**A ‘gigantic struggle between believers and those without God’? Catholicism in the Spanish Second Republic, 1931-9.**

**Abstract**

In Spain today the place of the Catholic Church and the role of the Catholic faith under the Spanish Second Republic (1931-9) remain one of the most bitterly contested aspects in recent history and memory. Behind that confrontation is the Catholic Church hierarchy's continued support for a narrative of ‘good versus evil,’ carried over from the 1930s and portraying the Church as a passive and helpless victim of Republican persecution. But as this article shows, far from a confrontation between ‘good and evil’, the Republic was an arena of social change in which debates around religion and the place of the Church became the lens through which larger political, social, and cultural clashes played out. It suggests that historians must begin to pay much more attention to the reality experienced by many Catholics during the 1930s in order to fully understand the complexities of the Second Republic in peacetime and civil war.

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In Spain today the place of the Catholic Church and the role of the Catholic faith remain one of the most bitterly contested aspects in recent history and memory. Much of that current polemic focuses on what happened during the 1930s under the Spanish Second Republic, which was ultimately defeated in the civil war of 1936-9. The toxic mythologies of the Francoist dictatorship that emerged victorious from the civil war and those who supported it continue to reverberate with vitriolic force, obscuring the complex history of the Republic and what it stood for as part of a long-term process of political and social change.

Not the least of the problems is the Catholic Church hierarchy's continued propagation of a Manichean wartime narrative of ‘good versus evil’ through a vast body of martyrological literature. The complex political landscape of post-dictatorship Spain has allowed this genre to continue to flourish, devoid of primary research and lacking even the most basic apparatus of rigorous historical investigation – and yet often at the expense of alternative historical narratives of the civil war’s meaning. Led by the prolific Vicente Cárcel Orti, honorary prelate and head of the Church’s highest judicial authority in Spain, these martyrologies masquerade as history but, written according to the Church’s analytical concepts and funded by its powerful lay Catholic associations, they work to transform the civil war into another stage in an eternal, Christian struggle between good and evil. Such works portray the Church as a passive and helpless victim, targeted for outright persecution by the Republic and its supporters, which in consequence impelled virtually all lay Catholics to mobilize politically in defence of their faith in peacetime and, from 1936, at war.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Working beyond those myths, this article explores the more complicated historical reality of the 1930s. Examining the role of the institutional Church and the place of Catholicism in the Republic, it develops the picture of a political, social and cultural reality experienced by many Catholics with rather more complex understandings of their situation. Far from a confrontation between ‘good and evil’, the Republic was an arena of social change in which debates around religion and the place of the institutional Church became the lens through which larger political, social, and cultural clashes played out. Many of these conflicts were the long-standing products of Spain’s acutely uneven development over the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Accelerated by the impact of the 1914-18 war, as right-wing fears of bolshevism and left-wing hopes of a new world coalesced into an ongoing struggle in many countries (including Spain), the spaces in which those conflicts could be peacefully contested shrank dramatically. In that process of polarization, complex understandings of the place of religion in society became subsumed into a struggle between socially conservative forms of mass mobilized Catholicism on one hand, and a secularizing Republic, supported by many social constituencies whose everyday experience of the Church had imbued in them deeply hostile (and often violently anticlerical) reactions to its role in society.

**The Restoration Monarchy, 1875-1931.**

Between 1875 and 1931, the restored Bourbon monarchy in Spain perpetuated and consolidated an exclusive, excluding, static political system. Resembling the older order of European politics, it was dominated by a landowning aristocracy, Catholic Church and Army each seeking political stability through a tightly-controlled network of patronages. Consequently, the Restoration system proved unable to accommodate the social classes emerging from industrialization and urbanization – not least the aspirational middle class intellectuals and urban working classes in Barcelona, Madrid, and other urban centres, particularly on Spain’s north east seaboard. The final loss of empire in 1898 – *El desastre* [the disaster] – focused the attentions of the Spanish military further inward, transforming it into a powerful internal political lobby, determined to protect their own deeply conservative idea of ‘Spain’ at all costs. That ultra-conservative ideal was reinforced by the Catholic Church, its religious personnel anchored in counter-Reformation absolutism and functioning as the everyday guarantors of a rigidly hierarchical social and cultural order. Vehemently opposed to ideas that threatened its monopoly on truth and sin, the Spanish Church’s offensive against growing liberalism and socialism was shared by Church hierarchies across Europe as they struggled to come to terms with the pluralist freedoms and possibilities of modernity inaugurated by the Enlightenment. This was a battle that would rage until the 1960s and beyond, and although the peripheral Church leaderships in the Basque Provinces and in Catalonia remained less conservative, Church initiatives almost everywhere reflected an intense and widespread fear that the urban poor would transfer their allegiances to emerging workers’ political movements. Across Spain, the urban poor perceived the Church as their enemy – it offered no material assistance and was increasingly abandoning inner cities as alien territory. In Spain’s deep south too, many of the starving agricultural day labourers who worked on the great estates of large landowners saw the Church as the ally of their exploitative employers and of the violent state security forces.

