

The Divisions within the Catholic Church During the Spanish Civil War  
(1936-1939)

By Benjamin DeLeo

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## Introduction

The Spanish Civil War was an unprecedented upheaval of religious and cultural values for Spain, not to mention the vicious bloodshed perpetrated by both the Republican and the Nationalist forces.<sup>1</sup> Much of the conflict was centered on, and ultimately exacerbated by, the Catholic Church in Spain. The Catholic Church held a particularly important role in the lives of the Spanish populace, and it had so for generations. Volumes have been written, entire libraries filled, with the historical and cultural importance of the Church in Spain. As such, this paper will not seek to describe the lengthy relationship of the Church to the people, which simply cannot be encapsulated here. It will, however, seek to dismantle and disprove the common notion that the Catholic Church was a monolithic institution that operated as a singular entity. The Catholic Church is, like any other institution, made up of individuals whose experiences, and values color their decisions. A variety of individuals from all ecclesiastical levels exist that demonstrate the divisions within the Church during the Spanish Civil War, and it is precisely these divisions, often in defiance of popular narrative, that are so often overlooked.

It would be remiss to ignore the fact that much of the clergy within Spain supported the Nationalist cause championed by General Francisco Franco. Despite this, several prominent members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, such as Cardinal Francesc d'Asís Vidal i Barraquer, and Bishop Monseñor Mateo Múgica y Urrestarazu, either openly or passively defied the Nationalist cause. Additionally, those who sided with the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive understanding of the atrocities committed, and by which group, see the introduction of *The Spanish Holocaust* by Paul Preston.

rebel's cause did not all operate with the same level of religious militancy promulgated by those in the heart of Nationalist Spain. All these examples demonstrate the Catholic Church in Spain was more multifaceted than it might appear.

Spanish Civil War hosts a variety of competing interests within the Church, all vying for supremacy in the chaotic space that is Spain from 1936 to 1939. The chapters are divided so as to facilitate a progression of ideas, and to outline key factors in the divisions. The clergy, as proverbial foot soldiers in the hierarchy of the Church, occupy the first section. It is here that the fanatical nature of many clergy is explored. Climbing the hierarchical ladder are the bishops, who arguably hold the greatest sway amongst their flock, or, at the very least, have the most visible pulpit. Their most influential members, Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer and Cardinal Isidro Gomá y Tomás, possessed immense influence over the narrative of the War, not to mention members of the Vatican. The Vatican's influence is contrasted with the bishop's and lower clergy's influence as the Holy See has the advantage of greater objectivity. It is through the lens of the Vatican, the bishops, the clergy, and the Basque priests, who supported the Republic, that we begin to see the separations in the attitudes of the members of the Church. Finally, the paper reexamines the character of Vidal, and why he became such a steadfast proponent of anti-war sentiment. The paper culminates in a bittersweet victory, with the flag of the Falange flying high, and members of the Church, like Gomá, left to wonder what their actions have wrought.

Although the predominant ecclesiastical sympathies within Spain laid decidedly with the Nationalist rebels, the position of the Vatican was one of cautious neutrality, especially at the beginning of the war. The Pope at the time, Pius XI, walked a proverbial

political tightrope, at times denouncing the “Communists” while simultaneously condemning the violence committed by both sides. Despite obvious sympathies toward the Nationalist cause, Pius XI continued to refuse to overtly support the rebellion, much to the frustration of General Franco and clergy close to him. Perhaps afraid that the endorsement of the Holy See would spur even more violence against local clergy and civilians, the Vatican would consistently refuse to recognize the war as a “Crusade”, a designation many Spanish Bishops and priests enthusiastically endorsed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Of note: All quotes from primary sources are translated from Spanish by professional translators. Unless specified, the primary source quotes are taken from the secondary source without the entirety of the document available. Much of the primary sources used are not digitized, and as such the secondary source will be cited. If the document in which the quote is embedded is available online and in English, it will be at the end of this publication.

## The Church in Spain

The Catholic Church in Spain has a long and complicated history that, for obvious reasons, cannot be discussed adequately here. It is, however, necessary to understand the situation of the Church in Spain leading up to the Civil War, in order to understand its actions during the conflict. The Catholic Church in Spain long enjoyed a close relationship with the government, especially during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, which ended with the ruler's exile in 1930.<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid a complete revolution, King Alphonso XIII worked with the new government, which christened itself the Second Republic, to create a constitutional system and repeal the policies of Primo de Rivera. Many of those who were the most vociferous for reform were anticlerical and saw the Church in Spain as an obstacle to progress, due in part to the vast wealth and land that the Catholic Church had accumulated over centuries.<sup>4</sup> This was compounded by the fact that the Church had increasingly begun investing its considerable wealth in banks and businesses, which were much more dissolvable in times of crisis than land.<sup>5</sup> As historian José Sánchez writes, "Of more consequence, the Church lost contact with the working class, something which never could have happened if it possessed landed wealth."<sup>6</sup> The classist struggle was an ever-present undercurrent in religious politics within Spain, and would continue to drive much of the conflict within the Republic and ultimately the Spanish Civil War.

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<sup>3</sup> José Sánchez, "The Spanish Church and The Revolutionary Republican Movement, 1930–1931," *Church History* 31, no. 4 (1962): 430.

<sup>4</sup> Anticlericalism has a long history in Spain, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Catholicism Versus Laicism: Culture Wars and the Making of Catholic National Identity in Spain, 1898–1931." *European History Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 2013): 657–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691413499283>.

<sup>5</sup> José M Sánchez., *Church and State during the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1961) 46.  
<sup>6</sup> Sánchez. *Church and State during the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936*, 47.

The new government, which christened itself the Second Spanish Republic, immediately clashed with the episcopate. Isidro Gomá y Tomás, Bishop of Tarragona, decried socialism as the “antithesis of Catholicism” and defended what he saw as the Church’s right to engage in politics.<sup>7</sup> It is important to mention that the opinion of a clergy member on the topic of socialism was usually closely related to their own status within the hierarchy of the Church. Lower priests, who were often as poor as the parishioners they served, were more likely to be in favor of socialism, while the Bishops harbored much more antisocialist sentiment.<sup>8</sup> The lower-class priests were not only members of the Church, but they also had mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, all of whom stood to benefit from increased wages and better working conditions. The Bishops, conversely, usually came from families that could afford quality education, and were more likely to see the socialists as agents of chaos, rather than change. These divisions were often lost on the more fanatical of the anticlerical movement, painting all men of the cloth as being of similar attitudes. These attitudes would color much of the disunion between the Church later in the war.

The government would go on to further curb ecclesiastical power, much to the chagrin of the traditionalists, ardent Catholics, and the clergy themselves. On January 23, 1932, the Republican government dissolved the Jesuits, nationalizing their landed possessions and taking their holdings in Spanish banks. This was met with fervent opposition from Catholics from across Spain. Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer, whose opposition to the Nationalist cause in the revolution will be discussed at length, led the

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<sup>7</sup> José Sánchez, “The Spanish Church and The Revolutionary Republican Movement, 1930–1931” *Church History* 31 no. 4 (1962): 430 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3162745>.

<sup>8</sup> Sánchez., *Church and State during the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936* 47.

charge in decrying the dissolution of the Jesuits. Basque Catholics protested the decree en masse, and the decree was wildly unpopular in all but the most anticlerical circles.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately for the Church, these anticlerical activists occupied an important role in the legislative powers of the Second Republic.

Right-wing hostility to the republic was increasingly motivated by the priests. The Republic further entrenched the separation of church and state through several laws, including ending the state money to the Church and dissolving the monopoly the Church had on education. This enraged many lay people and those in clergy, who saw the actions as targeted towards families.<sup>10</sup> One priest, from Castellón la Plana, near Valencia, preached “We should be prepared to fight a civil war before we tolerate the separation of Church and State.”<sup>11</sup> This was a common feeling among clergy who saw the violent anticlerics and the reforming Republican-Protestant coalition as being one and the same.

Interestingly, the initial attitude of the Vatican to the Republican government was surprisingly supportive. Although operating with caution, the Vatican recognized the New Government as legitimate, due, in no small part, to the abolition of the Patronato Real doctrine.<sup>12</sup> This doctrine stated that the monarchy, not the Papacy, could appoint bishops in Spain. As such, the monarchy could choose bishops that, while still beholden to the Church, would also promote the monarchy’s interests. The Vatican gave an order to all bishops within Spain to write a pastoral letter declaring the Republic as legitimate,

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<sup>9</sup> Sánchez., *Church and State during the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936* 141.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York, New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2012), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=7PKHUTjX0UAC&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PT3> 32.

<sup>11</sup> Preston 32.

<sup>12</sup> Hilari Ragner, *Gunpowder and Incense: the Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War*. (Madison, New York: Routledge , 2007) 21.

and despite those among the clergy who had deep monarchist sympathies, almost all obediently wrote the letter.

Even before the war, stark divisions existed among the upper clergy. For instance, several clergymen wrote the letter, but their spirit was far from what was desired. These included Gomá, then Bishop of Tarazona, and Pedro Segura, Cardinal of Toledo, both of whom would go on to be some of Franco's most fervent supporters among the Spanish clergy.<sup>13</sup> Both lamented the fall of the monarchy, and the dire consequences should a godless regime ultimately prevail. Segura's letter in 1931 was particularly vehement writing, "The history of Spain does *not* begin this year! We cannot renounce our rich patrimony of sacrifices and glory accumulated by a long success of generations."<sup>14</sup> He appealed to the faithful from across Spain, exhorting them to support the shared history between the monarchy and the Church.

In the time leading up to the rebellion and the beginning of the Civil War, other members of the clergy continued to defy both governmental and Vaticinal protocol. In 1934, Aniceto Castro Albarrán, the Magistral Canon of Salamanca, wrote a book entitled *El Derecho ala Rebeldía*.<sup>15</sup> In it he outlined a theological incitement to armed rebellion. This was contrary to Vatican policy, and certainty against Republican laws.<sup>16</sup> Vidal i Barraquer requested that the book be denounced by Rome, to which the Vatican refused. Such calls became increasingly common, as did the blur between Catholic doctrine and nationalist propaganda.

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<sup>13</sup> Ragner 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ragner 23.

<sup>15</sup> Translated as "The Right to Rebel". Ragner 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ragner 33.



Vidal, ever the pacifist, became concerned with what he saw as the violent rhetoric being preached by men of the cloth. These men, who vowed to follow the teachings of Jesus and of the Church, were simultaneously calling for violent uprising. The paradox of using violent means to spread peaceful teachings was not lost on Vidal. In a letter dated December 6<sup>th</sup> 1933, he wrote on those agitating for violence:

“They do not comprehend that although a violent backlash might be successful at first, it would soon lead to a revolution more disastrous and with more grievous consequences than any we have suffered before. A true victory can be found only in knowing how to consolidate the successes we have achieved so far and in acting zealously among the masses by teaching by teaching and guiding the conscience of the faithful by using the instruments that God has placed in our hands, Acción Católica above all.”<sup>17</sup>

The foresight seen here by the Cardinal of Tarragona is truly remarkable. He accurately predicted a conflict that would take the lives of hundreds of thousands and displace countless more. The bloody war garnered both tacit and overt support by many members of the church. Despite this, Vidal is a prime example of those within the Church that offered peace as a solution to the violence.

These events illustrate that the attitudes of many within the Church during the rebellion were not born out of vacuum, but rather were continuations of existing dissatisfaction towards the Republican government. It is important to provide context,

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<sup>17</sup> Acción Católica was a movement of Catholic individuals who sought to exert a Catholic influence on society. They operated outside of the realm of politics but encouraged politicians to act in the best interest of Catholics. Ragner 32.

and to demonstrate that the events leading up to the War were a foundation for the situations during the conflict. It is also necessary to characterize the bishops and priests as people, rather than simply positions. They are subject to the same biases and emotions that constantly drive human decisions. The two influences, emotions and context, help to explain why the divisions within the Church arose the way that they did, and to exactly how supposed men of peace felt called to incite violence.

## Chapter 2: Fanaticism of the Clergy

The initial uprising in 1936 was characterized by not only an intense dislike of the Republic, but also an overwhelming suspicion of any individual with sectional ties, whether they were clergymen or not. The sectional ties were born out of centuries of differences within Spain, some of which were present even before the notion of Spain as a unit began. The history of the tensions is far too vast of a topic to be discussed here. It is sufficed to say that for the sake of the war, the Nationalist cause strongly distrusted Basques and Catalans. Both regions enjoyed relative autonomy under the Republic, whereas the Nationalists sought to erase the distinctions in favor of a unified State. The Nationalists' attitude was not as much the disapproval of Catalan or Basque autonomy, but, as Ragner puts it, "transparently anti-Catalan"<sup>18</sup>. Even staunch supporters of the Rebellion in the Clergy were under intense suspicion.

