

British Catholic Perception of the Spanish Civil War

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The Spanish Civil War, occurring amidst the political turmoil prior to World War II, was a story that dominated the British press, for it seemed to represent the coming war in proxy, a conflict in which a democratically elected government must defend itself from a Fascist insurgency. Absorbing every aspect of society, from the decimation of Guernica, the first case of a city being wiped off the map through an aerial attack, anti-clerical violence and the burning of churches, and stories of blood-bath executions in public bull-rings, the Spanish Civil War represented the worst character of violence made manifest, and a mere foreshadowing of the looming war with Germany. The press played on the fear of an anxious population, and all of Britain watched with bated breath through the clamped muzzle of non-intervention while reports poured in from the two Spains, Republican and Nationalist.

One British social group that was particularly invested in the Spanish Conflict, was that of Catholics. From Spain, they were hearing report after report of anti-clerical violence from "Red" and Anarchist elements, and it seemed to the educated Catholics in Britain, that the existence of the Spanish Church was at stake, a repeat of the revolution that decimated the Church in Russia. This educated Catholic literati immediately went to work publicizing the plight of the Spanish Church to its audiences. This Catholic press was a unified force for the Nationalists from the start of the war, buying the image of Crusader Franco and turning around and selling the rhetoric of insurgency, and committed itself to the Nationalist position throughout the war.

Working-class Catholics were not so quick to adopt this position. Those who were not as in tune with the internal Catholic debate, who relied heavily on reports from the secular press and institutions in conjunction with the liberal Catholic press, were much more likely to see the Franco coup in a different light. They saw the concern of the Catholic element in Spain not in terms of Crusade, but Inquisition. The encompassing ideal was that religious freedom depended on freedom from oppressive religion, freedom from the feudal, hierarchal Catholicism of the Inquisition that Franco and his Fascist allies seemed to represent. Throughout the war the Catholics associated with the Left were drawn to the Republican side through a combination of political conscience and religious justification that emphasized the humanity of democratic governments and an opposition to Fascism.

Many scholars have treated the problem of British Catholic reaction to the crisis in Spain. But, all of these scholars, with the exception of Tom Buchanan, have treated Catholics as having operated in a political and intellectual vacuum. Even Buchanan's work ignores the influence of a secular political conscience compelling British Catholics. In Thomas R. Greene's article *The English Catholic Press and the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936*¹ Greene draws heavily from a handful of Catholic periodicals as the only tempering force in the Catholic public perception of the emerging political atmosphere. It is his reliance on these narrow sources that he ascribes a nearly universal consensus of Catholic opinion on an issue that, in reality, was jaded across social and economic classes. James Flint reaches a similar conclusion in *"Must God Go Fascist?": English Catholic Opinion and the Spanish Civil War*,² and only stretches Greene's hypothesis into the next logical chronological bracket and draws largely from the same sources in reaching his conclusions. In his defense, Flint does draw significantly on the more liberal periodicals, the Dominican *Blackfriars* and the *Sower*, but is unable to arrive at a decisive conclusion, and never able to express a convincing argument in how British Catholics interpreted the information. Buchanan's treatment of the Catholic perspective in *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*³ presents a comprehensive dialogue on the various Catholic demographics, taking in to account all aspects of the Catholic press and even incorporating the politics of Catholic Labourites⁴ and the lay clergy's contributions in forming a more liberal outlook on the state of Spain's Church and government, but he still neglects the importance of the secular literary explosion that supplemented this discourse.

The lenses in which these authors see a "Catholic" public opinion, assume that Catholic opinion operated insularly and that Catholics could only assimilate information in a Catholic context. These approaches neglect and ignore the literary explosion of the secular world in regards to the Spain of this period. Politicians, poets, and other popular writers were producing literature to inform and persuade the populace as a whole on the Civil War, including some that were specifically targeting Catholics. Prince Hubertus of Lowenstein's *A Catholic in Republican Spain*, a Left Book Club publication of 1937, was based entirely on a religious justification of the Republic and its government and how immediate the Fascist menace was to the Catholic Church in Spain and Catholics through out Europe. These types of popular sources have been marginalized, under-valued, or

¹ Thomas R. Greene, "The English Catholic Press and the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936," *Church History* 45 (1976): 70-84.