Growing anticlericalism from the turn of the century was thus grounded above all in the collective daily experience of a Church which these groups identified as part of a ‘vast repressive coalition that structured everyday life against them’.[[2]](#endnote-2) This was true not only of Spain’s urban and rural poor but also those middle class intellectuals who dreamed of a new, progressive and accessible political system free of obscurantist Catholicism. Those increasing social tensions prompted those behind the Restoration system to turn towards authoritarianism and the intervention of the military in the form of a dictatorship led by General Miguel Primo de Rivera. In many ways a regional variant of the authoritarian response to the turbulence of post-war revolutionary Europe – most notably Mussolini’s Italy – by the time Primo fell in 1930 his regime was backed unequivocally only by the Catholic Church. The Church itself remained on the counter-offensive against the secular labour unions of the political left (as elsewhere in Europe), gaining some success in setting up alternative Catholic associations in the rural centre of Spain in Old Castile and Leon.[[3]](#endnote-3) In these areas, large numbers of conservative and intensely Catholic peasant smallholders remained intimately bound to a Church which represented salvation and protection from new and frightening social, cultural and political influences, many of which came to be perceived in the mass democracy inaugurated by the emergence of a Republic in 1931.

**The Second Republic, 1931-1936.**

The arrival of the Second Republic in April 1931, by way of a massive anti-monarchist, urban vote, brought with it hopes of modernizing social, cultural and economic change. A progressive governing coalition sought to institute reforms intended to create a modern Spain through democratic change – in turn destroying the reactionary influence of the Church, eradicating militarism and improving the immediate conditions of Spain’s poorest social constituencies. This huge agenda inevitably raised the expectations of the urban and rural workers but in order to consolidate itself as a democratic system, the Republic needed to establish superiority over the Army and the Church, the two nationwide institutions that exercised tight control over Spanish society.

Popular action across Spain regarding the ‘religious question’ actually ran far ahead of governmental plans: across Spain local political organizations and groups of citizens took it upon themselves to enact ‘reforms’ months before the secularizing constitution was approved by parliament.[[4]](#endnote-4) Although in some localities this took the form of republican flags hanging from church buildings, there was also a more violent element: a wave of church burnings that began in Madrid on 10 May 1931 quickly spread to Seville, Cádiz, Málaga and Alicante.[[5]](#endnote-5) Innovative and empirically rich scholarship over the last two decades from a new generation of historians has placed this violence in its historical context, making clear that this was the consequence of a long tradition of popular anticlericalism that emerged in response to the Church’s role at the centre of the repressive Restoration Monarchy.[[6]](#endnote-6) Church burnings were thus a logical and rational – and tremendously violent – expression of a huge and jubilant outpouring of popular and public enthusiasm for the Republic by large numbers of those excluded and repressed by the Restoration system.

The birth of this democratic, pluralistic regime, backed by outwardly anticlerical constituencies, whose leading politicians were unswervingly committed to secularizing reform and a non-confessional ‘European’ state, provoked the suspicion, fear and hostility of the Church, the armed forces and the landowning and industrial elites. There could be little greater contrast in that sense of collective foreboding than the rapturous ecclesiastical reactions that had greeted the 1923 coup establishing the Primo de Rivera dictatorship.[[7]](#endnote-7) Although the separation of Church and State would always cause ecclesiastical hostility, measures to restrict religious processions and interfere with traditions and communal piety also struck a raw nerve among lay Catholics. As many of the ordinary faithful came to feel excluded from – and even assaulted by – the new Republic, so those who aspired to lead them insisted Catholics had only one political choice. And so, from the spring and summer of 1931, the ecclesiastical hierarchy began to construct a discourse which portrayed the Church as a helpless victim of this Republican ‘persecution’, impelling lay Catholics to mobilize politically in defence of their religion. As early as May 1931 Cardinal Pedro Segura, the Spanish Prelate in Toledo, acknowledged publicly that ‘when the rights of religion are threatened, it is an indispensable duty of all to unite to defend them and save them.’[[8]](#endnote-8) That ‘threat’ to religion, in the form of the plurality of conscience, civil marriage and burial, and the breakdown of church’s hegemony over education, joined newly-permitted gendered and sexual freedoms, permeating the mind-set of those opposed to the Republic. Segura’s pastoral, which praised the now-abdicated Alfonso XIII and urged Catholics to rally against the Republic, earned the prelate his expulsion from Spain by the Republican authorities, but his words struck a chord with huge numbers of Catholics from diverse backgrounds.