One particularly compelling example is that of Maximiliano Arboleya Martínez, an Austurian Canon, traveled to Nationalist-held Valladolid in 1937.<sup>19</sup> Arboleya was a supporter of the revolution and the Nationalist cause, and traveled to Valladolid to discuss the war with what he perceived as his friends, having preached and done social work together with many of the local clergy. Much to his surprise, the clergy who he had thought would welcome him were openly hostile and accused him of harboring Basque sympathies. The same happened to his prelate, as well as the Archbishop of Valladolid who, as said by a clergyman, "... was lucky to die in time. If he had lived, things would

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<sup>18</sup> Ragner 43.

<sup>19</sup> Ragner 42.

have gone badly for him...”<sup>20</sup>. Arboleya was treated, ironically, as a leper for the crime of not being perceived as properly fanatical.

As is so often in the beginning of wars, a strong fervor takes hold of the populace and drives the emotional climate into a state of euphoric fanaticism. Such is the case for the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. The clergy, especially those incensed by the Republic’s failure to protect the Catholic Church, were just as fervent for war, if not more so. It is easy to see why, as many of the reforms of the Republic repeatedly diminished Church power. Even so, it is truly remarkable the depth to which local priests, especially in the region of Navarre in Northern Spain, embraced the violence of the war. Some even went as far as to volunteer for in the columns for the front.<sup>21</sup>

Father Huidobro was one such Navarrese priest. He volunteered to accompany a regiment on the battlefield. One account dictates how a tank was used as cover, while behind it was set up tables to serve as placement for the wine and bread. Huidobro then “said Mass as the bullets of the Godless crashed against the iron wall” according to an eyewitness.<sup>22</sup> Huidobro also wrote that it was his belief that the wars within Spain, the current Civil War and those that preceded it, were important tools used by God to enact His Kingdom on earth. This war helped preserve “a living, ardent faith which gives us hope in breathing new life into a better Spain” according to Huidobro.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note, however, that while Father Huidobro was zealous, he was not overly cruel. Later in the war, once the Nationalists had begun securing Republican-controlled territory, they

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<sup>20</sup> Ragner 42.

<sup>21</sup> Ragner 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ragner 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ragner 54.

began executing suspected rebels without trial. Huidobro was strongly against these extra-judicial executions and pleaded with the Nationalist forces to present evidence before meting out judgement.

While Navarre's priests were particularly zealous, they did not possess a monopoly on clergymen who fervently supported the War. Andalusia, region in southern Spain known for its piety among other things, had its fair share of notable priests, the most remarkable of which being Father Laorden. After his church had been set alight in the town of Rociana, Father Laorden sought refuge in the homes of several notable socialists in the town. The local Falange, the political party associated with the Nationalists, captured those deemed responsible. Shouting from the Balcony down to the crowd of Falangists and the accused conspirators, Laorden said "You all doubt believe that, because I am a priest, I have come with words of repentance. Not at all! War against all of them until the trace has been eliminated!"<sup>24</sup> Father Laorden says it well, these are not the words of a priest.

Perhaps the most enthusiastic priest of those documented was Father Vicente, a priest with the Raqueté. The Raqueté was a band of particularly ruthless soldiers operating rearguard of the Nationalist forces. He desired to be in the thick of the action with bullets practically whizzing by his head as well as the members of the Raqueté. The violence and bloodshed did not deter Vicente. A British volunteer for the nationalist forces wrote of him that "He was the most fearless and most bloodthirsty man I ever met

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<sup>24</sup> Preston 183.

in Spain.”<sup>25</sup> Vicente liked to spot targets, and the volunteer noted “It seemed to me he could barely contain himself from snatching my rifle and loosing off.”<sup>26</sup>

The time just before the war saw its share of priests acting rather like soldiers than men of the cloth. These clerics were called *curas trabucaires*.<sup>27</sup> There are accounts of these priests owning, and even using, firearms. In Murcia in south-eastern Spain, a parish priest, with his residence surrounded and fearing for his life, opened fire on the mob, killing one. In Santander was a similar situation, with the priest shooting into a crowd and injuring one of the demonstrators. One parish priest had as many as three firearms, a Winchester rifle, a Mauser pistol, and a Remington revolver.<sup>28</sup> The atmosphere just before the war, and certainly during the first months, were terrifying for many local parish priests. As a result, some turned to violence to defend themselves, while other abstained and were persecuted. The fact that these individuals defended themselves from masses of enraged people is not what is particularly surprising here. It is that these men swore an oath to the Church to uphold the values of Jesus Christ, which are presented to include pacifism, not violence. Additionally, this demonstrates the tense atmosphere for many priests leading up to the war and help give reason to why so many local priests defended the Uprising. News of the episodes were not kept to the local region, and reports of mobs burning Church’s spread across Spain, while other dispatches describing the killings enraged ever-more anticlerical sentiment.

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<sup>25</sup> Preston 183.

<sup>26</sup> Preston 184.

<sup>27</sup> Translated as “Mixed up priests”.

<sup>28</sup> Preston 117.

It is important to note, despite the vociferous among the clergy who supported the Rebellion, that there were those who were uneasy, to say the least, about the reprisals and killings perpetuated by the Nationalists. Quite often, Republican women were raped, had their heads shaved, and forced to imbibe castor oil to soil themselves.<sup>29</sup> Local priests sometimes advocated for these women, protesting their atrocious treatment. In Villamartín, the local parish priest objected to the torture and killings of accused Republican sympathizers.<sup>30</sup> He was ignored. In Cantillana, a town just northeast of Seville in the heart of Andalusia, a local priest decried the extrajudicial killings of the Nationalist Civil Guard. In a sermon, he said that “If the Church is damaged, it can be repaired; if the statues have been burnt, they can be replaced; but the husband or son who was killed can never be replaced.”<sup>31</sup> For this, the priest was forced to leave the town at the conclusion of the war.

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<sup>29</sup> Preston 161.

<sup>30</sup> Preston 143.

<sup>31</sup> Preston 162.

### Initial reaction of the Bishops

On the outset of the War in late 1936, the Spanish Bishops did not all act with unity, some were much more fervent in their support for the Nationalist cause than their fellow prelates, while others preached caution and reserve. Isidro Gomá y Tomás, Franco's most ardent supporter among the bishops, felt little trepidation in supporting the Nationalist cause. The cause was intertwined with National Catholicism, which proclaimed that Spain was a Catholic state, and as such belonged in the hands of only those who virtuously upheld the faith.<sup>32</sup> Additionally Gomá found a like-minded national in Franco in that both believed in the absolute supremacy of the Catholic religion. Taking it a step further from National Catholicism, Gomá was an *integrista*, meaning he sought all persons in Spain to worship Catholicism, and the prohibition of any other kinds of religions.<sup>33</sup> This blended beautifully with the anti-semitic, anti-masonic, message of the Falangists, and though the two could have disagreements, the overall relationship was one of cooperation and collaboration.

Other Spanish Bishops did not possess the same zeal for the Nationalist cause that Gomá did, though they undoubtedly held nationalist sympathies. Perhaps they were horrified by the violence or afraid of reprisals by Republican mobs. Gomá chastised these bishops for their silence in a Francoist pamphlet distributed throughout Spain in June of 1937.<sup>34</sup> In it, he describes the gloriousness of the National Cause and God's blessings on the soldiers and chiefs. He says of this, that although God's will be with the Nationalist cause, several of the bishops have shown a "greatness of neglect shown by some since, or

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<sup>32</sup> Ragner 33.

<sup>33</sup> This is also translated as "fundamentalist". Cardinal Segura was also an ardent *integrista*.

<sup>34</sup> Ragner 64.



at least *at* the beginning. It is an omission which the people in the supreme moments of their history, must never forget.”<sup>35</sup> These words, coming from a respected cardinal and a primate of Spain, carry prodigious weight.

The clergy in the republican zones at the beginning of the war faced severe dangers, persecution, and threats. Anticlerical fervor swept across great swathes of the republic, most notably Catalonia, caused the death of thousands of clergymen, and forced the others to go into hiding. They adopted plainclothes to avoid vicious mobs and depended on the charity of a few families known to them. To address the need for aid for the clandestine priests, Cardinal Vidal i Barraquer started a collection that was almost expressly to feed the impoverished clergymen in the province of Tarragona. The payments into the collection were intended to alleviate the intense suffering. Gomá also set up a collection, though his was drastically different in its goal and support. The public intention Gomá’s collection was to repair the sacked churches in formerly Republican territory that was now in Nationalist hands. In practice, the Nationalist government saw Gomá’s collection as an avenue to raise military funds and promote the war abroad as a struggle between Catholics and the Godless. Therefore, Vidal’s collection was a threat to the Nationalists and was decried as such.

The money from Gomá’s collection never helped the also impoverished clergy in the National zone, nor did it help rebuild the Church. Through the help of Irish Catholics, many of whom saw the war in Spain as a religious crusade, Gomá’s collection gained over £44,000. 72% of the £44,000 or £32,000 went directly to the Nationalist cause. Of

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<sup>35</sup> Riquer 64.

the other £12,000 there is no record. Gomá, far from being dismayed that the collection was being militarized, handed the collection over to Franco's government. He did so with the request that the supplies be used for medical purposes for sick and wounded soldiers, but in practice the money likely went to munitions for the front. It is important to contextualize the circumstances that Cardinal Gomá was forced to deal with. Gomá sought to use the money to curry favor with Franco and secure a future position for the church in an uncertain time for the institution. Gomá saw the funds as indirectly helping the church, albeit at the cost of the churches and priests at the time.

Vidal, on the other hand, was much more concerned with giving aid to the threatened priests in his home province than military aid. Like Gomá, Vidal was a bishop and a cardinal and must have had the same trepidations about the future of the church. Despite similar situations Cardinal Vidal viewed the prevention of suffering as his most important role. He wrote to every cardinal in the world in September of 1937, asking for alms for the suffering Catalan clergy. The Irish primate who was helped finance Gomá's collection rejected Vidal's offer, saying that they had already given to Gomá. Gomá's collection was news to Vidal, who mentioned that as of the writing of the letter on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, "the Catalan clergy have not benefited from it".<sup>36</sup> He wanted to believe that the funds were simply delayed in bureaucracy, rather than expropriated for the war effort.<sup>37</sup>

The two collections, each with particular goals in mind, are examples of the division between two of the highest ecclesiastical positions in all of Spain and

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<sup>36</sup> Ragner 75.

<sup>37</sup> Ragner 75.

demonstrate the attitudes of each man. Gomá felt little hesitancy about supporting the Nationalists, despite the dictatorial control the military exercised. He rushed to support them and their cause, at the intent to secure the position of the Church. Vidal saw the situation much differently, and was rightfully cautious about the rebels, especially with regards to the Catalan clergy and people whom he aimed to protect. It is not so much that Vidal was an opponent of the Nationalist cause, though Franco's government painted him as such, but that he was diametrically opposed to violence to advance the position of the Church. It was this violence that so worried Vidal, as he saw the bloodshed unleashed by the uprising as neither necessary nor justified.

On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1936, less than a month before the beginning of the war, a pastoral decree was issued by the two bishops of the Basque country.<sup>38</sup> This decree condemned the Basque nation for taking up arms, and that they had no right to defend themselves with force. It was written by Gomá and instructed to be disseminated to the rebellious Basque priests and population who had sided with the Republic. The two bishops Mateo Múgica of Vitoria and Marcelino Oleachea of Pamplona both dutifully signed the document; the request of a primate is hard to ignore. Both men, due to the circumstance of being a Basque and their own convictions, were forced to navigate a proverbial minefield of politics during the war. Their stories are correspondingly fascinating and provide an insight into Bishops caught between their ecclesiastical instructions and their love of the people.

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<sup>38</sup> Ragner 152.