² James Flint, "Must God Go Fascist?": English Catholic Opinion and the Spanish Civil War," *Church History* 56 (1987): 364-374.

³ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴ See Also: Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

completely ignored by many who have handled this subject and this does a great disservice to the issue. This article seeks to bridge these gaps and explain in a broader context how Catholic public perception was formed. It incorporates the Catholic and secular presses in conjunction with social and political discourse from non-Catholic organizations targeted at audiences where Catholics were a significant portion of the intended readership, or even Catholics themselves, to illustrate the disparate nature of opinion across economic, political, and social classes of Catholics in Britain.

At the onset of war, the English Catholic press was quick to jump on the Nationalist bandwagon and wrote scathing attacks on the Republican government in the form of front page articles of one of the leading weekly Catholic periodicals, *The Tablet*. On July 25, 1936, *The Tablet* began with an article entitled "Civil War in Spain," in which they described the perceived political situation in Spain. Here they portrayed the parties of the Popular Front⁵ government as instigating or, at the very least, being complicit in unrest that was intended to undermine the authority of the Republic in order to incite a military reaction and consequently "persecute imaginary Fascists" in the military and allow for the creation of a "Red" Army.

The very next week in the August 1, 1936 edition of the paper, *The Tablet* took an even more polarized stance on the question of which way Catholics were to throw their political support in the Spanish conflict. They used loaded language, describing the Republicans as "Godless Marxists," in order to portray the Popular Front government as being a militant Marxist government, invoking the specter of Soviet Bolshevism and conjuring a chimeric Communist threat on the civil liberties of the beleaguered Spanish people, even though this was hardly the case.⁶ This political rhetoric sought to undermine public support for the democratically elected Spanish Republic and tip the scales of public political opinion to justify the Franco rebellion in terms that would legitimize a military coup as a knee-jerk reaction against perceived tyranny. As part of this stilted claim on Republican militancy, the editorial staff of *The Tablet* refused to

⁵ The Popular Front was a coalition of Leftist parties including both the Socialist and Communist Parties of Spain. It was formed in January 1936 to unseat the incumbent conservative government in the February 1936 elections. The party was immensely successful and took an overwhelming majority in the Cortes, the legislative body of Spain, with 271 seats going to Popular Front candidates and 137 and 40 going to the Rightist and Center parties, respectively.

⁶ At the time of publication this was a claim that could hardly be supported. The composition of the Popular Front government included not a single cabinet member from an orthodox Marxist party. The Cortes at the date of *The Tablet's* publication included 1 Republican, 6 Left Republicans, 2 Liberal Republicans, 3 Republican Unionists, and 1 member of the Esquerra party, all parties that were left-of-center, whose platforms were based on democratic political reform but could hardly have been considered Marxist. In fact, not a single member of a Marxist aligned party takes a Cabinet position until after Franco's insurgency and the politically fractured Left cedes 8 positions to Socialist and Communist party members in order to maintain the support of the Far-Left militias that become the backbone of the Republican Army in the wake of July's rebellion.

characterize Franco's movement in the terms of the day. Every time the word Fascist appears in the article, it appears in quotation marks, implying that even though the rest of the world labeled the insurgency as a Fascist uprising, the term is a misnomer, used only editorially, for clarification and association by the staff of *The Tablet*.