Through mass, popular mobilization behind the vexed question of Catholicism, orchestrated – but not necessarily invented by – the Catholic Church itself, huge numbers of people rapidly came to see in the Republic and its reforms a deadly threat to their very idea of Spain. Comprised of ordinary lay people, not only in Spain’s poor and remote rural centre, but also in the growing mass organizations of the political right in the cities, mobilization occurred widely behind the idea of a ‘crusade.’ Borrowing the language of the faith, the ‘crusade’ was not just about Segura’s called-for defence of religion, but was underwritten by a host of social fears, always intrinsic to which was the Republic’s intention to redistribute social and economic wealth – and the political power it came with – and its acceptance of cultural difference. Only in this growing interconnectedness between religion and the politics of the right can we understand how disparate right-wing groups, including the fascist Falange, could access such mobilizing potential.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Chief amongst these for the first two years of the Republic was *Acción Popular* (AP), led by José María Gil Robles, a young lawyer from Salamanca.[[10]](#endnote-10) Catholics were urged by their bishops and local priests to vote for AP and across Spain, the leaders of AP and other right-wing political parties were often the same people who directed Catholic agrarian, women’s and youth groups.[[11]](#endnote-11) These local networks played a crucial role in the subsequent organization of Catholic forces into a structured, centralized political movement, which eventually came in February 1933 with the founding of the *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* (CEDA), a confederation of right-wing groups led by Gil Robles.[[12]](#endnote-12) It was funded by Spain’s wealthy agrarian landowners and successfully united provincial and rural middle class Catholics, gravely warning them of an immediate threat to religion, tradition and family values. Despite representations of the CEDA as a conservative-republican opposition party within the Republic, the party emerged in a much wider European context marked by the gradual crushing of the left by authoritarian and fascist regimes. At the very least the CEDA was guilty of bringing the legislative life of the Republic to a standstill at key moments through its policy of filibustering reformist legislation. But deploying paramilitary and fascist imagery – with Gil Robles a self-styled *Jefe*, a Spanish equivalent of *Duce* or *Fuhrer* – only encouraged a very real and immediate contemporary conviction amongst workers who believed this was a regional variant of Hitler’s and Mussolini’s parties.[[13]](#endnote-13)The Church’s enthusiastic backing of the CEDA also forged an enduring mental linkage between Catholicism and what many workers on the left understood as fascism.[[14]](#endnote-14)

But despite the rhetoric of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the mobilization of large numbers of Catholics behind the CEDA, there were many ways in which one could be a Catholic in 1930s Spain.Their range of reactions, and how they made sense of their places within the Republic, were likewise multiform and plural. But much more can be done by historians to challenge the monolithic vision of Catholics as socially and culturally immobile and politically intransigent. In his recent study of the Catholic clergy in Madrid, the historian José Luis González Gullón has problematized that static image in a number of ways, exploring the everyday lives and experiences of the capital city’s priests amid the confrontations of the 1930s.[[15]](#endnote-15) As González Gullón indicates of the capital, in a pattern replicated in other parts of Spain, clerical responses to the Republican regime could be diverse and fluid.[[16]](#endnote-16) The historian Marisa Tezanos also emphasises the need to explore this aspect of the religious life of the Second Republic in more detail.[[17]](#endnote-17) There were Catholic politicians across the political spectrum, and likewise there were priests and ordinary lay Catholics who over the course of the Republic supported political options including– in rarer cases – socialism and communism. Some were more evangelical than others, some more socially conservative, and though men and women fit uncomfortably within taxonomical boxes, Tezanos illustrates that there were Catholic priests who stood for political office during the Republic across the political spectrum – although several of their number were suspended by the Church for collaborating with parties deemed to be anticlerical. Some saw liberalism and socialism (and anticlericalism) as artefacts of this new political modernity to be engaged with rather than rejected, but at the same time did so through the lenses of new forms of Catholic thought, believing the construction of democracy should be inspired by the universal values of the gospel. These people included the widely known Madrid priest Leocadio Lobo, whose pastoral experience with families in need, and his contact with liberal Catholics in Madrid had shaped his strong perspective on Spain’s social ills.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Many priests also went to great efforts to offer pastoral care through community centres, recreational activities and educational programmes. These initiatives were often conceptualized, organized and run by the individuals themselves, with no assistance – if not opposition – from their ecclesiastical superiors. Clergymen like Juan García Morales, a parish priest from Huelma (Jaén), were greatly influenced by strands of liberal European Catholicism that emphasized the need to engage actively within new industrializing, modernizing environments.[[19]](#endnote-19) Inspired by the progress made elsewhere in Europe (France and Belgium in particular), these few small embryonic organizations provided the only real links in Spain between clergymen and forms of organized unionization. Confined mainly to Catalonia, they sought to develop pastoral strategies based in and around working lives, with community centres offering recreational camps and educational seminars, whilst some even had football teams.[[20]](#endnote-20) Although condemned in some ecclesiastical quarters for being ‘too modern’ in their desire to engender productive links between Catholicism and working class politics, these groups did forge strong links with the Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, the progressive political party led by a number of Catalan Catholics.[[21]](#endnote-21) As the geographical spread of reforming Catholic initiatives like this and – although of a different tenor – those in the Basque Country confirmed, these were to remain minority initiatives for a variety of structural and deeply rooted attitudinal reasons. In much of the rest of Spain, the Catholic labour movement remained conservative, hostile to socialism and wedded to longstanding structures of repression, its involvement in strikebreaking and yellow unionism well recognized.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Those spaces for alternative forms of Catholicism – small from the outset – were shrinking further as the landscape of Republican politics became more conflictive. In the historiographical mainstream, the breakdown of the Republic towards civil war is portrayed as a process of polarization, clearer and accelerating dramatically from 1934 through to 1936. But this might be usefully perceived not in terms of polarization around left and right, but rather in terms of two symbiotic and simultaneous processes. On the one hand, the increasing fragmentation of the political left and the powerlessness of those behind the democratic reform to realise their project, and on the other, increasing mass mobilization by the political right and conservative forces against those reformist ambitions. Lost amidst those processes were Catholics opposed to that right-wing mobilization, their political options narrowed and the space in which they could interpret their place in the Republic, tied to other similarly radicalizing, fragmenting options, began to collapse.