Bishop Mateo Múgica is a strange case. He was, perhaps, the most convoluted story of all the Bishops. A bundle of contradictions, Múgica was a supporter of Basque autonomy who then supported the Nationalist cause, two opposed conditions.<sup>39</sup> He tolerated and even aided the autonomist clergy in his region, despite signing Gomá's pastoral letter that the Basque people did not have a right to defend themselves. While these are not expressly at odds, the only way the País Vasco, or the Basque Country, could maintain their autonomy in the face of the advancing Nationalist army was to take up arms. He also refused Gomá's request that the local priests read the August 8<sup>th</sup> pastoral letter. He did this, not because he objected to the contents, but because he feared for reprisals against his priests, whom he frequently referred to as his "flock"<sup>40</sup> For this he was hated by the Nationalists, whose aborted assassination attempt on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1936 eventually prompted Múgica to flee to the safety of the Vatican in Rome. Writing years later in 1945, Múgica said that initially, he had supported the Nationalist cause. Then, as the extrajudicial executions mounted, he began to see that "some did evil to serve the aims of anarchism; others did the same under the pretext of working in the name of Christ."<sup>41</sup> Although he harbored these feelings during the war, he was counseled, by someone Múgica refused to identify, against public dissent.<sup>42</sup>

Múgica was caught between two sets of extremes. On one side the most influential Spanish prelate in all of Spain pressured him to conform, on the other he felt compelled to protect his clergy from violence. Ultimately, he was able to do neither. He spent the rest of his life in exile, never allowed by Franco's government to return to

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<sup>39</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 82-83.

<sup>40</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 84.

<sup>41</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 84.

<sup>42</sup> No record remains of who this individual was.

Vitoria. Of this he wrote that he was “the shepherd of the best diocese in the entire world, and now the least of the Bishops of the Holy Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>43</sup>

The other Basque Bishop, Marcelino Oleachea of Pamplona, has a similar, though not as dismal experience as a Basque Bishop compared to Múgica. Oleachea’s diocesan responsibility extended over the whole of the region of Navarre.<sup>44</sup> Navarre was one of the most active and most aggressive supporters of the Nationalists despite their Basque heritage. This was due, in large part, to the Carlist influence in the southern part of Navarre.<sup>45</sup> At first glance, Oleachea seems to be a staunch supporter of the Nationalist cause. He affixed his name to Gomá’s letter on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August and he was the first Bishop to publicly deem the war as a “crusade”.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the use of the spiritually and politically charged term “crusade”, Hilari Ragner has this to say: “But if the Bishop of Pamplona used this epithet, which was forced upon him by the fanatical attitudes of the Navarrese, he did so to be able to say words of peace and save lives as well.”<sup>47</sup> The circumstances surrounding Oleachea’s decisions necessitated adherence to public political will, lest he risk ostracism and violence.

Oleachea’s actual attitudes likely leaned much away from the Nationalist cause. He was the son of a working-class family and had given aid and refuge to two anti-nationalist priests.<sup>48</sup> To both men, Iñaki de Azpiazu and Mariano Ayerra Redín, Bishop Oleachea seemed sympathetic to their plight. He initially declined to participate in

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<sup>43</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 85.

<sup>44</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 112.

<sup>45</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 112.

<sup>46</sup> Ragner 152.

<sup>47</sup> Ragner 152.

<sup>48</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 112.

Nationalist propaganda, nor did he personally bless the troops. While he later reversed course on these issues, it points towards, as Ragner said, the idea that Oleachea was much less fervent in the Nationalist cause than it may appear, and certainly more level-headed than some of his fellow bishops.

It was all too common for Nationalist forces, and Republican forces too, to find a band of the perceived enemy, and execute them without trial. After a murder of several autonomist priests by the Nationalist forces, Oleachea erupted in fit of passion. In a sermon dated November 16, 1963, Bishop Marcelino Oleachea delivered perhaps the most impassioned call for peace by any bishop in the war. In it, he urged “Forgiveness! Forgiveness! The sacrosanct law of forgiveness, No more blood! No more blood!”<sup>49</sup> He called upon those who have lost loved ones to temper their desire for revenge. Funerals happened every day, where young men were carried back to the village to be buried. Their loved ones would cry out for vengeance. Instead, he implores them to say “*No! No! Hold back!* The blood of our son is blood that redeems us; we can hear his voice; it is like the voice of Jesus Christ on the Cross; come near and see what he says. ‘Forgive!’ Let no one be touched because of our son! Let no one suffer! Let all be forgiven!”<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that the speech was aimed at the local killings, not the fighting at the front. It is impossible to overlook, however, the pacifistic overtones.

The Nationalists operated with the classic approach of many in wartime that anyone who is not totally invested is put under scrutiny, which is why Oleachea’s speech is so noteworthy. While he was not the first episcopate, nor the last, to preach forgiveness

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<sup>49</sup> Ragner 155. See document appendix for further context.

<sup>50</sup> Ragner 155-156.

it takes courage to defy the established trend and call for an end to the violence. It was this exceptional act of humanitarianism that distinguished himself from his fellow Bishops, many of whom ignored or excused Nationalist reprisal killings on the ground that the Republican's were more egregious. Gomá, for instance, wrote in a letter that although the reprisals were sins, "What happens in this war cannot be judged by the same criteria as an ordinary war."<sup>51</sup>

Later in the speech Oleachea called for the pardon and forgiveness of those that had neglected the Church before the war, as this was often the only criteria needed for an execution. Many priests generously certified the terrified people accused of harboring communist or Marxist sympathies. Through this, local priests saved hundreds of lives from Nationalist death squads. Oleachea's declaration for forgiveness was a sharp break from his fellow prelates, many of whom felt strongly that priests should not hand out certificates to those suspected of being involved in Marxism.<sup>52</sup> In essence, priests decided the life-or-death fate of these individuals, and a negative declaration from a priest condemned the accused to almost certain death. The Archbishop of Santiago, Tomás Muniz Pablos, said in September of 1936 this was much preferable to parish priests generously giving out certificates and saving lives. The Bishop of Lugo, Raphael Balanza echoed his statement. Bishop Oleachea harshly disputed this and ordered his priests to abide by the Canon of 1393 which forbade priests from becoming witnesses in criminal trials with severe punishments.<sup>53</sup> This sharp break is particularly remarkable, because it,

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<sup>51</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 114.

<sup>52</sup> Ragner 157.

<sup>53</sup> Ragner 157.

mirrored Múgica's situation of being caught between the prevailing political will, and the Bishop's call to minister to the children of God.

Despite Oleachea's loud presentation, his actions demonstrate that he was much more moderate than he wanted himself to appear to be. Any public dissent threatened reprisals against innocents in the particularly chaotic time of the first months of the war. This, in and of itself, is a break from prevailing episcopate thought. Oleachea does not stand with the majority and excuse or tacitly support crimes against civilian Marxists. His examples nonconformity does not imply that he supported the Republic, indeed it is with almost certainty that he held resentment towards the previous regime that had turned a blind eye to murders in convents, monasteries, and eroded the power of the Church with nearly every piece of legislation. It is, however, equally likely that he was anti-Nationalist, in large part because they were anti-Basque and anti-autonomy. These sentiments, and the alarming ferocity of the Nationalists, that caused Bishop Oleachea to differ from his fellow prelates.

By far, the examples outlined by Oleachea, Múgica, and Vidal run counter to the norm. Most of the Bishops, led by Gomá, the primate of Spain, were either extremely sympathetic to the fascist cause, or supported them outright. Bishops, propelled by revolutionary fervor, adopted the fascist salute as did many of the clergy. It is easy to see the reasons why these members of the Church decided Franco's rebellion deserved ecclesiastical support. For one, the Nationalists were a reactionary force against the Republican government, and this simple fact garnered the support of clergy members who were displeased with the Second Republic's erosion of Church influence.



This does not, however, seem a sufficient reason to the kind of fanatical support that the Nationalist cause received from most of the Spanish Church. The Church was so invested in Franco's victory that they abandoned the core principles of Jesus, so that they could save them. José Sánchez writes: "Christian ideals were compromised for personal and institutional survival; and worse, for it became a positive good to kill for Christ's sake"<sup>54</sup>. The Nationalist's reprisals were contrasted against the horror of Republican slaughter of church men and women. Nearly 7000 clergy were massacred, including a whopping 13 bishops and 2300 diocesan priests, almost entirely at the hands of Republican-affiliated death-squads.<sup>55</sup> While news of these killings took time to travel across battle lines and into the heart of Nationalist territory, their influence is striking. This, compounded with the liberalization of the Republic and the severe restrictions on Church power, including abolishing government assistance for the clergy and outlawing religious schooling, culminated into almost the entire upper hierarchy of the Church supporting the Nationalists.

What makes the Church's position so incomprehensible for modern audiences is the deafening silence of ecclesiastics on the horrors of the war. What almost all the bishops and priests that defied popular Church thought had in common was the denunciation of the reprehensible violence. They felt themselves called to a higher cause, one that transcended what might be politically sound, in favor of what was morally just. The bishops, whose silence rang louder than their words, can be justifiably criticized as putting the needs of the Church over the values of their order. Only a few, including

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<sup>54</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 116.

<sup>55</sup> Julio de la Cueva, "Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (1998): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/261121>. 355.

Vidal, Múgica, Oleachea, and several others, can be said to have at least attempted to put morality over institutionalism. Even then, Múgica and Oleachea were supporters of the Nationalist cause, each for their own reasons, and still they were among the minority that defied their colleagues.

## Vatican Initial Response

The Vatican at the time of the Rebellion was headed by Pope Pius XI. He was a demanding pope, authoritarian in leadership style, and he expected the best from his subordinates. Surely influenced by the First Great War, which had ended only four years before the start of his pontificate in 1922, Pius XI's motto was "The peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ."<sup>56</sup> It was for this reason, and other, more practical ones, that the Vaticinal stance towards the Civil War was of cautious neutrality that gradually gave way to complete acceptance by the end of the war. While the Vatican's relationship with the Second Republic was certainly less than amicable, the two did have dialogue before and during the war. Contrasting the Holy See's position to that of the Spanish bishops, Ragner writes: "In reality, while the Spanish prelates very quickly cast aside caution, reserve and gradualism, the Holy See maintained them until the very end."<sup>57</sup>

Owing as much to prudence as to judiciousness, the Holy See's position on international issues is set apart by stark neutrality. It does so for a variety of reasons. First, and perhaps the most compelling reason, is the agency to which the Holy See can ascribe itself. The Holy See is a governmental institution and conducts diplomacy with nearly every nation on earth. As such, it is almost invariably wise, in international politics at least, to tread cautiously or risk irreversible consequences.<sup>58</sup> Rushing to recognize, in this case the Nationalist government centered in Burgos, Spain, would severely harm

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel Binchey, "Pope Pius XI," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* . 28, no. 109 (March 1939): 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/30097676.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af39be3f56f879dd76558ec2e9093193f>. Translated from Latin: Pax Christi in Regno Christi.

<sup>57</sup> Ragner 64.

<sup>58</sup> José M Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987). 119.

relations with the Republic. If the war turned to the Republican's favor the Vatican would forever have the stain of supporting an insurrection, further worsening the future possibility of attaining goals of securing the position of the Church in Spain.

At the crux of the neutrality lay the fluidness of the War. On one hand, the Republicans had the advantage of existing institutions and bureaucracy to aid in the organization of the war effort. On the other hand, the Nationalists held many of the nation's top generals, as well as a significant contingent of battle-hardened troops from the war in Morocco. Additionally, neither side had an overabundance of munitions and so the war was in flux. This was true in the first months of the war and shifted as other international powers supported their respective ideological side. It was therefore prudent, as stated in the previous paragraph, to adopt a wait-and-see approach.

Another reason as to why the Vatican neglected to recognize the nascent Nationalist government, despite sympathetic religious ties, was the potential threat of anticlerical violence against clergy in the republican zone. The earliest days of the war were the bloodiest for the clergy, and it was thought that antagonizing anticlericals by recognizing the Burgos government would only serve to incite the mobs into a frenzy. The chief proponent of this line of thought was Vidal i Barraquer, the Bishop of Tarragona. Vidal was forced to flee to the Vatican in the very early days of the war in July of 1936, despite large popularity, because of threats of anticlerical violence.<sup>59</sup> As a result, he was the most influential Spanish member of the episcopate to escape Spain as of that time. This afforded him a great deal of influence with the Pius XI and with the

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<sup>59</sup> Ragner 15.

Pope's secretary of state, Cardinal Eugene Pacelli. He used that influence to preach moderation to attempt to protect the clergy in his diocese. He is likely a large reason as to why the Church's early position was so cautious.