Not only did *The Tablet* attempt to polarize Catholics against the Republican Government by playing on fearsome political demagoguery, they engaged in discourse that sought to illegitimize the Republic on religious issues. Their religious criticisms included equally pointed language. They equivocated the insurgency to a crusade and even hyperbolically asserted that "her [the Catholic Church] existence as an organization is at stake."⁷

Though not as prestigious as *The Tablet*, *The Catholic Herald* was the weekly periodical most obviously in support of Franco and his forces. In 1937, nearly every issue of the *Herald* had a front-page article on some aspect of the Spanish conflict. From glowing descriptions of Franco and his character, to spurious reports of "Red" atrocities and other major aspects of the war, most notably the Nationalist bombing of Guernica, the pages of *The Catholic Herald* read like the tabloid version of the news concerning Spain, only being taken seriously by those who had already thrown their lot in with Franco and were unwilling to back down. This type of sensationalism, hyperbolic reporting, and Fascist sympathizing went a long way in alienating working-class Catholics, who were in tune with mainstream perception of the war, from the views and arguments of the Catholic press. *The Herald's* commitment to the Nationalist cause, and their unrelenting support for Franco, came to represent an arm of Franco's propaganda machine working in the United Kingdom. *The Herald's* reports, in conjunction with similar reports in *The Tablet*, made the official mouthpieces of British Catholics seem to overtly support Fascism.

The most sensational account of *The Herald's* wartime reporting was their defense of the Nationalists in bombing the Basque town of Guernica. The story of the Guernica bombing broke in *The Times* of London on April 28, 1937 by the wartime correspondent in Bilbao, and remains to this day, one of the principal accounts of the tragedy. *The Times* described the bombing as having been carried out by "a powerful fleet of aeroplanes consisting of three German types, Junkers and Heinkel bombers and Heinkel fighters," who "did not cease unloading on the town bombs weighing from 1,000lb. downwards and, it is calculated more than 3,000 two-pounder aluminum incendiary projectiles. The fighters, meanwhile, plunged low from above the centre of the town to machine-gun those of the civilian population who had taken refuge in the fields." The story enraged the public everywhere and became the most important journalistic story of the Spanish Civil War. *The Catholic Herald*, in its April 30, 1937 issue, was

⁷ "The Religious Issue," *The Tablet*, August 1, 1936.

quick to dispel the “Red Myth” of the Nationalist bombing of Guernica, accusing *The Times* and *Daily Express* correspondents, who were both eyewitnesses of the event, to having received the news from the official news agency of the Republican State in Bilbao. *The Herald* even went so far to accuse the Republican government as concocting the entire story to attack the Nationalists through the manipulation of the international press. There were no German aircraft, there was no Nationalist attack, and the town of Guernica was set on fire by Anarchists and Reds. In the subsequent issues of *The Herald*, they expanded on this conspiracy theory, having their Spanish correspondent visit Guernica and report that he was “satisfied that the work of destruction was essentially Marxist,”⁸ while offering no evidence for his claim. And, in the June 4, 1937 issue, *The Herald* interviewed a relief worker who came in the aftermath of the “alleged bombing” who attributed the destruction to mines and dynamite rather than aerial bombing stating “my natural impression would have been that such wholesale devastation could not have been accomplished solely by aircraft.”

Also, in their factionalist support for the Nationalists, *The Herald* gave a hypocritical condemnation of the French Popular Front government for the breaking of the non-intervention agreement of September 1936. In the January 22, 1937 issue of *The Herald*, an editorial ran that condemned France of “shamelessly breaking the non-intervention pact” by supplying the Republican government with arms and military support. This accusation falls short of the mark for a number of reasons. First, the French Popular Front government only supplied aid to the Republicans in July and August prior to the signing of the pact. And secondly, the accusation completely ignored the overwhelming military support Nazi Germany and Italy, non-intervention co-signers, were supplying in both man-power, technology, and munitions to the tune of, by *The Herald's* own estimate, 140,000 Italian troops and 10,000 German troops by May of 1947.⁹ *The Herald* even went so far as to say “the Church had no land in Spain,”¹⁰ to try and separate the image of the Church with the land-holding aristocracy in Spain.

