them: The Lord says so. And they, whether they listen or not, are a rebel house, they will know that a prophet is among them* (Ez 2, 3-5).

The transition to democracy was made possible thanks to an agreement for **amnesty** and a beginning of **national reconciliation**. Spanish bishops, revived by Vatican Council II, supported the transition. The President of the Conference of Bishops, **Gabino Díaz Merchán**, stated so at a special Synod held in Rome (1985): “The Council has helped us be instruments of reconciliation and peace amid Spanish society, which in these years has undergone profound cultural, social and political change”.

In effect, says Santos Juliá, “the representation of the civil war as a useless fratricidal slaughter, the discourse on reconciliation, the tearing down of divisions between victors and the defeated, the mixing of Christians and Communists, and collaboration in common actions determined the appearance of a generation of democrats before the democracy that had renounced the great historical themes in favor of common vindication of rights and liberties”.

In that context of social change and Church renovation, in June of 1976, the **Conference of Spanish Bishops** approves the catechism *Con vosotros está*, which brings human rights into

homes and presents them as “a clear sign of the action of the Spirit in today’s world”. Here are some of the most important human rights included in the catechism: religious freedom, education, worker participation (the right to form unions, to strike), political participation (the right to assemble and form associations, the right to vote, authentic elections), the right to truly humane life (no one will be submitted to tortures or punishments or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment).

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the civil war, the Conference of Spanish Bishops says in a few words in its pastoral guide *Builders of the peace*: “It would not be good that the civil war is converted into a subject that cannot be discussed with freedom and with objectivity. Spaniards need to know with serenity what truly happened in those years of bitter remembrance”, “knowing how to forgive and how to forget are, apart from being a Christian obligation, indispensable conditions for the future reconciliation of peace. Although the Church does not pretend to be free of all error, those who reproach it for siding with one of the contenders must take into account the brutality of religious persecution unleashed in Spain from 1931. None of this, neither for one side or the other, should be repeated. May forgiveness and magnanimity be the general climate of the new times. We all gather up the inheritance of those who died for their faith, forgiving those who killed them, and those who offered their lives for a future of peace and of justice for all Spaniards”.



Cardenal Tarancón and a page of the catechism *Con vosotros está*, approved in 1976. Human rights arrive in the home.

After the regression of a long pontificy, spanish Bishops now find themselves a **step backward**. Some are canonized and not a word is said about others. Pius XII was opposed to massive and indiscriminate canonization. A similar attitude was adopted by John XXIII and Paul VI, who halted canonical processes that from the end of the war arrived at the Vatican. Things changed with John Paul II. Up to January of the year 2000 239 were beatified.

The Benedictine Hilari Ragner denounces the present state of things: “In religious matters the lances are still poised, I won’t say as in 1936, but almost. Not only does the vision of victors and defeated remain basically in counterpoint, but also it unleashes more passion than when any other aspect when the Civil War is dealt with. It is especially those defenders of the notion of crusade and promoters of the processes of beatification and canonization of martyrs of the Civil War who, after so many years of delivering their version, react in a way that is very unscientific, with special aggressiveness, when another, distinct, one reaches their ears”.

Spanish bishops, in their *Moral Orientations for the Present Situation in Spain*, display concern for the “threatened reconciliation”: “Our recent history is more agitated and

convulsive than would be desired”, “a society that appeared to have found the path to reconciliation and understanding, once again finds itself divided and confronted. A utilization of the ‘historical memory’, guided by a selective memory, again opens old wounds of the Civil War and heightens conflicting sentiments that seemed to have been overcome”. For certain, war mentality spears in some sectors, which is not good. However, memory is for all (finally!), which is healthy, just and necessary.

## 12. Dry Bones in the Middle of the Plain

**The Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory** laments the opportunity lost by John Paul II during his last visit to Spain, May 3 and 4 of 2003. The canonization of the priest Father Poveda, assassinated on July 28, 1936, “would have been the opportunity of the Church to forgive and ask forgiveness for its collaboration with the Franco dictatorship, and thus recognize the thousands of families that are still searching for their loved ones”.

“There are gigantic common graves in Extremadura, where there were mass assassinations at the Castuera concentration camp, in Asturias – 1,600 in Oviedo. 2,000 in Gijón – and in various parts of Andalusia. In Catalonia alone the regional government has located 54 interments of this type, with 4,000 cadavers in Barcelona,” says Paul Preston

In Spain there are more than 30,000 unidentified bodies which remain in common graves.