The final reason was the Vatican's role as an international moderator and peacemaker.<sup>60</sup> The Vatican, as the self-proclaimed representative of Christ's vision on Earth, is held to a certain standard, both by its believers and those outside the Church. That standard often takes the shape of being the voice of peace in times of war, and of brokering treaties and conciliations among warring factions, especially when the Church is caught between them. It is difficult to convince a foreign government that the Holy See is a legitimate peace-broker if the official or unofficial position of the See favors a particular side. Though in the case of the Spanish Civil War, this attitude was diminished somewhat, due to the overly religious themes of the War. The Vatican found sympathetic Nationalists, in this case, because elements of the Republican side meant harm to the national institutions of the Church.<sup>61</sup> So while the Vatican's default position was against showing favoritism, the Nationalist's supporting of the domestic Church in Spain renders this attitude less effective.<sup>62</sup>

While the conflict raged on in its emergent months, the Pius XI decided to make a formal speech regarding the war in Spain. At this point, September of 1936, many refugees from Spain had taken asylum in the safety of the Vatican.<sup>63</sup> The displaced was made up of almost entirely Nationalists or Nationalist sympathizers, including several

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<sup>60</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 119.

<sup>61</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 119.

<sup>62</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 119.

<sup>63</sup> Ragner 83.

bishops and many clergy. Task of leading the ecclesiastical group and directing the logistics of concerning said group fell to Vidal as the senior Spanish official present. However, so vehement was the dislike of Vidal for his attitudes towards the Nationalists and for his rumored support of Catalan separatism (despite stating to the contrary)<sup>64</sup>, that the Pope judged it prudent for Vidal not to attend.

Although dismayed, Vidal acquiesced to the Pope's decision and utilized the situation to reiterate the danger of the gathering of so many pro-war clergy. Vidal worried, and said as much to the Pope, that the frenzied atmosphere might turn the attending Bishops, who's otherwise reasonable natures would have prevailed, into rabid supporters of war. This would further devolve and worsen the hope that clerics could return to Spain to minister to those committing some of the worst war crimes in recent memory.<sup>65</sup> Vidal's exhortation for moderation greatly impacted the speech.

Thus, the Vatican's first public statement on the war, the speech at Castelgandolfo, occurred. Pius spoke on September 14, 1936 to the Spanish refugees in Italian, though Spanish leaflets were provided. In the crowd of nearly 500 onlookers were the Spanish bishops of Cartagena, Tortosa, Vic and La Seu d'Urgell. The speech began with Pius XI's unequivocal condemnation of Communism and saying the horrors of the conflict had all the hallmarks of the work of Satan.<sup>66</sup> While the condemnation of Communism was a welcome one for the passionately Nationalist audience, they were disheartened to find that the pontiff neglected to brand the war as a Holy Crusade. A large number of bishops and priests had not hesitated to frame the Civil War as a Crusade

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<sup>64</sup> Ragner 92.

<sup>65</sup> Ragner 82.

<sup>66</sup> Ragner 82.

against the godless red hordes, and it dismayed many to not hear the Pope share their zealotry. Many among the crowd had expected the Pope to boldly justify the conflict, especially considering Pius' particular disgust with Communism. In fact, Pius lamented the divisive nature of the war, and the toll it took on the nation as Spain tore itself to pieces. He spoke of brothers massacring brothers, towns people locked in contention against those who just a few short months ago were peaceful neighbors.

The speech, toward its end, strayed yet farther away from the hopes of the Nationalist clergymen. It praised the brave persons who had devoted themselves to upholding God and religion, but cautioned against excesses that could not be justifiable, even in defending the faith. "Thus, interests that are not upright, or are egoistic or partisan, are introduced and these cloud over the morality of the action and the question of responsibilities."<sup>67</sup> This point seems poignantly directed at the Nationalists' actions, which were voraciously defended by many men of the cloth. He praised the actions of people who, although vainly, tried to alleviate the suffering of the war. In the closing remarks of the speech the Pope said the exact opposite of what the Nationalists in the crowd wanted to hear. He reminded the refugees that the persecutors as well as the persecuted were God's children. Of the enemies, Pius had this to say: "We cannot...doubt as to what is left for us to do-to love them and to love them with a special love born of mercy and compassion."<sup>68</sup>

It is, in the closing plea for love of one's enemies, that Vidal's words seem to resurface. Vidal felt it was his duty to love his enemy as himself and consistently

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<sup>67</sup> Ragner 83.

<sup>68</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 123.

espoused his policy of reconciliation to the Pope. It is undeniable his influence here. The break between what the Bishops in Spain called for, and Pius XI's initial talk of loving the enemy, cannot be overemphasized. The two sentiments were diametrically opposed, and it was antithetical to the Nationalist priests, many of whom had friends and family killed by the anticlerical mobs, to love their persecutors. At the end of the speech, the reaction was mixed. Some members found Pope's message to be inspiring, though most others were disappointed or downright angry at the equanimity of the speech. One onlooker threw down his leaflet to the ground in disgust.<sup>69</sup>

Despite this speech, there is little evidence to state that the Spanish bishops heeded the call for moderation and fraternity. In fact, the opposite is true. Nationalist propaganda machines took the Castelgandolfo speech and kept parts that fit the narrative of a Holy War, while entirely disregarding the latter half of the speech. Bishops, some of whom had practiced reserve, saw the Pope's dissected words, presented as the whole truth, and "let loose[d] a cascade of Pastoral letters in Favor of Franco."<sup>70</sup> When the truth eventually came to light that the speech's tone was balanced, Nationalist Bishops like Enrique Pla y Deniel often neglected to alter their rhetoric to be more in line with the Holy See's position.

The Castelgandolfo speech is a prime demonstration of the Vatican's attitude toward the Franco government. It refutes the idea that the Catholic Church in its entirety leapt to join the Francoist uprising from the outset, as is too often the narrative in popular literature. It is historically inaccurate to ignore the very real trepidation of the Vatican

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<sup>69</sup> Ragner 84.

<sup>70</sup> Ragner 85.



towards the Nationalists, and it belies the lazy notion that the Catholic Church entirely cast aside reason in favor of passion. While there were many Spanish clergymen who did so, the Vatican, unburdened by the passionate patriotism that so gripped clergy and laymen alike, had a much more circumspect approach. Even with the fact that many clergymen ardently supported Franco, there were still those within Spain who refused to do so. To gloss over these details in favor of a concise and simple story does injustice to the memories of clergymen who called for peace, despite suffering serious consequences for their disobedience to the Nationalist cause. Historians have an obligation to look critically on the past, especially when details might upset established consensus. In the case of the Vatican's division with its prelates in Spain, crucial details include both the Castelgandolfo speech, and the See's actions toward Burgos following it.

The Francoist government in Burgos greatly desired relations with the Holy See, as official Vatican recognition would give credence to the charge that the War was a religious one. According to Francoist supporters, Catholicism was the ideological glue of the Nationalists, and as the war raged on it became more and more crucial to garner the See's favor. Burgos sent a representative in the form of Marque de Magaz, a former Spanish Naval officer in the regime of Prime de Rivera. Magaz, confident that the Vatican would recognize him, occupied the Embassy to the Holy See on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1936.<sup>71</sup> Much to his, and Franco's dismay the Pope refused to recognize Magaz as a representative, and virtually ignored him. This was because Magaz was operating under the dual offices of ambassador to the Italian government and the Holy See. It was only

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<sup>71</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 211.

until the Spanish government designated that the two be separate, did the Vatican acknowledge his presence.

Magaz's first mission was to convince the Vatican to reject the Republican ambassador, Luis de Zulueta y Escolano, and to secure complete recognition for the Burgos government.<sup>72</sup> He failed in latter regard and succeeded in the former. His failure to secure recognition was due to his own shortcomings, but more significantly to the Pope's attitude towards the insurgents. From the perspective of Pius XI, the Nationalist rebels did not have a clear and cohesive cause, at least not enough for complete diplomatic recognition. Their cause was still too fascist for the Pope's liking, too akin to the ideology of Hitler.

In the case of the Republican representative, Magaz was forced to use political machinations to remove the ambassador and did not secure the Vatican's blessing for such a maneuver. He cut off Zulueta from funds from a local bank and convinced the fascist Italian police that the only remaining member of Zulueta's staff was a communist, upon which the unfortunate accountant was expelled from the country. Cut off from funds and bereft of allies, Zulueta was forced to abandon the embassy, which Magaz promptly occupied. Upon hearing that the embassy was now under Magaz's control, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Giuseppe Pizzardo, demanded Magaz lower a monarchist flag that he had raised. The two argued, until Magaz eventually relented. After this incident, Magaz's efforts were almost laughably ineffectual, having lost almost all good will with members of the Vatican.

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<sup>72</sup> Ragner 85.

Upon the expulsion of Zulueta, Magaz had a new directive, convince Pius to denounce *bizcarrismo*.<sup>73</sup> It became apparent in the days and months following the outbreak of the Uprising in July, that the Basque provinces had declared themselves for the republic. This included almost every Basque priest in the region. The Basques had long had a national reputation for being among the most ardent Catholics in all of Spain.<sup>74</sup> While the Basque situation will be discussed in a later chapter, it is sufficed to say that Franco, and the Nationalist Bishops, found it difficult to characterize the war as a Crusade when the most concentrated Catholic stronghold in Spain had declared itself for the Republic. It was to this pressing mission that Magaz dedicated himself. It exceedingly ironic, as it turned out, that Magaz was the largest obstacle the pursuit of his singular goal.

Owing to the combative nature that Antonio Magaz y Pers possessed, he managed to alienate nearly every member of the Vatican's diplomatic team, including those close to the Pope. As such he was ultimately unsuccessful in getting the Pope to condemn Basque nationalism. This was also due to the recent emigration of Mateo Múgica, Bishop of Vitoria, to the Holy See. After being expelled, Múgica had opportunity to speak on behalf of his Basque diocese, which he used to influence the opinion of Pius XI. This reflected quite poorly on the Franco regime, and undoubtedly led to a further disconnect between the Vatican and the domestic episcopate. It was for this reason that Magaz was virtually ignored for the rest of his tenure, while Isidro Gomá, Primate of Spain, was

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<sup>73</sup> Translated as "Basque Nationalism".

<sup>74</sup> Sánchez., *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 70.

elevated to the position of unofficial representative of the Holy See to the Nationalist government.

This was a major step forward for the Nationalists and represented a fundamental shift in the way the Vatican perceived the government in Burgos. By acknowledging the Nationalists, it fundamentally undermined the Vatican's previous position of neutrality. By permitting Gomá to represent the Holy See, it meant that the Pius saw the potential victory of the Uprising as more realistic, and it provided a method to communicate directly with Franco himself. The rebels very existence was a challenge to the Republic. Therefore, while the Vatican could technically claim to be ministering to both sides, the simple act of recognizing the rebels is a victory in and of itself for the Nationalists. This brought the official Vatican policy to be more in line with the fanatical prelates. Despite this step forward, it is only a step. The Holy See did not support wholesale the cause of the Nationalists, and neither did it abandon relations with the Republic. Recognition was a gradual process, which both confused and frustrated Francoist supporters

## The Collective Letter

In December of 1936, Francisco Franco was faced with a problem. The war was still very much in flux, and the outcome began to grow increasingly uncertain. The Basque region presented a great challenge to the National forces in both an ideological sense, and a strategic one. The Basque front occupied a significant chunk of Franco's forces, and delayed an assault on the Spanish Capital of Madrid, which was in Republican hands, at that time. Just as, if not more importantly, however, the Basques were a strongly religious people, and their support of the Republican government provided a spiritual obstacle for the Nationalist forces. If, as the Nationalist propaganda stated, that all true Catholics supported the Republic, how can it be that the most catholic region supported the "godless" republic? Even more compelling was that the Basque clergy had allied itself almost entirely with the Republican forces, representing a huge schism in the ecclesiastical unity of Spain.

Franco, with his newfound Papal representative in Isidro Gomá, desired a letter from Catholic authorities denouncing the Basques. It was Franco's hope that the condemnation would encourage the fiercely religious Basques and their clergy to surrender. Pacelli, the Secretary of State for the Vatican, thought that such a condemnation would be largely ignored especially after the failed pastoral letter from Múgica and Oleachea on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August. This idea was then abandoned, as was an eventual pastoral letter from the Holy See denouncing the connection between the Communists and Basques, though such a letter had relative support from Pius XI. It was then that the idea of a domestic letter, one written and promulgated by the Spanish

bishops, began to take shape. The “Collective Letter” as it would come to be known, was the first of its kind.