The Catholic Herald's unmitigated propagandizing for the Nationalist cause, its often implied support of Fascism, its support of Franco, and its lack of criticism projected at the other European Fascist powers, caused many working-class Catholics to become disillusioned with any type of Catholic Press. It was this type of rhetoric that came under attack from other Catholic sources, notably *Blackfriars* and *The Sower*, who used this

⁸ Spanish Correspondent of *The Catholic Herald*, “Our Correspondent Visits Guernica,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 14, 1937.

⁹ *The Catholic Herald* Editorial Staff, “Strength of Foreign Forces in Nationalist Spain,” *The Catholic Herald*, May 14, 1937.

¹⁰ *The Catholic Herald* Editorial Staff, “Catholic M.P.’s Challenge Regarding Spanish Clergy,” *The Catholic Herald*, January 8, 1937.

propagandizing as a spring-board for condemning the mainstream Catholic press as being too sympathetic to despotic governments and Fascism in general and thus bringing the principles of Catholicism under fire from the secular world for that support.

Another Catholic serial, *The Sower*, if not willing to make an overtly pro-Republican stance, emphatically criticized Franco and all of Fascism. They showed immense concern for Catholics who were willing to lend their political support to despots who claimed to wage their wars in the name of Catholicism. They described the policy decisions of a leader of this nature who will appeal to Catholics through bombastic rhetoric and who will be all too willing to describe themselves as someone who “will be inspired by Catholic ideals and will put down the Church’s enemies with a strong right arm.”¹¹ The editorial staff was quick to caution against supporting anyone with that ideological bent for it might bring about a society with far more dangerous implications than a liberal leaning, anti-clerical democracy. They cited the cases of *il Duce* in Italy and *das Führer* in Germany, and asked if English Catholics would really wish that type of government on themselves or the Spanish people.

This attack on international Fascism was all a part of a larger argument in which the editorial staff of *The Sower* was implicitly criticizing the English Catholic Press, especially *The Catholic Herald* and *The Tablet*, as being far too sympathetic of Fascism, ideologically and practically, and thus alienating their working class readers. The article title, “False Prophets,” illustrates their true views in regards to these fascist leaders claiming a religious impetus to their movements, and how they were harnessing the energy of that demographic for more sinister means. They then spoke for the lay-Catholic majority by saying, “the majority of Catholics belong to the working-class and the main reason for their apathy [for a Catholic press] is that Catholic working-men are convinced that the Catholic press is given over to Fascist propaganda—and with that, like their non-Catholic fellows, they will have no truck.”¹² The language and nature of their arguments, appealing to the popular opinion of Catholics at its foundation, illustrates the lack of support for Franco, and Fascism, in the largest sections of the Catholic population digesting the reports of the Catholic press on the streets. The implication was that lay-Catholics were becoming disillusioned with these reports primarily because they believed Fascism was in direct conflict with Christianity and no amount of pedantic rhetoric would convince them of a false political reality.

One orthodox Catholic periodical that was dissenting from the more conservative rhetoric of *The Catholic Herald* and *The Tablet* and not yet wholly Leftist was the Dominican periodical *Blackfriars*. Though not committed to either camp, the Dominicans characterized their position as

¹¹ The Sower Editorial Staff, “False Prophets,” *The Sower* 125 (1937): 190.

¹² *Ibid.*, 191.

“not neutrality, but impartiality.”¹³ This brought criticisms from both spheres of the Catholic presses, the pro-Franco and pro-Republican. The Dominicans grounded their argument in impartiality on the basis that judgment should not be “prompted by personal or ideological sympathy for one side or the other,” for that leads to the acceptance of “simplistic shibboleths, solutions, and programmes. Too often these breed fanaticisms which, however worthy their origins, cannot be easily reconciled with a Christian spirit.”¹⁴

The *Blackfriars* editorial staff viewed the rhetoric of the pro-Francoists and the pro-Republicans as propaganda that sought to distort the truth in the name of factionalist demagoguery. Purporting that the breeding of fanaticism was anathematical to true Christian spirit and would only breed greater problems that, as they said would “degenerate into battles of catchwords and labels which obscure rather than resolve the complexities of reality,”¹⁵ and that the true aims of a movement, however noble, would be lost in its attainment. They defended their impartiality as a necessary stance to keep intellectual discourse honest and objective on a subject that has so easily inflamed the passions of all Catholics in Britain and on the continent.