In November 1933, the political right went to the polls in a united coalition driven by the CEDA, facing a fractured political left, disunited and disillusioned by the limited achievements of 1931-3. The extraordinary growth of the CEDA, the fervent support it received from the religious press, the Catholic associational movement, and large numbers of priests was realised in the victory of that conservative and counter-reforming coalition. During the ensuing ‘two black years’ [*bienio negro*], the CEDA-backed government modified, overruled or simply ignored the secularizing legislation of 1931-3, allowing the Church to make its presence once again felt on the streets and in the classrooms, dismantling the secular education projects that had promised to ‘modernize’ and ‘Europeanize’ Spain. Arrests and trials on charges of blasphemy or ‘offences against religion’ also became increasingly common as the Church’s implication in the climate of repression and reprisal fostered by the right once again reminded workers of the daily experience of the Restoration Monarchy.[[23]](#endnote-23)

After the experience of the *bienio negro*, the Popular Front election victory of February 1936 and the return to power of a progressive government with a reformist programme generated another explosion of popular expectation.[[24]](#endnote-24) But it also generated a violent urgency amongst politically mobilized groups on all sides. During the spring of 1936, paramilitary street violence increased dramatically, along with a number of assassination attempts against leaders of political parties from across the spectrum. With the CEDA portraying the elections as the final confrontation between revolution and order, a further spate of Church burnings only seemed to confirm their worst fears. Those assaults allowed the political right to interpret escalating political violence as yet more ‘evidence’ of revolutionary terror and a ‘Republic out of control’, behind which a coup against the Popular Front was being prepared.

**Civil War, 1936-1939.**

In July 1936 a group of right wing army officers led a rebellion against the elected Popular Front government of the Republic. Although street violence and the narrative of the ‘Republic out of control’ – urged on in parliament by the CEDA – provided the perfect justification for the military to ‘restore order’, the aims of the rebels ran much deeper, intending the violent destruction of the progressive social and political change wrought by the democratic Republic. But the initial failure of this rebellion, defeated in most urban areas by a combination of loyal security forces and armed workers, dramatically fractured the country’s polity and initiated a violent reorganization of physical and cultural space. In many towns and cities, this took the form of libertarian revolutionary options. As the failed military coup escalated first into civil war and within days into an international conflict as Hitler and Mussolini came to the aid of the rebels, mass political mobilization on all sides transformed the rebellion into a war fought by and against Spanish civilians.

Huge numbers of Spanish Catholics, and the institutional Catholic Church itself, joined social constituencies from across the political right in support of the military coup, and from the first days of the war an abundant literature written by the clergy exalted the war effort against the Republic as a religious crusade to save the nation and the Church.[[25]](#endnote-25) Though it would not be until late September 1936 that Enrique Plá y Deniel, Bishop of Salamanca, declared the war to be a ‘crusade against communism to save religion, the fatherland and the family,’ his sentiments had already been pre-empted at local level.[[26]](#endnote-26) As those sentiments made clear, social, economic and political conflicts were being played out through the lens of religion and a ‘crusade’. But for many in the insurgency this Catholic eschatological formula provided the explanation for everything in what was, as the historian Mary Vincent articulates, a genuine belief in holy war. For Vincent, this was crucially ‘a claim to legitimacy rather than a strategy of legitimation, justifying both the fact and the violence of civil war to those who were fighting it.’[[27]](#endnote-27) Although for the military rebels the ‘crusade’ remained a strategy of legitimation, as the euphoric mobilization of conservative, Catholic volunteers in Navarre and elsewhere showed, the pre-existing language of a crusade ‘for God and for Spain’ was transformed in wartime with what Cardinal Gomá, the primate of Spain, called an ‘enthusiasm bordering on frenzy.’[[28]](#endnote-28)