It is through the third, and final iteration, that the foundations of the Collective Letter began to take shape. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1937, Franco discussed with Gomá the severe hostility to which the Nationalist Cause was subject in international Catholic press. The Republicans had their fair share of condemnation for the violent killings of priests, nuns, monks, and bishops. International press, however, brought up the massacres of poor workers conducted by the Nationalists, despite the religious overtones present in propaganda. This was an important issue as the war was still far from over in the spring of 1937. Although the Nationalists had a slight lead, both sides were jockeying for international assistance, and a Collective Letter from the Spanish Bishops to the Catholic world at large would aid greatly in a Nationalist victory. Gomá, at the behest of Franco, wrote the letter dated July 1, 1937, though it would not be published until later to allow it to be disseminated to Catholic Bishops abroad.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Letter was the significant diversion in tone, compared to the bishops. The Letter far from calling the current struggle a religious war, takes the opposite stance. In fact, it says, in no uncertain terms, that the war is precisely not a religious struggle and, more emphatically, that it is not a Crusade. A passage of the letter reads: Thus, the Church, although the daughter of the Prince of Peace, may bless the emblems of war, found military orders, and organize Crusades against the enemies of the Faith. This is not our case. The Church has neither sought nor

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<sup>75</sup> Ragner 110.

desired the present war.”<sup>76</sup> This is a complete repudiation of the rhetoric coming from many of the episcopate, especially strong supporters of the Falange, Franco’s fascist political party, like Enrique Pla y Deniel the Bishop of Salamanca. The reason for shift mirrors the reason for the letter: Gomá thought that international opinion would be more greatly swayed if the Church presented itself as a peacemaker, than an inciter of religious violence.

Although it is true that the Church did not start that war, it is false to say that many did not desire it. The letter paints the episcopate as being reluctant for war, despite only a minority of bishops actively opposed it. Prelates from across Spain yearned for an end to the Republican regime, and the Uprising presented a prime avenue for change. The letter painted the episcopate as working towards the Nationalist cause unilaterally, which it did not do. It glosses over the fact Bishops like Oleachea, and Vidal counselled for an end to the violence, while others called for more and more vicious bloodshed.

The letter continues to describe the massacre of religious men and women in the Republican zone. In this, it accurately depicts the numbers, known at the time, of the killings.<sup>77</sup> What the letter did not do, however, is afford the same type of objectivity towards the Nationalist slaughter of the working class. It neglected the active role many in the Church took of concealment of the Nationalist’s extrajudicial killings. It dismissed the sentiment that bishop Olechea stated in his address concerning the common occurrence of bands of townsfolk killing suspected communists, even if the suspect was little older than a child. To this the letter says “... we state that such stories bear no

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<sup>76</sup> Ragner 114.

<sup>77</sup> Ragner 115.

relation to the truth and that there exists an enormous and unbridgeable gulf between the ways in which the principles and forms of justice are administered and applied in this war by one side and by the other.”<sup>78</sup>

Gomá wrote to every bishop in Spain that he could, asking them for their signature on the Collective Letter. Forty-three responded that they would sign the letter, five did not. Out of these five, three refused to affix their signature, all with varying degrees of importance. The first bishop, out of the five, not to sign was Torres Ribas, Bishop of Menorca. Menorca was entirely in Republican hands at this time, and the old and half-blind bishop was entirely cut off from the rest of Spain. The second was Cardinal Segura, who did not sign because he had resigned the position of Archbishop of Toledo. The third was Javier de Irastorza Loinaz, Bishop of Orihuela-Alicante. He was residing in England at the outbreak of the War, and the reason why he was not in his diocese has not been made public, but speculation is that there was a complicated matter involving funds.<sup>79</sup> Although his name does not appear on the Letter, the historical record is unclear as to why this was the case. Gomá asserted that he sent the letter to all prelates living within and residing outside of Spain. It can be therefore concluded that Irastorza received this letter. Additionally, Vatican newspapers assert that Irastorza was the Bishop of Orihuela-Alicante, and that he was not replaced. Only with the release of further documents can historians know the reason why the bishop did not sign the letter.

The fourth non signatory, is a case that has already been discussed at some length, that of Mateo Múgica, the exiled Bishop of Vitoria. Múgica, perhaps more than other

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<sup>78</sup> Ragner 116.

<sup>79</sup> Ragner 111.



prelates, felt a special connection with the people of his diocese, and was thus devastated when he was forced to flee his “flock” as he referred to them.<sup>80</sup> He was also deeply distressed to learn of the Nationalist killings of 16 Basque priests from October to November of 1936.<sup>81</sup> All of this engendered a strong dislike of the Nationalists in Múgica, though he did not let this fact be widely known at the time. When Gomá wrote him asking for his signature, Múgica wrote back that although he would like to sign the letter, because he was not currently in control of his diocese he would have to decline. In his letter to the Pope why he did not sign the Collective Letter, Múgica gives a vastly different reason. To the Pope he said that he objected to the claim that the Church was free in Spain; Múgica viewed it as “enslaved”.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the Letter claimed that the judicial system in Spain under the Nationalists was just, a claim to which Múgica strongly objected. He personally knew many pious Christians and outstanding clergymen who lost their lives at the hands of Nationalist firing squads. Múgica’s third and final objection was the Letter’s position on the Basque people, which used patronizing language. He took that section of the letter as a personal affront.

It is not altogether difficult to understand why Múgica wrote two different letters with two different reasons. It was likely that he felt a strong animosity towards the Nationalists for their treatment of the Basque peoples which he never lost an opportunity to describe to the Pope. It can also be supposed, albeit with a healthy amount of skepticism, that Múgica felt that he could return to his diocese at the end of the war. He certainly hoped so and made overtures at the end of the war to return to his beloved

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<sup>80</sup> Ragner 111.

<sup>81</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 211.

<sup>82</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 96.

diocese. Perhaps he did not wish any sentiments expressed to Gomá disparaging the Nationalist cause to reach the civil authorities, lest the slim chance of him returning to his position be reduce to nil. Despite his desire to return, Mateo Múgica refused to sign the Letter and instead decided to stand by his objections. The difficult decision would eventually cost Múgica the diocese he so cherished, as Nationalists prevented him from returning at the end of the War. Their principal reason was his refusal to sign the Collective Letter of Spanish Bishops of 1937.<sup>83</sup>

The fifth and final prelate not to sign was Francesc Vidal i Barraquer, Archbishop of Tarragona. He was by far the most influential prelate refuse to sign the Collective Letter, owing to a large number of objections he had with the document. Vidal was never one to compromise his principles for the sake of conformity. His reward for upholding what he saw as his moral duty to defend the Church and her members was a death in exile. Vidal knew the consequences of his actions, and resolutely maintained his reasons even after the war.

Vidal's first reason for refusing to sign the document was a significant justification for the neutrality he displayed during the war, namely that he feared for the lives of the priests of his diocese. The Cardinal worried such a document would worsen anticlerical reprisals against Catholics and priests in the Republican zone, as the reprisals were almost always passionate in form. Historical records indicate that anticlerical violence was almost always the result of tensions running high, rather than the organized killings displayed in the Nationalist zone. He felt that the document was focused too

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<sup>83</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 83.

much on the political, while a statement of bishops should be more focused on saving lives in wartime. He proposed, instead, that writing individual letters to foreign bishops could serve the same purpose without provoking reprisals. This fell on deaf ears, as Gomá wrote the document at the request of Franco, and the Caudillo was much more concerned with his political war, than keeping the religious safe.

His second objection attacked the very nature of the document. Vidal found the document to be entirely devoid of ecclesiastical meaning, while pandering to Franco's wishes. He said "I have read the document with close attention. I find it admirable in both its form and its fundamentals, as is everything you [Gomá] write. It will serve you very well as propaganda, but in my estimation, it does not quite fit the character of all those who shall have to sign it."<sup>84</sup> He felt that ecclesiastical documents should be created at the will of the Pope, or some other ecclesiastical authority within the hierarchy. By acting at the behest of someone outside of the Church, it severely compromises the integrity of the Letter, and sets a dangerous precedent to "accept suggestions made by persons outside the hierarchy, when concerned with these matters of incumbency."<sup>85</sup> Gomá was a representative of the Catholic Church and his superiors only included other members of the Church. By submitting to the demands of a political figure it called into question of whether Gomá's decisions were born out of rigorous religious scholarship or loyalty to persons residing outside the Church. Ceding power to a government that had only just obtained a measure of power betrays the greater interest of the Church, which should be moderation, according to Vidal.

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<sup>84</sup> Ragner 112.

<sup>85</sup> Ragner 112.

The Primate's final reason was closely intertwined with the first two. He felt that the Church had a duty to remain absolutely neutral in matters of politics. It would set a good example, argued Vidal, to the priests if the Bishops refused to engage in partisan politics.<sup>86</sup> He felt that the very integrity of the Holy See could be comprised if the bishops confirmed the already-prevalent impression that Spanish prelates interfered in matters of politics.<sup>87</sup> Working within the framework of civil government was conducive to the mission of "peace, charity and harmony" that the bishops had sworn themselves too. In this sense, Vidal did not see the Uprising as a legitimate regime. In a letter to the Secretary of State of the Vatican about the Collective Letter, Vidal i Barraquer stated that the Church "should not confuse the fact of authority with the abuses of those in power."<sup>88</sup> According to Vidal, the fact that the Nationalists did not constitute legitimate authority, the sanctity of the idea of the separation of political and ecclesiastical powers, and the threat of reprisals from anticlerical mobs all compounded to compel the exiled Bishop of Tarragona to refuse his signature. In a sense, when presented with two poor options morality dictated that the Church remain neutral, and that it is compelled to work within civil framework to achieve lasting peace.

Of the Bishops who did sign, there was one who almost did not affix his signature to the Collective Letter of 1937. This individual was Justino Guitart y Vilardebó Bishop of Urgel. Urgel is located squarely in the region of Catalonia, a Republican stronghold. It was because of this that there was also a large Anarchist presence in the region, which led to Guitart to seek refuge among Jesuits in Italy. Guitart was a friend and mentor to Vidal i

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<sup>86</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 99.

<sup>87</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 99.

<sup>88</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 100.

Barraquer, they shared a great many similarities, including a dislike of the Nationalist cause. Each kept the other abreast of the situation and were no doubt in agreement. Both Guitart and Vidal were closely monitored by the fascist Italian police, and their correspondence hinged on secrecy. This only served to alienate Guitart further from the Nationalist cause.

Upon Isidro Gomá's first overture to the Bishop of Urgel urging him to sign the document, Gomá was met with a sharp reply. Guitart asserted that he would only sign the document if the other bishops residing outside of Italy did as well, alluding to Vidal's refusal. Gomá, on his second request, was more menacing. He described that, although mistaken, Vidal had reasons for his refusal. Múgica too, was a victim of circumstance and his abstention was something Gomá was working to have rectified. According to Gomá the simple fact that the bishops stood in unanimity, ignoring Vidal, Múgica and Guitart himself, meant that the document was sound in its message and syntax. Eager to publish the document, Gomá attempted to intimidate his fellow prelate, saying "Should you decide to conform without conditions, a telegram saying, "I agree" will do."<sup>89</sup>

Justino Guitart took the threats in stride and rebuffed them. It was only at the request of Vidal that Guitart grudgingly appended his signature. To Vidal, it was sufficient to have him abstain, and Guitart's refusal was not necessary. Indeed, it is likely that Vidal knew of the consequences Guitart would face should he not sign the Letter. Vidal thought Guitart could do more good working from within Spain, with his fellow

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<sup>89</sup> Ragner 113.

prelates in Catalonia. Therefore, although in stark disagreement, Guitart eventually acquiesced to Gomá's demands.

The Vatican's official policy regarding the Collective Letter defied all expectations. They did not have a public position. The Vatican did not put out a statement via official channels either supporting or denouncing the letter. Cardinal Pacelli, the Secretary of State continued to receive correspondence from Gomá about the Bishops and of Vidal's refusal to sign, but Pacelli did not comment on them. It was not until March 5, 1938, a full nine months after the publication of the Letter, that Pius XI sent a letter to Gomá. The dispatch, which was handled by agents of Franco, praised the stance of the Bishops for denouncing evil "from whichever quarter it may come"<sup>90</sup> This line, which ended the letter, implied that there could be evil from the Nationalist side, or at least that the Communists did not possess a monopoly on evil deeds. The Vatican's stance, as this shows, that they wished to distance themselves, without public comment, from the bishop's collective letter.