If *Blackfriars* was slow to voice support for a side in the political sphere of the war, they were quick to show their biases in how certain types of behavior in the Catholic sphere were not to be tolerated with an implicit criticism of the Spanish Church. The editorial staff, in expounding on the status of the proletariat in the modern world, and the duties of the Church to that group, was quick to condemn any Catholic institution that would ally themselves with the rich and the elite.¹⁶ The Dominicans even went so far as to say that episodes of violence committed against the Church because of economic means may be justified if the Church in that region has a history of oppression and mismanagement of its religious duties. In its October Issue of 1936, *Blackfriars* stated,

And when in a riot or a revolution their [the proletariat's] inhibitions are released, they set fire to our ecclesiastical palaces, pillage our accumulated treasures, shoot us down and fling us into the blazing ruins. Those palaces, by the way, would never have been built, those stores of gold and silver and precious stones never accumulated, if we had continued to emulate the Poor Man of Galilee or His alter ego, the Poverello of Assisi. The proletariat in Umbria would not have murdered St. Francis. They knew what side *he* was on. If today the ‘underprivileged’ (heavens! what a wishy-washy

¹³ Blackfriars Editorial Staff, “Extracts and Comments,” *Blackfriars* 19 (1938): 441.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹⁵ Blackfriars Editorial Staff, “Extracts and Comments,” *Blackfriars* 19 (1938): 441.

¹⁶ Blackfriars Editorial Staff, “Extracts and Comments,” *Blackfriars* 17 (1936): 777-785.

word) don’t know what side *we* are on, perhaps there is a reason apart from Diabolism and Bolshevistic propaganda.¹⁷

If not willing to lend support directly to the Republican government, *Blackfriars* was all too willing to condemn the Spanish Church and voice its support for the oppressed peoples of Spain. No matter where that oppression originated.

In addition to the Catholic periodicals and publications, there was a tremendous literary explosion regarding the Spanish Civil War from the secular press. Catholics in Britain were largely aware of these publications, and many working-class Catholics were subscribers of The Left Book Club, an organization devoted to the spread of Leftist ideals and the containment of Fascism through the printing of affordable paperback books to raise awareness on those key issues. Almost all of the Left Book publications in regards to the Spanish Civil War had sections devoted to the nature of the Catholic religion in Spain, arguments and illustrations that would appeal to Catholics, and there were even entire books devoted to generating support for the Republican government through distinctly Catholic argumentation. Even the mainstream Catholic press paid recognition to these contributions as a letter to the editor in *The Catholic Herald* of March 5, 1937, illustrates. Here Laurence Geoghegan, an overt supplicant of the Catholic mainstream press, argued that The Left Book Club and its arguments needed to be understood because those arguments were resonating in the working-class Catholics throughout England. He advocated for middle-class Catholics in sympathy with *The Herald* to subscribe to the relatively cheap club to more clearly understand the arguments of the Left and to combat their influence on lay-Catholics.

One such Left Book publication that sought to address the question of the Church’s role in the Civil War was Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard’s *Spain in Revolt*. The objective of the book’s chapter devoted to the Church was to explain to its audience the significance of the Church as an actor in politics and in the economy, and how those roles had led the Church to become a force of reaction in the Second Spanish Republic. Gannes began by describing the nature of political protest in Spain by quoting Margarita Nelken, a Left Socialist Party deputy, who said “in other countries, the crowd, in a moment of national uprising, attacks banks and palaces, while here it burns convents and churches.”¹⁸ This statement is indicative of the state of Church in Spain for two reasons. One is that the Church was seen as the primary target of economic oppression, and secondly it illustrates the feudal nature of Spain by having a person

¹⁷ Author’s italics. Blackfriars Editorial Staff, “Extracts and Comments,” *Blackfriars* 17 (1936): 777-785.