The theological claim to a holy war, and its intertwined claims to legitimacy, were aided immeasurably by a vast multitude of forms of popular and political revolt against those perceived as being implicated in the coup. This included an outpouring of spontaneous extrajudicial violence against representatives of the Church in territory that remained under Republican control from July 1936. [[29]](#endnote-29) Churches were entirely stripped of religious imagery and burned, the corpses of priests, nuns and saints were dug up by militiamen and publicly displayed, and thousands of priests were psychologically abused, mocked and beaten before they were executed.[[30]](#endnote-30) The deaths of 6,832 religious personnel, among them 4,184 priests and seminarians, 2,365 monks and 283 nuns, confirmed a real and unparalleled outpouring of violence.[[31]](#endnote-31) But at the same time, that reality provided the victims in a constructed narrative of the war portraying, in the words of Plá y Deniel, an apocalyptic battle of ‘heroism and martyrdom’ against those ‘without God’.[[32]](#endnote-32) That supposed eternal struggle was replicated too in the thoughts of thousands of others, not least the missionary priest Ramón Sarabia: ‘in the end the gigantic struggle broke out between believers and those without God...The sword triumphed which God placed in the hands of our Caudillo, Franco. And there arose from his hands and from the blood of millions of heroes and martyrs, the New Spain, Catholic Spain.’[[33]](#endnote-33)

The narrative of martyrdom espoused by the Church and the new Francoist state being constructed by the rebels portrayed anticlerical violence in terms of ‘good and evil’, a persecution of the church by ‘godless fanatics’. But in paralyzing the Republic’s control over law and order, the military coup had also opened up radically expanded opportunities to challenge previously existing power structures: in this revolutionary environment, ordinary people across Spain focused their attentions on the huge and long-standing influence that the powerful Catholic Church had held over their everyday lives.[[34]](#endnote-34) This longstanding anticlericalism, reinforced by existing hatreds of the repressive social system espoused by the right and justified by the Church, now became a means of logical mobilization in the post-coup landscape of the Republic. [[35]](#endnote-35) Committing these these anticlerical acts thus provided a way of advancing within the new political and social structures being forged – actions that were neither illogical nor irrational. Despite what Pla y Deniel and Sarabia (and countless thousands of others) believed, what transformed the clergy into especially pursued targets principally did not, ultimately, refer to an eternal, apocalyptic battle. The huge sway which the institutional Church held over the everyday lives of vast numbers of ordinary citizens had provoked visceral, politicized anticlericalism over decades, reinforced further by the experience of the *bienio negro*. In this revolutionary atmosphere, anticlericalism was confirmed as a central instrument in the popular imagination of a new, egalitarian society.

But although the Church was undoubtedly targeted as an institution in 1936, the violence directed against religious personnel was not necessarily indiscriminate. Despite the efforts of Francoism and the institutional hierarchy of the Church to transform its meanings, this anticlericalism was always in some way a rational and selective phenomenon.[[36]](#endnote-36) And, as the experience of the Madrid priest Leocadio Lobo showed, individual priests who had no history of conservative political militancy or who had not come into conflict with members of the local community could sometimes be protected in the aftermath of the coup. This was sometimes by local townspeople, newly created militia groups, village and neighbourhood committees, previously existing unions and political organisations, and still existent yet fragmented governmental authorities, each of which had different understandings of the post-coup environment. In isolated cases, priests were saved because they were old or sick, but most crucially many of those who survived had displayed a dedication to intensive pastoral activity and to caring for Spain’s working classes. Their actions encompassed an entire array of socially reforming initiatives, ranging from providing food and shelter to the homeless and unemployed poor, establishing outreach centres, social centres, and recreational activities and to actively taking part in social-democratic, socialist and communist politics. In this, they were agents too of their own survival, not simply ‘un-murdered victims’ of revolutionary violence saved by divine intervention, as the epistemological categories of Francoist mythologies would have it, but active participants in the post-coup Republic.