In its intent, the Collective Letter was a resounding success. It was met with support from Catholic diocese from across the world, who were shocked by the descriptions of Republican violence contained in the letter. A Catholic world public, hesitant to support a regime accused of massacring innocents, were sympathetic to the story of the clergymen in the Republican zone in the first three months of the war, when the most egregious anticlerical slaughters occurred.<sup>91</sup> The propagandistic chief of the Nationalist regime said of Gomá's Letter: He has achieved more, by the Collective Letter

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<sup>90</sup> Ragner 124.

<sup>91</sup> Ragner 123.

than have the rest of us by all our utmost efforts.”<sup>92</sup> Vidal i Barraquer’s fears were realized in the Letter’s international reception. It was effectively used as propaganda to advance the war effort, but also it stoked tensions against Republican clergy members. Although anticlerical violence diminished drastically after the extremist government was replaced by a moderate one in the Republican Zone, it continued until the end of the war. After the Bishop of Teruel was captured by Republican forces, the chief allegation against him was his support of the Collective Letter.<sup>93</sup>

The Letter, more than any other single document from the Spanish Civil War, shows the divisions within the Church hierarchy of Spain, and the powerful personalities that presided over them. Small in number, those that did not sign and the one that was compelled to via threats represented a loud minority of bishops who did not share the hawkish attitude of their brothers. The Letter, if nothing else, is beneficial in that it differentiates the tendency of the majority of Spanish bishops to engage in politics, from those that could not support the Rebellion at the risk of desecrating their vows to peace and charity.

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<sup>92</sup> Riquer 123.

<sup>93</sup> Riquer 122.

## Basque Clergy

The Basque clergy during the Civil War represents the largest faction of ordained members of the Catholic Church that resisted Franco. Over 2000 Basque priests refused to submit to the Nationalist cause, against the public advice of their Bishops.<sup>94</sup> Instead, they chose to support Basque Nationalism and an autonomist movement, demonstrating the importance of regional ties in the Spanish Civil War. Additionally, the Basque region was one of the only areas in the Republican dominion not to see outbursts of anticlerical violence. This was due to the Basque region's overwhelming Catholicism', and the wide support the religion enjoyed there. Additionally, it is important to note that the Basque peoples, with whom the clergy followed, did not fight the war for the same reasons as the other Republican zones. They fought less for the ideals of the Republic, and more for the relatively autonomous position they enjoyed in the Republic. Even more compelling was that Franco's army, although largely Catholic, pursued a one-Spain policy that was diametrically opposed to Basque language and culture.

The Basque regions were forced into a difficult situation. On one hand, the region's population was extremely Catholic, which precluded itself from much leftist support, especially at the beginning of the War. On the other, its nationalistic tendencies precluded it from support from rightist groups. To the Basque priests, however, the two were not mutually exclusive. They found that they could fulfill their oath to God while simultaneously ministering to the nationalist people. Any study of Church history reveals that priests, bishops, and even popes are subject to the same political opinions as the

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<sup>94</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 122.



secular society. The Basque priests were no different. They opposed what they saw as a rebel coup who threatened to quash both *bizcarrismo*, and the Basque culture itself.

In order to understand the motives behind the Basque priests, it is important to understand the sectional nature of the War. It is no coincidence that the provinces that supported the Republic were also the ones with a history of a separate identity from the rest of Spain. Many in the two regions, Catalonia and the Basque Country long regarded themselves as distinct from the rest of the Spanish populace, in no small part due to the different languages. Catalan, while intrinsically linked with Spanish, is a separate language, and the language of the Basque country, *Euskara*, owes its roots to a language entirely distinct from Spanish and predates even the Roman empire.<sup>95</sup> The cultural distinctions manifested themselves in the creation of political parties that supported autonomy, and it was this party, in the Basque country, that gained control over the government.<sup>96</sup> They, in turn, sided less with the Republican, and more against the Nationalists. In fact, Basque nationalists harbored resentment towards the republic, who they saw as an agent of the centralizing power of Madrid.<sup>97</sup> Despite this, they were compelled to oppose the Nationalists, in whose ranks anti-separatist sentiment was rife. Indeed, the mere name of the Nationalists conveys the idea of unification under one banner, and to Franco that banner was the Falangist state, to which many Spanish prelates gave their blessing.

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<sup>95</sup> Cheng-Feng Shih "The Emergence of Basque Nationalism In Spain: Struggle For Peace In A Multiethnic State." *Peace Research* 30, no. 3 (1998): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23607618>. 43

<sup>96</sup> Stanley Payne, "Catalan and Basque Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971):<https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947100600102>. 46.

<sup>97</sup> Payne 43.

The priests were not only passive observers, but leaders of their people.<sup>98</sup> The seminary became a place intrinsically tied to *bizcarrismo* in the years leading up to the war. One monarchist wrote that seminaries in the Basque provinces were “separatist centers” and a book published after the war by the Franco Regime said that seminaries were referred to as “*batzoki*” meaning “Basque cultural center”.<sup>99</sup> It was here that fledgling priests came to be ordained, and, unlike other seminaries at the time, discuss new ideas.<sup>100</sup> This led to the seminaries being often the genesis of new ideas about Basque nationalism, championed by some to whom Spanish was a second language. The Basque Church thrived with almost a 100% participation rate in rural areas, and over 50 in cities.<sup>101</sup> What made this unique was that during this period, from about the 1920s to 1936, the rest of Spain followed the opposite trajectory. Membership increasingly declined and anticlerical sentiment was rife. The priests, surrounded by Basque cultural influences, saw the centralizing force of the Nationalists to be dangerous to their unique heritage.

Another reason why the Basque priests’ broke ranks with their fellow ordained in the south and west of Spain was the Republic framework for independence. Both the Francoist and the Republicans courted the Basque nationalists, but it was only when the Republic promised to provide an avenue for autonomy that the Basque region declared itself for the Republic. This earned it vitriolic condemnation from the religious from

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<sup>98</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 71.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson, Peter. Ed. Sandra Ott. “From the Pulpit to the Dock: Basque Priests in Franco’s Military Courts, 1937” In *War, Exile, Justice, and Everyday Life, 1936-1946*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies Press, University of Nevada, Reno, 2011.

[https://scholarworks.unr.edu/bitstream/handle/11714/122/war\\_exile\\_justice.pdf?sequence=1#page=108](https://scholarworks.unr.edu/bitstream/handle/11714/122/war_exile_justice.pdf?sequence=1#page=108). 64

<sup>100</sup> Anderson 64.

<sup>101</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 72.

across Spain, and later the Vatican too spoke out against the Basque priests. Animosity grew in the ranks of Franco's army, as many saw the Basques to be traitors to Spain. The Basques, in turn, rejected the violent anti-clerical anarchist element that operated as the de-facto head of the Republic in the early months of the War.

The final reason why the Basques supported the Republic was one that is used frequently in times of war: practicality. While the Basques rejected the anticlericalism of the republic, there were still sizable groups of anticlericals in the major Basque cities such as Bilbao.<sup>102</sup> In July of 1936 the Nationalists were still far away from major Basque cities and could not help if violence erupted against the Churches.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, Republican armed groups already operated inside the province, and siding with the distant Nationalists would mean immediate and swift reprisals. As it was, the Basques could pacify the radical leftists by supporting the Republic, and the conservatives by keeping the Churches open. Therefore, although the Basques did share similarities with the Nationalists, they were forced to side with the Republic to maintain religious freedom and keep the peace. Despite this, the Basques would eventually be driven back into the mountains. Bereft of options and allies, the Basque people, resolute in their faith, eventually succumbed to defeat, though not before 16 priests were murdered by Francoist forces.

After the Nationalist army invaded Guipúzcoa in Northern Spain, the soldiers were anxious for a chance at reprisal, especially those from Navarre. They saw their fellow Basque countrymen as traitors to the faith by supporting the Godless communists

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<sup>102</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 75-76.

<sup>103</sup> Sánchez 75.

of the Republic. 13 Basque priests were shot after the fall of Guizpúzcoa, and three more priests were killed in the Basque region by the time it was subdued.<sup>104</sup> The killings prompted intense backlash, notably from Gomá and the Vatican. Gomá complained to Franco about the executions, after which the *caudillo* promised no such killings would occur again. While Gomá was not entirely satisfied, he did not see this as an important enough reason to stop his passionate support for Franco's cause. He contrasted the nationalist killings to the thousands of priests murdered by the mobs of the republic, and so his faith in Franco only slightly wavered. The killings also provoked international backlash, and severely harmed relations between Franco's government and the Vatican. It was a deciding factor in the Vatican's decision to pursue a strategy of cautious neutrality until later in the war.

At the behest of Franco, who wanted to court favorable Catholic international opinion, the executions stopped. What followed was a wave of imprisonments as Nationalist forces captured tortured as many Basque priests as they could find. All were guilty of treason against the faith, in their eyes.<sup>105</sup> This, again, prompted Catholic outrage, including from the formerly exiled Cardinal Segura.<sup>106</sup> While this does not represent a fundamental shift in the Spanish episcopate's overall opinion, it was one of the few times bishops like Segura protested the atrocities of the Nationalists. They could justify the slaughtering of civilians and partisans, but they drew the line at ordained churchmen. The Basque priests were an embarrassment to the Nationalist cause, and by extension the Church. Their actions demanded punishment.

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<sup>104</sup> Preston 413.

<sup>105</sup> Anderson 70.

<sup>106</sup> Anderson 78.

The Basques presented a unique problem for both the upper echelons of the clergy and the military generals. While the Uprising did not begin with overtly religious themes, it soon adopted them as it proved invaluable in uniting fractured Nationalist groups into a cohesive army. Franco's propaganda ministers, of whom some would make an argument Cardinal Gomá could be classified as such, tried to paint the war in terms of a struggle of good vs evil, nationalists vs communists, and the armies of God vs the armies of Satan. It was easy for these men to compare the pious nature of the troops who frequently attended Mass before battle, with the homicidal anticlericals slaughtering priests by the hundreds. It was much more difficult, however, to push this narrative when the Basques, armed with as much is not more religious piety, sided with the Republic.

Isidrio Gomá's condemnation of the Basque priests was swift, though he did admit that their faith seemed sincere. The Civil War, Gomá asserted, was not one of class but of religion. It is "at bottom, one of love or hatred towards religion."<sup>107</sup> He denounced the killings of the Basque priests, but also felt they were at fault for their circumstances. The "aberrations" of the priests were regrettable because "brought them in front of a firing party, because a priest should not descend from that level of holiness, both ontological and moral."<sup>108</sup> In other words, it was the priests' fault for agitating against the Nationalists and for Basque autonomy. If they had taken the righteous side, which was all too apparent according to Gomá, then they could have spared themselves such a fate. The second half of the phrase "descend from that level of holiness" implies the priests' engaging in politics was ill-advised, at least when those politics suited aims contrary to

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<sup>107</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 86.

<sup>108</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 86.

the vast majority of the Spanish Episcopate. Gomá seems to imply that engaging in these kinds of politics were inexcusable. Only when it supported the majorities goals were the acts just. This leads one to question whether Gomá had studied thoroughly enough the first generations of Christians.

### Francesc Vidal I Barraquer

Francesc Vidal i Barraquer was the highest ranking, and most steadfast, member of the hierarchy to break away from the greater ecclesiastical movement. He refused to support the Nationalists, and for this he would die in exile, far from the diocese and people whom he cherished. Despite countless attempts by other prelates within Spain, Vidal refused to acquiesce, knowing that his decision would likely cost him his home, and leave him helpless as the rebel army ravaged his home province of Catalonia. His decision to not support the rebels was representative of a significant contingent of Spain that felt trapped between the extremes of the anticlericals and the fascists. Hilari Ragner dubbed this group the “Third Spain”, and it is safe to say that Vidal was by far the most influential member of this group, whether he saw himself as such or not.

Francesc d’Assis Vidal i Barraquer was born in 1868 in the province of Tarragona.<sup>109</sup> His ecclesiastical career began somewhat differently than his fellow seminarians. Vidal came from a family of lawyers, and perhaps due to familial pressure he obtained a law degree from the University of Barcelona where he practiced law. At the age of 28 Vidal decided to enter the seminary to become a priest, which began a swift climb up the hierarchical ladder. At forty-five he became the bishop of Solsona, and four years later he was offered the archbishop position at Tarragona, the highest position in the province. A mere two years later he was ordained a Cardinal in 1921.