¹⁸ Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard, *Spain in Revolt: A History of the Civil War in Spain in 1936 and a Study of its Social, Political, and Economic Causes*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1936), 226.

conscious of class struggle still referring to royal palaces as targets for political expression, targets that had largely disappeared as sources of political power in the rest of modern, liberal Europe. While the rest of Europe was struggling with an industrial bourgeoisie, Spain was still struggling with its feudal agrarian lords, and this type of illustration is supposed to caution Englishmen in how they were to view the structures of oppression in the Spanish theater of class warfare.

Gannes then further described the measures in which the Church had legislated its economic power through antiquated concepts such as a medieval mortmain, which was enforced through the Twentieth Century, that stated the Church “could only attain new lands, but could never surrender or lose what she once had.”¹⁹ It was through articulating these historic precedents that Gannes brought the discussion of the Church in Spain back to the Second Spanish Republic to explain the necessary legislation the Republic made to curtail the Church in a fair and equitable manner. Even though property was nationalized in agrarian reform, the Church was paid for the confiscation and still allotted the lands and property it needed to function. The Republic even allowed provisions for the Church to purchase property in the future as long as it pertained to its own private function and was not intended for profit.

Gannes was very aware of the Catholic portion of his audience and made sure to include these types of justifications in his reporting on the Civil War so that an effective argument directed towards Catholics could be constructed. His emphasis on the past despotism of the Church and how the significant difference of the status of the Church in Spain compared to the English Church, brought about uncomfortable, but necessary forms of revolution in Spain. And, the generous recognition of the Church’s ability to operate independent of state structures in the Republican government and continued toleration of Catholics in the provisions of the Republican Constitution that guaranteed freedom of religion was meant to illustrate how Republican Spain meant to be incorporated as a modern nation-state, free from its religious and feudal constraints.

Another Left Book publication that contained information pertinent to Catholics was Arthur Koestler’s *Spanish Testament*. Koestler traveled through much of Republican Spain interviewing citizens, militiamen, and collecting stories and letters from across Spain to give voice to the average Spanish citizen to the rest of the world. He began his discussion of the Church in Spain by immediately reiterating the position of the Church as landowner and feudal institution but gave additional insight into the workings of the Spanish Church and the character of Spanish Catholics. The most telling is his characterization of the Spanish Republic of 1931 as finally drawing Spain in to the realm of the civilized, modern state. He described the clauses in the Spanish Constitution that were just then

¹⁹ Ibid., 227.

allowing for the separation of Church and State, secular education in state schools, all while allowing Catholics schools to exist as private institutions, permitted all churches to remain open, and nothing that would interfere from regular Catholics from participating in the observance of their religion.²⁰ Koestler went on to say that it was the clergy who were not satisfied with these reforms and their conservative reaction to the disestablishment of Church power was the driving force for the anti-clerical nature of the masses. He then went to the masses themselves to collect their testimonial which comprises the bulk of the chapter.

The interviewees immediately attacked the notion that the Nationalists were just in the waging of any type of holy war. Koestler cited an incident of July 19, 1936 in which machine-guns were fired on civilians from the window of a Salesian Monastery, the Cathedral of Saint Isidor, and several seminaries at the outbreak of the war, which caused many of the church burnings reported by the international press as having originated from the mob violence that was carried out on those churches as a result of their military action against civilians. Koestler interviewed a participant of those early days, a civilian living in Madrid and later a member of the Republican Militia who commented “I myself am a practicing Catholic, and go to confession twice a month, but at that moment my sympathies were with the crowd. When a man in a priest’s robe shoots down a woman with a machine-gun for no reason at all, then he is no longer a priest.”²¹