Their ability to take part in the Republican war effort and make sense of the war outside of the rebel narrative of crusade hinged centrally on their understanding of the religious violence at the start of the war as a violent representation of those culture wars of 1931-6 and earlier. Efforts of individual priests working with and for the Republic attempted to articulate the nature of the war in these terms. By 1937 the Catalan priest Joan Vilar i Costa would anonymously write and publish a precise and damning condemnation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in a three-hundred-page book, rebuking the ‘supposed pious side’ in the conflict for not only ‘killing thousands of workers,’ but for ‘shoot[ing] the priests who do not surrender to fascism.’[[37]](#endnote-37) Demanding that Catholicism not be used for ‘dictatorial’ and ‘reactionary’ politics, the book dismantled the rebels’ justification for the conflict whilst at the same time putting forward clear and reasoned arguments for Catholic loyalty to the Republic.[[38]](#endnote-38)

But individual voices like Vilar were drowned out not only by the continued dislocations of the Republican zone, which would remain a fraught and dangerous environment for priests throughout the war, but also by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, its alliance with Francoism and its ‘Collective Letter’, published in July 1937. Signed by almost all of Spain’s bishops, the letter argued that the rebels had taken up arms to ‘save religious principles’ from those set on the ‘elimination of Catholicism in Spain’ and the ‘extermination of the Catholic clergy.’[[39]](#endnote-39) As explained by the priest and historian Hilari Raguer, who remains an authoritative voice on the position of the Catholic Church in the civil war, the letter was ‘undertaken on Franco’s initiative, intended for foreign bishops and directed, through them, at international Catholic opinion.’[[40]](#endnote-40)

Despite what the letter claimed (and the support for its sentiments that rippled through the international Catholic community, although not without some exceptions) and throughout three bitter years of civil war, the Republic made concerted and continuous attempts to reconstruct the fabric of its democracy.[[41]](#endnote-41) Including the restoration of religious normality and of open, free, public worship, with churches closed in the aftermath of the summer of 1936, this was much more than an opportunistic strategy to appeal to international powers that might alter the balance of the war away from the rebels. It was part of the ideal of the Republic itself, reciprocated by Catholic politicians, lay people and priests – many of whom had rejected the alliance of Church and the political right, working to secure an alternative vision for the future even before the war. Some priests and lay Catholics would not only support those efforts, but take on an active role within the Republic as it sought to reconstruct its image as a modernizing liberal-democracy and to translate that image into reality for its entire citizenry.[[42]](#endnote-42) But by the time the Republic was ready to celebrate a first wartime public mass, in the city of Tarragona, Franco’s forces were already at the city gates, turning attentions toward staying alive for those who had helped to arrange that long hoped for public mass. [[43]](#endnote-43) The next public mass to be celebrated in the city was to the glory of the Francoist ‘crusade’, in a city deserted by thousands of refugees.

***Nacionalcatolicismo* and the war after the war.**

The victory of the military rebels did not mean the end of their war against the Republic. In a process that had begun in the first days after the military coup of July 1936, and extended to the entirety of the national territory on 1 April 1939, hundreds of thousands of Republican supporters, ordinary civilians, provincial and mid-level political activists, and soldiers were subjected to brutal violence unleashed by Francoism and its supporters. This was a process rivalling the efforts of totalitarian states elsewhere in Europe; it was a ‘way of “killing change” in particular by undoing the language of rights...intended to teach those who had believed in the Republic as a vehicle of change that their aspirations would always be bought at too high a price.’[[44]](#endnote-44)

Restoring the alliance of throne and altar – only this time in a new, distinctly modern dictatorship – the fundamental result of the war on the institutional Church was the construction of an official discourse which identified religion as a Catholic traditionalist monopoly, and with it the National-Catholicism of the new Francoist state. That narrative construction is illustrated superbly by the historian Peter Anderson, whose work charts the reciprocal dynamics between the dictatorship and ordinary individuals across southern Spain, as pre-war fears became post-war myths, legitimizing both the Francoist repression and the regime itself through the narrative of the ‘crusade’.[[45]](#endnote-45) Such a Manichean worldview held no place for those Catholics who had opted for more peaceful dialogue with the Republic and the new languages of political and social rights wrought by its reformist ambitions. Instead the efforts of many Catholics (and indeed non-Catholics) to integrate religion and modernizing change during the Republic were buried by the invention and consolidation of the bloody confrontation between ‘religion’ and ‘anti-religion.’ The result was the acute marginalization (if not the systematic elimination) of those pluralistic and often diverse projects that had worked for the incorporation of Catholicism in Spain’s democracy.[[46]](#endnote-46) And, as the historian Helen Graham makes clear, the Francoist regime, buoyed up and legitimated by the western anti-communism of the Cold War, then kept alive these binary categories for nearly forty years, through a vast repression and the endlessly reiterated discourse of ‘good and evil’, of ‘martyrs and barbarians’.[[47]](#endnote-47)