Vidal’s relationship with politics was a reluctant one, born out of necessity rather than ambition. During the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the government prohibited the

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<sup>109</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 109.

use of Catalan as a language in proceedings of the Church. Vidal opposed this, arguing that the Catalan people have a right to conduct religious proceedings in their native tongue. Through this, the unwitting Cardinal became a symbol for Catalan nationalism, although he went to lengths to keep himself isolated from politics. The Vatican later capitulated to Rivera's demands, to the chagrin of both Vidal and his fellow Catalan bishops. After Cardinal Segura was expelled from the country in 1931, the Archbishop became the effective primate, being the most influential churchman in the country at the time. In fact, he was offered the position of the see of Toledo, the primate's seat, but he declined, preferring instead to remain in his home of Catalonia. Although Vidal took great steps to ensure that he did not compromise his holy orders by becoming a political activist, such a decision demonstrates the unique love the Cardinal had for Catalan culture and the region in general.

While it is certain that Vidal i Barraquer's actions during the Civil War were ones of moderation and peace, the seeds of these tenets began long before the War began. During the rise and tenure of the Second Republic, Vidal led the Church in Spain to a position of conciliation with the democratically elected government. During a secret meeting the Church, led by Vidal and another compatriot, cooperated with the President and other officials in the reduction of Church power.<sup>110</sup> The goal of these proceedings was to keep the peace among the precariousness of the Church's position in 1931. While Vidal was not pleased with the drastic reduction in Church power, he saw that working within the system was more likely to produce a compromise in which the Church retained

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<sup>110</sup> Ragner 26.



some of its function while pacifying the more rabid among anticlerical groups. Above all Vidal wanted to maintain the peace.

The Cardinal of Tarragona was exceedingly unique in that he was one of the only Spanish bishops to not publicly support the Nationalist rebellion. While his fellow prelates were convinced to support the rebellion because of, among other reasons, waves of anticlerical violence in the Republic, Vidal refused to support the Nationalists for the very same reason.<sup>111</sup> He thought that if the Church allied itself against the Republic, it only put priests in even more danger than they currently faced. Other than peace, Vidal saw the Church and the state as occupying separate spheres of influence. Matters of the faith should fall to the Church, while matters of the state falls to the government. When the vast majority of the Spanish Bishops declared themselves supporters of the Rebellion, Vidal saw this as a dangerous step towards corrupting the holy duty of the Catholic Church with short-term political gain. Politicians, by their nature, seek "...to entrap us in cunningly devised nets!"<sup>112</sup> He felt that a Prelate is called to rise above petty partisan politics and appeal to the masses. By advocating for one side in a political landscape, the Church inherently rejects those of the opposite view, driving them away from the Church, and according to Vidal, away from salvation. It is therefore the mission of the Church to preach the Gospel and do good works for all, especially the persecutors.

Additionally, Vidal felt strongly that it was his duty as a prelate of the Catholic Church to call for peace. Further, he felt it the Church's duty to do what every means it could procure to end the fratricidal violence, not encourage it. It frustrated him to see so

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<sup>111</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 98.

<sup>112</sup> Vidal often lamented this point. Perhaps he had a unique view, being educated as a lawyer, about politicians. Ragner 291.

many of his fellow Bishops and priests enthusiastically support the rebellion, a movement that was predicated upon the notion that it was reconquering Spain from the godless. He, unlike nearly every other Spanish bishop, refused to excuse the Nationalist violence as simply “war”. He also worried that the churchmen had too zealously rushed to Franco’s aid, without stopping to think of the consequences such a decision would have, and even if it conflicted with their ecclesiastical duty to minister to all peoples.

This was also the chief reason why the Cardinal refused to sign the Collective Letter of Spanish Bishops of 1937. He feared the Letter would fuel reprisals against an already persecuted Catalonian Church. Some historians have argued that Vidal’s worry was unfounded, and that the persecution decreased after the letter. According to Hilari Ragner, this opinion is “completely unsustainable”.<sup>113</sup> Republican supporters viewed the Letter as the Church’s complicity in the rebellion and an extension of the Catholic Church’s prior policy of supporting landed interests.

Vidal expressed his desire for peace to the Vatican throughout his time in Rome. In 1936, Vidal was forced to flee due to roaming bands of “uncontrollables”, meaning persons gripped with anticlerical fervor who killed indiscriminately.<sup>114</sup> He fled to Rome, where the Bishop of Tarragona used every avenue available to him to convince the Vatican, notably Cardinal Pacelli, the Secretary of State, to endorse peace. He wrote in 1937 on the topic of peace that “The Holy See can exert great effort in achieving it for his wise and forceful efforts to bring about peace have recently elicited warm praise from eminent statesmen.”<sup>115</sup> Vidal’s efforts increased dramatically as the war progressed and

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<sup>113</sup> Ragner 122.

<sup>114</sup> Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* 98.

<sup>115</sup> Ragner 235.

the death toll mounted. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1938, he wrote of the importance of a negotiated peace and the importance of “steer[ing] people towards moderation in a beneficial way”<sup>116</sup>

So fervent was the Bishop’s desire for peace that he wished for a Nationalist victory, if only to end the bloodshed. The Nationalists represented a grave threat to Catalan culture and the language, both of which were extremely important to Vidal. Additionally, he could only imagine what life would look like after the installation of a fascist dictatorship, compared to the democratic regime that came before it. This demonstrates the lengths to which Vidal strove to end the violence. He wrote: “I am dismayed by the intentions of the Government in Barcelona to resist to the last the advance of Franco’s army. It will exact a huge cost in innocent blood and leave behind it a trail of ruins, desolation, hatred, and vengeance.”<sup>117</sup> In this he differed from some of his fellow bishops who wanted the Republicans to be defeated to the last man. While he could understand if it were the generals who wanted to decimate the last vestiges of the Republic, but he could not see why “certain noted ecclesiastics” gave speeches saying that a negotiated peace was impossible. By doing so, they were “abandoning the peace-making mission that is so often demanded of the Church”.<sup>118</sup> It hurt Vidal to see so many of his brothers endorse further violence while extolling the virtues of the war.

Eventually, Vidal i Barraquer’s desire for peace outweighed his desire to abstain from politics. During the spring of 1938, the Nationalist began an unmitigated bombing campaign of Republican towns in the province of Catalonia. The bombs fell on military

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<sup>116</sup> Ragner 235.

<sup>117</sup> Ragner 236.

<sup>118</sup> Ragner 237.

and residential centers alike, sparing not even the cathedrals.<sup>119</sup> Horrified at this latest act of unnecessary aggression, Vidal wrote to Franco himself, as well as Negrín, head of the Republican government. To both, he urged for peace, though his words were starkly different in the letters to the leaders. Vidal tried to convince Franco that the war had reached its inevitable conclusion, and a negotiated peace should be attempted. Utilizing every weapon in his arsenal, Vidal flattered the general by praising his talents and wisdom. He would also be happy if the “anarcho-communist-atheist syndicalism” was rid from the “Fatherland” forever.<sup>120</sup>

To Negrín, however, his tone was starkly different. Vidal recounted the many atrocities committed by those who supported the Republic, and how through the turmoil and persecution the Cardinal of Tarragona maintained absolute neutrality in matters of politics. He appealed to the ideals of the Republic, stating that he “has done everything I could for the poorest classes”.<sup>121</sup> So imperative the need for peace was to Vidal, that he volunteered to put his life in jeopardy as a token of good will. “I offer everything I have, including myself [as a hostage] for the salvation of Spain and the timely pacification of spirits and of all the Spaniards.”<sup>122</sup> It is difficult to overstate the gravity of these words. The Cardinal of Tarragona, second only to Gomá as head of the Spanish Church, offered himself as a bargaining tool, to a group with a history of homicide against clerics. Such a premise would not be wholly incompatible as fiction.

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<sup>119</sup> Ragner 291.

<sup>120</sup> In Spanish, “Fatherland” is translated as “Patria”. Ragner 238.

<sup>121</sup> Ragner 239.

<sup>122</sup> Ragner 239.

Vidal's penchant for self-sacrifice distanced himself from the other prelates because many were swept along in a tide of nationalist sentiment. Vidal became a veritable leper, exiled from his community, and shunned by his former brothers. He felt it was a prelate's duty to suffer for the good of the dioceses and for the Church as a whole. This was evident in his writings to Justino Guitart, Bishop of Urgel. As it was already discussed, Guitart objected strongly to the letter, and it was only through the intercession of Vidal did the recalcitrant bishop allow his signature to appear. If Vidal's and Guitart's reasonings were similar, then why did he urge the Bishop of Urgel to sign the document? It was likely because Vidal had the foresight to see which way the war was turning, and he did not wish to see Guitart expelled from his diocese and sent to suffer the same sad fate as the Cardinal of Tarragona.

According to Hilari Ragner, Vidal was a part of what he called "The Third Spain". While on one side lay the Nationalists, with their intense passion for Catholicism and a love of fascism, and the other the Republicans with their dislike of Catholicism and their democratic values. While these two groups cannot be distilled to two sets of values, especially as we have seen with the Basques, it was the perceived camp that an individual was sorted into. Scholars of the Spanish Civil War have generally agreed with these classifications, or at least have operated under the assumption that they were foundational. Ragner's argument is not that these groups were not correct, but that a binary classification did not truthfully encompass the complex situation. Indeed, such a dichotomy overlooked the many ardently Catholic individuals that rejected fascism but refused to wholeheartedly support the Republic.

Committees for peace were established by lay people and Catholics in France called for peace, both of which were vilified by Nationalist clergy and lay people alike. *La Croix*, a prominent Catholic newspaper in France, called for peace. Serrano Suñer, the minister of the interior for the Burgos government at the time, denounced the paper in a fiery speech. “La Croix,” thundered Suñer, “a periodical which is pacifist now, and as such, our enemy...”.<sup>123</sup> Such a mentality was entirely indicative of the Nationalist sentiment at the time: to preach peace was dangerous to the war effort, and therefore the Church. Nevertheless, Vidal championed the ideals of the so-called Third Spain, by remaining steadfast in his commitment to pacifism.

Vidal i Barraquer was a churchman of steadfast morals and an unwavering commitment to peace. Vidal did not allow himself to be swept away in a hawkish tide of warlike spirit. Preferring reasoned argument and impassioned pleas to grandiose speeches that incited violence, Vidal never forgot the human toll of the war, and how so often lives are lost for little reason. He took the Catholic Church’s oath seriously to promote and propagate the pacifism demonstrated by the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. Always willing to forgive, and never one to let egoism dictate his decisions, he was truly a unique example among the Spanish episcopates.

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<sup>123</sup> Ragner 218.

## Bittersweet Victory

As the war trudged onward, it became more apparent by the day that the Nationalist forces had gained the upper hand over the disorganized Republicans. The ever-prudent policy of the Vatican began to change with the shifting tide of the war, granting more and more recognition to the Burgos government, and consequentially less to the Second Republic. This was demonstrated by the exchange of ambassadors, replacing the older policy of unofficial Vaticinal representation by Gomá. On July 25, 1937, the Pope designated Archbishop Ildebrando Antonuitti to officially oversee the repatriation of Basque children that had fled the violence. It was the understanding, however, that such a decision could quickly turn into official recognition, should the war continue along its current path. In August of 1937, Antonuitti was promoted to Chargé d'Affaires, a move that the Franco government took as the official recognition they so desperately desired.

A problem arose in March of 1938, as the true cost of total war, as encouraged by hawkish bishops, came to fruition. Italian airplanes, laden with tons of explosive munitions, began an unmitigated air raid on the city of Barcelona. The bombers dropped their cargo with impunity, punishing residential districts and completely decimating the whole of the city. This differed starkly from previous bombing campaigns, which confined themselves to areas of military significance such as railway lines or supply depots. Additionally, the bombs were timed to an almost continuous salvo, swapping conventional military tactics for psychological warfare. Civilians were targeted in the name of ridding the country of Communism. Such actions bear direct correlation with the

rhetoric of the Spanish Bishops. Unsurprisingly most of the Spanish episcopate were unusually quiet as Nationalist-allied planes slaughtered non-combatants by the thousands.

While the episcopate remained largely silent, the Vatican was forced into action by international opinion. The air-raids received almost unanimous international opinion, save Germany, who was allied with Franco, and Italy, who had conducted the raids in the first place. The Holy See was caught between projecting an image of humanitarianism and not angering the Nationalist government. The initial reaction of the Vatican was soft condemnation, simultaneously denouncing the bombings and reiterating Franco's recent promise to discontinue the raids. Despite Franco's vague platitudes to the Vatican and assurances the bombings would stop, the raids only increased. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March *L'Ósservatore Romano*, the Vatican's official newspaper, boldly condemned the raids: "The useless slaughter of the civil population has re-opened once again the pressing and difficult problem of the 'humanization' the war, war being by its very nature destructive and inhuman."<sup>124</sup>

While the Vatican's disapproval with the actions of the Nationalist do not represent a fundamental shift in policy, it does demonstrate the effect of the Spanish bishops' incendiary language. The bishops blessed the actions of the combatants and urged them onward in pursuit of a Holy War. Actions, such as the slaughter of civilians, can be dismissed in pursuit of a higher cause. The Holy See's language clashed sharply with the Spanish Church's designation of the War as a Crusade by acknowledging that any war is "destructive and inhumane", let alone laying blame at the feet of the

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<sup>124</sup> Ragner 232.