Not only did Koestler attempt to articulate the atrocities of the Nationalists, he used testimonial to describe the humanity of the Republicans action towards the Church. He reprinted a letter from Sister Veronica la Gasca of the Capuchine Convent in Madrid in which she lauded the restraint and noble character of the Republican militiamen by writing, “We feel we must express our thanks to the Militia for its kind behaviour and the assistance it has given us. Permit us to express in particular our grateful admiration for the way in which your Militiamen have respected the art treasures and objects of value in our chapels.”²²

Koestler eventually concluded that Franco, though claiming to represent Catholics, did not represent all Catholics in Spain, that he just represented the portions of Spaniards who “are both Catholic *and* Reactionary.”²³ He claimed that Catholicism was in no way systematically being persecuted by the Republic, but in contrast that Franco’s Nationalist army was systematically persecuting all those with Republican sympathies, be they Catholic or not.

In Prince Hubertus of Lowenstein’s *A Catholic in Republican Spain*, Lowenstein offered a compelling first-hand view of the conflict in Spain and

²⁰ Arthur Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 103.

²¹ Ibid., 106.

²² Ibid., 109.

²³ Author’s italics. Arthur Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 115.

he, without apology, interpreted those events through liberal Catholic lenses. In the beginning, he described how he familiarized himself with Spanish history through familial contacts in Spain and by keeping an eye on American and British papers and how they handled the reports they were receiving from their Spanish correspondents.

One thing that had disturbed him prior to his arrival in Spain, which was the primary concern of all Catholics watching the situation unfold, was the numerous reports of Church burnings and anti-clerical violence committed by Anarchist and the "Reds." In his defense of the Republican cause, which the book was at its most basic elements, he did not deny Anarchist and radical groups committing anti-clerical violence but sought to shed light on aspects of the events that the secular and Catholic presses had either mislabeled, misinterpreted, or had outright failed in reporting accurately.

While touring around the city of Barcelona Lowenstein remarked,

In the afternoon I was shown round the city, and had occasion to see the wonderful Gothic Cathedral, which is in the most perfect condition. This was of special interest to me, since in previous months I had read at least twenty times that it had been reduced to a heap of 'smouldering ruins.'²⁴

Lowenstein reported numerous instances of running across this same phenomenon in his journey through Spain and he implied that the presses of the various countries reporting on the Spanish conflict had been too quick to exaggerate the extent of these Church burnings. In addition, he also described a number of instances in which the Fascist forces of Franco, with their Nazi allies, had bombed churches with no military significance indiscriminately, even turning some into fortresses and munitions depots, keeping hand-grenades and machine gun shells stacked in crates on the Holy Altar of the tabernacle.²⁵ He synthesized his observations and argued that the Nationalist forces and their allies in no way coincided with the principles of the Catholic faith or could even remotely claim to stand in defense of anything Holy. He noted of the Fascists "It seemed to me rather significant of Fascist methods in warfare that these Red-Cross cars should have to be painted green, brown, and yellow and covered with branches and leaves as a camouflage against attacks by hostile aircraft."²⁶

Lowenstein also attempted to understand the Church burnings in an interview with Don Manuel de Irujo,²⁷ and posed the question of how he

²⁴ Prince Hubertus Friedrich of Lowenstein. *A Catholic in Republican Spain*. (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ Don Manuel de Irujo, Minister of Justice in the Republican government from September 25, 1936 to August 16, 1938, Irujo was a member of the Basque Nationalist party

and his Catholic readership abroad were to reconcile the anti-clerical violence committed under accused Republican auspices, with political support of the Republican government. Irujo, in response, did not seek to defend the violence, but merely explained it by saying:

If foreign papers ascribe the burning of Churches to 'Communist Agitators,' they simply do not know Spanish History. All times of unrest in Spain are marked by the burning of Churches. This was the case in 1823, 1835, 1868, 1873, and 1909. In 1909 the burning of the Churches was carried out by Anarchists following popular indignation against the great loss of lives in the war of Morocco eight years before there was a Communist Revolution in Russia! At the time when the other burnings took place there was hardly any 'Marxism' at all in the world.²⁸