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2. Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937*,(London and New York: Routledge/Cañada Blanch, 2005), p. 39 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Julio de la Cueva and Feliciano Montero (eds.), *La secularización conflictiva: España 1898 – 1931* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007) chart this process through the first decades of the twentieth century. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. William Christian, *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 469; Maria Thomas, ‘Disputing the Public Sphere: Anticlerical Violence, Conflict and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, April 1931 – July 1936’, *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea,* 33, 2011, pp. 49-69 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Frances Lannon, *Privilege, Persecution and Prophecy; The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1975*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.181-6 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The best introductions here include 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(3), 1998, pp. 355-369 and Maria Thomas*, The*Faith and the Fury*: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Lannon, *Privelege*, p. 179. The most complete overview of the institutional Church during the twentieth century can be found in William J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875–1998*, (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Boletín Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de Toledo,* May 2, 1931. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Sid Lowe, *Catholicism, War and the Foundation of Francoism* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), pp. 190-3 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
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13. Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform Reaction and Revolution in the Second Spanish Republic 1931-1936* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 130; Lowe, *Catholicism*, pp. 230-5. See Stanley G. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936: Origins of the Civil War*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 308-9 for the perception of the CEDA as ‘legalistic’ and ‘semi-moderate’. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. On the CEDA as the Church’s ‘primary political partner’ see Lowe, *Catholicism,* pp. 190-6 and Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 145-6 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
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16. For this variation across other areas of Spain, see for instance Antón M. Pazos, *El clero navarro (1900-1936):origen social, procedencia geográfica y formación sacerdotal*, (Eunsa, Pamplona 1990) [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Marisa Tezanos Gandarillas, ‘El clero ante la República: los clérigos candidatos en las elecciones constituyentes de 1931’ in Julio de la Cueva and Feliciano García Montero (eds.), *Laicismo y catolicismo. El conflicto político-religioso en la Segunda República*, (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 2009), pp. 276-284. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. José Luis González Gullón, ‘Leocadio Lobo, un sacerdote republicano’, *Hispania Sacra*, 125, 2010; Leocadio Lobo, *Primate and Priest*, (London: Press Department of the Spanish Embassy, 1937) [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Juan García Morales, *El Cristo rojo*, (Madrid: Editorial Castro, 1935) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. For a comparative context to these efforts, see amongst others Susan B. Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France*, (London: Duke University Press, 2009) [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. For the emergence of the FJCC and its links to European Catholic movements, see Pere Codinachs i Verdaguer, *La Federació de Joves Cristians de Catalunya (FJCC, 1931-1936). La seva mentalitat moral, la seva infuència social*, (Barcelona: Claret, 1990). The similar organization UTCC was founded by another priest, Josep Maria Tarragó i Ballús who would, during the civil war, come to be targeted by Francoist authorities; see José Andrés-Gallego and Antón M. Pazos (eds.), *Archivo Gomá: Documentos de la Guerra Civil, VIII* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. 2005 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Adrian Shubert, ‘El fracaso del sindicalismo católico en Asturias’, in Jackson, *Octubre 1934,* pp. 246-8 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rafael Cruz, *En el nombre del pueblo*, (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006), pp. 60-1 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*, (St. Ives: HarperPress, 2011), pp. 84-7. As the workers rebellion of October 1934 showed, driven by the collective fear that the new government would obliterate the language of political rights enshrined in the Republican ideal, the Church and its personnel once again became legitimate political targets in revolutionary goals – thirty four religious personnel were killed and churches were burned. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Eugenio Fernández Almuzara, *Evangelio de la Nueva España* (Valladolid: Rústica, 1937), p. 11. ‘The glorious national rising’, declared the Jesuit Eugenio Fernández Almuzara, on Radio Valladolid in 1937, ‘has been the principal fruit of two sentiments, that of patriotism and that of religion, the pillars of the triumphal arch of the New Spain.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Enrique Plá y Deniel, ‘Las dos ciudades’, *Boletín Eclesiástico del Obispado de Salamanca*, 1936, p. 270 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Mary Vincent, ‘The Spanish Civil War as a War of Religion’, in Martin Baumeister and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *‘If You Tolerate This’, The Spanish Civil War in the Age of Total War*, (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), p. 82 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. At the beginning of September, José Álvarez Miranda, the Bishop of León, called the Catholic faithful to join the war against ‘Soviet Jewish–Masonic laicism’, see Alfonso Álvarez Bolado, *Para ganar la guerra, para ganar la paz: Iglesia y guerra civil 1936–1939*, (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 1995) p. 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. José Luis Ledesma, ‘La santa ira popular del 36: La violencia en guerra civil y revolución, entre cultura y política’, in Javier Muñoz, José Luis Ledesma and Javier Rodrigo (eds.), *Culturas y políticas de la violencia España Siglo XX* (Madrid: Siete Mares, 2005), pp. 179-82 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See Thomas, *Faith and the Fury*, pp. 121-36. For contemporary accounts, see also Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit. An Eye-Witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937) and Juan Estelrich, *La persecution religieuse en Espagne*, (Paris: Plon, 1937) [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Antonio Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España, 1936 – 1939*, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961), pp. 758-768. Montero’s figures remain widely accepted, although more recent research has suggested slight alterations: Ángel David Martín Rubio has suggested a lower figure of 6,788 in *Los mitos de la repression en la guerra civil* (Baracaldo: Grafite, 2005), p.234, whilst Gregorio Rodríguez Sánchez has raised the number of nuns killed to 296 in *El habito y la cruz: religiosas asesinadas en la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Edibesa, 2006), pp.551-60. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Glicerio Sánchez Recio, *De las dos ciudades a la resurrección de España. Magisterio pastoral y pensamiento político de Enrique Pla y Deniel*, (Valladolid: Ambito, 1994), p. 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ramón Sarabia, *?España...es católica?: charlas de un misionero*, (Madrid: El perpetuo Socorro, 1939), pp. 288-9 [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. de la Cueva, ‘Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition and Revolution’ p. 360 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Thomas, *Faith and the Fury*, p. 139-41. For the rationality of these actions, see Bruce Lincoln, ‘Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27(2), 1985, pp. 231-60 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *Causa General: la dominación roja en España: avance de la información instruída por el Ministerio Público en 1943* (Astorga: Akrón, 2008). In Spain today, martyrological literature is more abundant than ever, echoing intellectually reductionist arguments borrowed from Francoism: see for instance Vicente Cárcel Ortí, *La gran persecución: España, 1931-1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. # Joan Vilar i Costa, *Montserrat; glosas a la Carta colectiva de los obispos españoles*, (Barcelona; Instituto Católica de Estudios Religiosos, 1938), p. 68