Nationalists. It also represented yet another opportunity for the episcopate to condemn the violence, which they were loath to do. Additionally, it demonstrated the disconnect between the Vatican and the bishops.

Despite the bombings, the Vatican officially recognized the Burgos government in April of 1938, and relegated the official recognition of the government in Valencia to suspension. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1939, Pius XI died, and in less than a month his successor, Secretary of State Pacelli, became his successor, Pius XII. In a few short months, punctuated by aerial bombardments, victory was declared. On April 1, 1939, Franco declared “the war is over”.<sup>125</sup> On the same day Pius XII congratulated Franco on a “Catholic Victory”, and nationalist Catholics celebrated statewide. Thousands of priests, monks, and nearly all the bishops broke out into raucous celebration over the end of the war and the triumph of the Crusade. Several bishops, even some of the regime’s most ardent supporters, including the Primate of Spain, began to understand the situation that had been wrought.

Isidro Gomá gradually became more apprehensive and disillusioned with the Nationalists by the end of the War. Always a fervent supporter of the Uprising, Franco and he were in close correspondence, and there was none in Spain who led the Church so vigorously to the tune of the march of the crusaders. It became readily apparent that the “crusade”, as so many ecclesiastics preached, began to devolve. Nationalists were slaughtering innocents with impunity, not to mention the imprisonment of the Basque clergy, which still worried Gomá. As the patriotic fervor died down, he wondered if he

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<sup>125</sup> Ragner 313.

had made the right decision conjoining the Church with a political movement. He also became preoccupied with the extent to which Nazism, which had little use for religion, had pervaded the Falangist movement.<sup>126</sup> All these factors caused great trepidation to the once-sure primate, and he was worried he traded short-term goals for the sanctity of the Church's mission.

It is important to note that Gomá, while a staunch supporter of the Nationalists, was not enraptured to their cause like his colleague, Bishop Pla y Daniel. While he worked closely with the Nationalist government, it is clear from his writings and extensive scholarship surrounding his life that he did so because he viewed it as in the best interests of the Church. As he began to be less assured, so did his health decline. The Primate suffered from kidney cancer, of which there was no cure. Perhaps, cognizant of his mortality and the little time he had left on earth, Gomá began to reflect on his life, and the most important decision of it: to support the Uprising. He wondered whether his brother, Vidal i Barraquer, had chosen the just path when so many had vilified him. In the last months of Gomá's life he admitted that if he could turn back time, he would like to write the Collective Letter over again.<sup>127</sup> He even went as far as to confide to two Catalan priests who had also held Nationalist sympathies: "The only one who had vision about this affair was your Cardinal."<sup>128</sup> The complete reversal cannot be understated. Shaken to his core, Gomá died in August of 1940, nearly unrecognizable from the man he was just four years prior at the start of the war.

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<sup>126</sup> Santiago Martínez Sánchez, "The Spanish Bishops and Nazism during the Spanish Civil War." *The Catholic Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (2013): 499–530. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.2013.0171>.

<sup>127</sup> Ragner 324.

<sup>128</sup> Ragner 324.

Despite being on opposite sides of the ideological divide, Gomá and Vidal were amicable toward each other. Gomá never ceased to attempt to convince Franco's government to allow the reinstatement of Vidal, to little avail. They could not allow the Cardinal, who had preached for peace since the beginning of the war, to be reinstated. So too they could not support a Cardinal that was accused, among other things, of being a Catalan nationalist while simultaneously imprisoning those who spoke Catalan. They tried to convince Vidal and the Vatican, through official and unofficial channels, to renounce his Bishopric. To this desire, the Cardinal replied "For myself, I will not tender my resignation, no matter who asks me for it. I shall die as the Archbishop of Tarragona".<sup>129</sup> He did just that. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, Cardinal Francesc Vidal i Barraquer passed away at the age of 75.

With the largest obstacle, Vidal, out of the way. Franco's government sought to work closely with members of the Church favorable to the government's aims. Ironically, despite the almost complete manner by which the Church supported Spain, it grew slowly, but increasingly apart from the Franco regime. In the era of the monumental reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the abuses of Franco's government seemed jarring. Even so, the Spanish Church enjoyed a period of complete spiritual domination over the whole of Spain. It was not until the old guard began to fade, and a new generation of priests, not knowing the war but knowing the Church's scandal, that the Church recognized its role in the war. While it can be said that the Church did not start the war, it certainly contributed to, and blessed, the violence.

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<sup>129</sup> Ragner 282.

While it can be said that the Spanish Church enthusiastically supported the Uprising en masse, there were many individuals that, without renouncing their support for the Nationalist cause, also counselled for peace and an end to the brutish violence. These individuals were cast as detrimental to the war effort and vilified by the fanatical supporters of the Rebellion, both lay and ecclesiastical. So fervent was their passion for Nationalism, which had taken on overtones of Catholicism, that even ardent supporters were under scrutiny if they were thought to harbor Catalan or Basque sentiment, their contributions notwithstanding. The Bishops were often the worst of offenders, with the vast majority supporting Franco and enthusiastically signing the Collective Letter.

The single largest group of those who broke from their Catholic brothers were the Basque priests. Motivated by a desire to protect the Basque homeland from invaders, the priests did what they could to support the Republic while simultaneously practicing their faith. Most of the Bishops, and even the Vatican, denounced the actions of the Basque priests. They were perceived as supporting communism, as any who were in the slightest an obstacle to the Nationalists were forced aside, with the spiritual backing of the episcopate. For supporting the losing side, the Basque priests were imprisoned, neglected, and banished from their homes.

The Vatican's story differs too from that of the Spanish Bishops or the Basque priests. While the Bishops supported the Rebellion and the Basques the Republic, the Vatican opted for neutrality through most of the war. Able to operate with relative objectivity, the Holy See thought it prudent to offer gradual acceptance of the Uprising. This was done out of prudence and an overabundance of caution. While they did congratulate Franco on a "Catholic victory", their stance throughout the war regularly

differed from what a fundamentalist like Gomá, or a pacifist like Vidal, desired of them. As such they were often the object of frustration for these two men, whose ideas about the war, especially at the outset, could not have been more different.

Gomá and Vidal were two men with nearly opposite views on the war. Gomá saw the conflict as a way to restore the power of the Church that had been stripped during the Republic and supporting the Nationalists as the most judicious path. Towards the end of his life, and with an increase in the senseless violence of the Nationalists, Gomá became ever more dissolution with the “Crusade”. Isidrio Gomá sought to protect the institution of the Catholic Church. Vidal, on the other hand, sought to protect the ideals of the Church. He was a champion for peace while nearly every other Spanish bishop vilified his cause. What is perhaps so striking is that Vidal never supported the Republic. He only cautioned for peace and for the Church to remain neutral in the conflict. This testifies to the absolute climate of anti-peace imposed by Franco. Only a few brave souls, Vidal i Barraquer, Múgica, Oleachea, and others, had the fortitude to call for peace. Out of these men, Vidal bears the lion’s share of credit. In the words of the late Hilari Raguera, whom without this paper would not be possible, “To the memory Cardinal Francesc d’Assis Vidal i Barraquer, a man of peace in a time of war”.

It is clear, through the evidence presented, that the Catholic Church during the Spanish Civil War operated, not as a cohesive unit, but often as individuals, as opposed to each other as they were opposed to the greater ideas of the Church. It is important to understand that the Church operated in this manner so as to understand the greater Spanish society going into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and spilling into the 21<sup>st</sup>. Without the

necessary context, the historical record would reflect a dearth of information and would not be truthful to the events of the Spanish Civil War.

## Document Appendix

The sermon of the Bishop of Pamplona, Marcelino Oleachea, on 15 November 1936, in Pamplona, during the act of granting insignia to the Acción Católica Femenina: 'No más sangre' \*found in Raguer 319\*

I cannot miss the opportunity that God has offered me, which I would do if I failed to turn your attention to a word, a word that could become historic. A word that I hold up before you as a motto, as an Order of the Day, to the Four Branches of Acción Católica, in the times we are going through and those we shall go through after the triumph. It is a word that comes down from the cross, the same cross whose emblem you have just received. It is the divine, sweet, consoling word of supreme intercession uttered by the dying Christ on behalf of all his executioners: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!' Forgiveness ! Forgiveness ! The sacrosanct law of forgiveness !' No more blood! No more blood! No more blood than Christ the Lord wishes to be spilt, by way of intercession, on the fields of battle, to save our glorious and shattered Fatherland; the blood of redemption that is joined by the mercy of God to the blood of Jesus Christ, to seal with the seal of life the new Spain, powerful and vigorous, but born in such terrible agonies. No more blood than that decreed by the Courts of a Justice that is serene, that reached after long thought, that is scrupulously reasoned, clear, free of doubts and will never become the source of bitter pangs of conscience. And ... of no other kind . Catholics, and, above all, Catholics of the glorious diocese of Pamplona! Men and women, and in particular those of you called to the ministry as auxiliaries to the Hierarchy, dear members of Acción Católica, you must practise love to the full, preach with all your energy the words of Jesus Christ on the Cross, those words which set

Christians apart: 'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do!' We cannot be like our brothers on the other side; those brothers who are blind, who have been poisoned, who hate, who do not know what forgiveness is. We cannot be like those: we have embraced a law of forgiveness so that God may forgive us. Catholics! When there arrives in the village the body of a hero who has died in battle at the front to defend God and the Fatherland, and when the young men, his companions in bravery, weeping, carry it on their shoulders, and a crowd of relations and friends, sobbing too, accompanies the hearse, and we feel the blood boil in our veins and passion roar in our chest and when we open our lips to shout for vengeance ... then let there be a man and let there be a woman who, yes, pay a tribute of tears to our nature, if tears can still be pressed from the heart, but who, reaching the coffin, stretch out their arms over him and cry with all their strength, 'No! No! Hold back! The blood of our son is the blood that redeems us; we can hear his voice; we can hear his voice, it is like the voice of Jesus Christ on the cross; come near and hear what he says: "Forgive!" Let no one be touched because of our son! Let no one suffer! Let all be forgiven! If the blessed soul of our martyr, beloved of God, became visible to you, you would not know it. If you wreak vengeance now, he would curse you, we and our son would curse you'. I am sure that that is how the Christian consciences of this great Navarra will speak. Forgiveness and charity, my children. In every village and town, I see rising up a gigantic mountain of heroism and a fathomless soul full of pain and apprehension. Let me speak of the fears. Souls who, trembling with fear, come flocking to the Church wanting baptism and marriage, confession and Holy Communion. They come sincerely enough, but they didn't come before. The links of the chains that held them as prisoners have been broken and they run to the warmth and



comfort of the Faith. But they bring fear with them as well, piercing the soul like a dagger. And we have to win them over with the sincerity of our faith, with the sincerity of our love, with social justice and with charity. The mountains and the chasms shall be levelled and by the happy road of peace we will all march as brothers, singing of the holiness of the Church, in the prosperity and grandeur of the Fatherland. Let hatreds die. Not a drop more bloodshed as punishment. Catholic women, interpose the delicacy of your minds and the fire of your generous hearts between justice and the accused. Work so that no hand will cause a drop of blood to be shed unjustly. Not a drop of blood shed in vengeance. A drop of blood badly spilt weighs more than a world of lead in the conscience of an honourable person: it allows no rest in life and soaks one with pain and regret in death. A drop of blood saved sweetens the whole of one's life; and gives hope for full glory. Motto and words of command: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. Three-hundred of you have come to receive the insignia of Acción Católica. If I can count on three hundred spreaders of these words of command, hatreds will end. There will be neither political Right nor political Left; there will be no Parties; all brothers. The Gospel is one; and will be one till the end of the centuries; and by fulfilling our lives with sincerity we shall arrive at the true life, without end and without sorrows; and that Fatherland which is the true Fatherland, where there are neither dissensions nor political parties. May God in his great mercy grant this to all of us. Amen.

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