In the book *Las fosas de Franco* (Franco’s Graves), Emilio Silva and Santiago Machías cover Spain from corner to corner and in each cardinal point they find “territories sowed with horror”, common graves in roadside ditches, gorges, wells and cementaries: graves in Candeleda (Avila), Medellín (Badajoz), Píkoketa (Guipúzcoa), Palma de Mallorca, Valladolid, Villarrube (La Coruña), Soulecín (Orense), El Fuerte de San Cristóbal (Pamplona), Puerto de Pajares (León), La Barranca (Logroño), Los Pozos de Caudé (Teruel), Las Minas de Castuera (Badajoz), La Sima de Jinámar (Gran Canaria), Las Cañadas del Teide (Tenerife), El Barranco del Toro (Castellón), cementerios de San Salvador (Oviedo), Ceaes (Gijón), Ciriego (Santander), Astorga (León), Mérida (Badajoz), Valdenoceda (Burgos), Badajoz, Zamora, Talavera de la Reina (Toledo), Cartagena, Espinardo (Murcia), Melilla, Colmenar Viejo (Madrid), Barcelona, Tarragona, Lérida, Gerona. And many other places of Spain’s geography.



Grave of Piedrafita de Babia (León). Reuters/CordonPress.

Commenting on these things, on May 9, 2003, our group of Tres Cantos (Madrid) came across the passage of the **dry bones** from the prophet Ezekiel: *The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the Lord and set me in the center of the plain, which was now filled with bones. He made me walk among them in every direction so that I saw how many they were on the surface of the plain.*

*How dry they were! He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come to life? “Lord God,” I answered, “you alone know that. Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord (Ez 37,1-4). Also seventy years! The place that is in exile is a field of dry bones, without life, without future, without hope. We must*

listen to the word of God, the spirit of God must come, from every cardinal point, from the four winds, so that the people in exile can return to their land, their place, their home. Or, what is the same, rise from the grave, resuscitate, live. To return is to resuscitate. Let's be alert.

A living community has to place itself **in the middle of the plain** and proclaim the **word of God about the dry bones**.

### FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP REFLECTION

1. The recovery of historical memory in Spain is a controversial problem, before which there are diverse and confronted positions. What seems to me the more healthy, fair or reasonable?

- it is not convenient, it is a way of reopening old wounds
- it is a way of closing them, question of justice
- the people who ignore their history are condemned to repeat it
- dialogue and analysis are important
- one side honored its dead, the other side did not have that opportunity
- according to a poll, 64.5 per cent are in favor of investigating everything related to the Civil War, uncovering common graves and rehabilitating those affected
- many call for the application of international Law: no expiration time, the right to know, right of justice, right of reparation
- a single vision of the past was imposed: the Civil War as crusade
- another vision exists: the Civil War as madness
- what happened seventy years ago, we are learning more and more about it
- it is good to know it: all discovery is light
- we must review the past
- we must review the position of the Church
- one thing is give a life for Christ and other is take it from others in the name of Christ

2. Picasso did not explain the symbolism of the Guernica figures. If we examine the painting from right to left, what do we find? What does it suggest to us?

The Valley of the Fallen is a symbol of diverse realities. Studying carefully the photo we can indicate some

3. In the five-year period before the Civil War we find some antecedents that we should take into account. Which seem to us more important? Why?

- the proclamation of the Republic
- the hostility of the right
- the position of fundamentalist bishops
- the approval of the Constitution
- the organization of the right
- the coup of Gen. Sanjurjo
- the proclamation of the Catalan nation
- the revolt in Asturias
- the agrarian problem
- the formation of the Popular Front

4. Why did Civil War break out?

- because of the uprising against the legitimately constituted order
- as defense or re-establishment of order
- the uprising begins by the method of physically liquidating the adversary
- the answer is in the same line

- the resources of the state come apart
  - madness prevails
5. In both bands there were heroes, victims, criminals, martyrs.  
What experiences can we share?
6. What do we think of the various reactions that the Civil War produced?
- violence is legitimate for the benefit of order, country, religion
  - violence is condemned against people and sacred things
  - there is economic collaboration with the rebels, but without publicity
  - a war of extermination is presented as a holy war
  - one thing is to conquer, another is to convince
7. Analyse and comment on some aspects of the bishops' collective letter:
- it doesn't define the war as a crusade, but it suggests as much
  - the cause of the war lies not with those who staged the coup d'état, but in the legislators and rulers of the Republic
  - they justify the uprising, the war, and the national movement
  - they denounce the excesses of the communist revolution, but not the others
  - numerical errors are many
  - the communists die reconciled, the nationalists (by the thousands) die martyrs
  - they respond to some objections
8. Some limitations to the collective letter:
- it ignores the social conflict underlining the war
  - it simplifies the Basque problem
  - it lacks feeling for democratic values
  - repression on the nationalist side is overlooked or silenced
  - the bishop is the one who covers up the Tragedy, the one who deceives
9. What does anticlerical violence signify? What are the roots? Are priests rejected because of Jesus or Jesus because of his priests?
10. A revision of the past is necessary:
- Franco under a ceremonial canopy: one picture is worth a thousand words
  - national confession, ecclesiastical confession: we did not know in time how to be true ministers of reconciliation in the heart of our nation divided by a war between brothers
  - they are rebels
  - the Church facilitated the transition
  - it has taken a step backward
  - a living community must place itself, as the prophet Ezekiel, in the middle of the plain and proclaim the word of God over the dry bones.

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Oct. 2006

Translated by LeRoy Ferguson