    [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Vilar, *Montserrat*, p. 71 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Isidro Gomá y Tomás, *Por Díos y Por España. Pastorales – instrucciones pastorales y artículos – discursos – mensajes – apéndice, 1936–1939* (Barcelona, 1940), pp. 564-9 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Hilari Raguer, *Gunpowder and Incense: The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War,* (London: Routledge/Canada Blanch, 2007), p. 109 [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. For the reconstruction of that liberal-democratic fabric and its underlying ethic (and its wartime limitations, imposed not least by the weight of the European democracies’ commitment to the Non-Intervention policy that significantly impacted the Republic’s ability to fight the war), see Graham, *Republic*, pp. 338-57; excellent contemporary analysis can be found in Manuel Irujo, *Un vasco en el ministerio de Justicia, Memorias*, II, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Vasca Ekin, 1976-9). For rejections of the Collective Letter, see amongst others Jacques Maritain, ‘De la guerra sainte’, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1 July 1937, also published as an introduction to Alfred Mendizábel*, The Martyrdom of Spain: Origins of a Civil War*, (New York: Vilalba, 1938) [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. See for instance the work of José Manuel Gallegos Rocafull, *La pequeña grey; Testimonio religioso sobre la guerra de España* (Barcelona: Peninsula, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. For the work of some of those involved in efforts to restore religious freedoms, see Hilari Raguer, *Salvador Rial, Vicari del Cardenal de la Pau*, (Biblioteca Abat Oliba, Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1993), pp. 141-3; Irujo, *Un vasco*, II; Queralt Solé and Gemma Caballer, ‘Aproximació a la biografia política de Josep Maria Trias Peitx’, *Cercles. Revista d’Història Cultural*, 15, 2012, pp. 165-181 [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Helen Graham, ‘The memory of murder: mass killing, incarceration and the making of Francoism’, in Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, Roberta Ann Quance, and Anne L. Walsh (eds.), *Guerra y memoria en la España contemporánea/War and Memory in Contemporary Spain*, (Madrid: Verbum, 2009), p. 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Peter Anderson, ‘In the Name of the Martyrs, Memory and Retribution in Francoist Southern Spain, 1936-1945’, *Cultural and Social History*, 8(3), pp. 355–370 [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. For the inculcation of a particular reading of integrist Catholicism in the Francoist war effort, see Mary Vincent, ‘The Martyrs and the Saints: Masculinity and the Construction of the Francoist Crusade’, *History Workshop Journal*, 47, 1999, pp. 68-98 and Michael Richards, ‘Presenting Arms to the Blessed Sacrament: Civil War and Semana Santa in the City of Málaga, 1936–1939’, in Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (eds), *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 196-222 [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. # Helen Graham, *The War and its Shadow: Spain’s Civil War in Europe’s Long Twentieth Century*, (Brighton: Canada Blanch/Sussex Academic Press, 2013), passim.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-47)