Following this, there was a prolonged discussion on the history of Church burning in Spain and its political, rather than its religious, significance. Irujo explained to Lowenstein that in modern Spain the Church was seen as a force of reaction and an extension of the landlord class. Though this should not justify the violence by any means, Irujo wanted to convey to Lowenstein's readership that this type of political activism was particular to Spain due to the sad state of the Catholic Church allying with elites and landowners, and forsaking its calling to defend the poor. Irujo and lay-Catholics in Spain regretted the violence, if possible, even more so than the rest of the world, because it represented their own individual failings as an effective body of Christ and they mourned the fact that the Church should be seen as an instrument of oppression in their own country.

In addition to defending the Republic in political and social terms, Lowenstein even resorted to the religious, quoting from a number of Papal Encyclicals that he argued defends the position of the Republican government.

First he quoted Leo XIII's *Immortale Dei*:

He who resists the [established] authority, resists the order of God, and those who thus resist bring upon themselves condemnation. And therefore, to transgress the laws of

and was a devout Catholic himself. He was instrumental in organizing the Independent Basque Party to provide the political and military assistance for the Republicans to hold on to Bilbao and remained in the government until near the final days of the Republic.

²⁸ Don Manuel de Irujo quoted in Prince Hubertus Friedrich of Lowenstein, *A Catholic in Republican Spain*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 98.

obedience and to have recourse to sedition... is a crime of treason not only human, but divine.²⁹

Pius X's *Gravissimo*:

Let Catholic men struggle with energy and perseverance for the defense of the Church's rights, but without ever turning to sedition and violence; it is not by violence that you will succeed in the overcoming of the obstinacy of your enemies, but only by firmness and patience, protected as in a fortress by the justice of your uprightness.³⁰

And Pius XI's *Divini Illius*:

The good Catholic is precisely because of his Catholic doctrine the best citizen who loves his country and submits loyally to the civil authority constituted in any legitimate form of government.³¹

Lowenstein then created the argument that it was in direct opposition to Catholic principles that the Nationalists have raised their insurgent banner. The democratically elected Republican government, he argued, posed no threat to the existence or function of the Catholic Church in Spain and thus never necessitated a political coup. But, the reactionary politics of Catholic elites, who feared the loss of prestige a liberal government would bring, created the religious rhetoric of crusade as a way of mustering support for their position, locally and internationally against the Republican government.

As it can be seen through the liberal conscience of Catholic periodicals such as *The Sower* and the Dominican *Blackfriars* in conjunction with popular appeals to the sensibilities of Catholics from the Leftist press, working class Catholics in Britain were not as devoted to the Nationalist coup as their middle-class contemporaries. The sensationalist reporting of periodicals like *The Tablet* and *The Catholic Herald*, only seemed to confirm suspicions that there was some arm of Fascist propaganda operating within Britain. The conservative Catholic presses unspoken underpinning of Fascist ideology and the outspoken sponsorship of the Franco regime, created tension in the minds of working-class Catholics who were being bombarded by the Leftist press with persuasive and compelling arguments

that played on both their religious and political sensibilities. This unmitigated support of Franco, and the journalistic mismanagement of the Catholic Press eventually was just too much for lay-Catholics to handle. The ingrained working-class fear of Fascism was too strong in them, and no amount of pedantic rhetoric from the Catholic presses could alter that. Thus, throughout the conflict in Spain, with a Second World War on the horizon, working-class Catholics in Britain, though possibly reserved about their Republican support, saw it as the only alternative to another Fascist regime on the Continent and threw their lot in with the Republican cause.

²⁹ Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei* qtd in Prince Hubertus Friedrich of Lowenstein, *A Catholic in Republican Spain*. (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 92.

³⁰ Pius X, *Gravissimo* qtd in Prince Hubertus Friedrich of Lowenstein, *A Catholic in Republican Spain*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 92.

³¹ Pius XI, *Divini Illius*, qtd in Prince Hubertus Friedrich of Lowenstein, *A Catholic in Republican Spain*, (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1937), 92.