

The Internationalized Crusade: Examining the International Catholic Support of
the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War. The Cases of Ireland and the USA.

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ABSTRACT

The Internationalized Crusade: Examining the International Catholic support of the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War. The cases of Ireland and the USA.

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The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 divided national public opinions throughout the West. One of the factors behind such split was religious beliefs. This was the case for the United States and Ireland where Francisco Franco's rebels got significant public support. This work argues that both the Irish and American Catholic Church hierarchies and laity Catholics' support of the Nationalists had dramatic effects domestically. This thesis expands previous scholarship on the Spanish Civil War by utilizing primary sources from both American and Irish archives to understand the intention, forms, and controversy of Irish and American Catholics' support of the Nationalists.

Keywords: Spain, Spanish Civil War, Catholicism, Church, America, U.S., Ireland, clergy, clerical, anti-clericalism, Nationalists, Rebels, Republicans, Loyalists, FDR, De Valera, O'Duffy

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Introduction

Prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Spain was regarded by the West as a politically irrelevant nation. This quickly changed, however, when a failed coup led by several right-wing generals triggered the outbreak of the war in July of 1936, an event which attracted international media attention. Nations throughout the world soon became divided over which faction they should support, the rebel Nationalists or the pro-government forces of the Republicans. Both the Nationalists and Republicans were coalitions of various political groupings. The Nationalist side included Conservatives, Monarchists, Carlists (a monarchist faction that supported a different royal lineage than Alfonso XIII), conservative Catholics, and the Fascist Falange. Meanwhile, the Republican faction consisted of liberals, centrists, unionists, regional separatists, socialists, anarchists, and communists.

Dramatic press coverage of the Spanish Civil War would inflame existing political, social, economic, and religious divisions throughout Western nations. The Spanish clergy's support of the Nationalists, highlighted by the publication of Cardinal Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter of 1936, and the Bishops' Collective Letter of 1937, would tie Catholicism to the Nationalist's core identity. The Republicans, in comparison, were often portrayed by conservative Catholics as the enemy faction due to the violent anti-clericalism that mainly took place in their zone during the first six months of the war. Because of the effects of yellow journalism and the clergy's support of the Nationalists, many Catholics saw the conflict as a religious war rather than the politically complex conflict it was.

The Spanish Civil War had complex causes that must be explored in depth to fully grasp the conflict. Factors such as a declining economy (in the middle of the Great Depression), frequent revolutions and coup attempts and conspiracies, a widespread lack of commitment to

democratic rules, large socio-economic divisions, the never resolved issue of the role of the Church, and rising peripheral nationalist movements, were significant contributors to the outbreak of the conflict.

Historical Background

Before the Second Spanish Republic was established on April 14th, 1931, the Spanish Catholic Church held a privileged role in society. The Church controlled Spain's educational, marriage, and welfare systems. The Church's frequent intrusions into politics and control over aspects of everyday life was resented by some social groups who embraced anti-clericalism. Shortly after the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 anti-clerical attacks took place in the form of church burnings. The Republic did little to curb the destruction of Church property, adding to the outrage of Catholics.¹

The ratification of the Republic's constitution on December 9th, 1931 took away the Church's privileges entirely from previously held privileges, adding to Catholics' discontent with the Republic. However, the separation of church and state failed in practice. The lack of secular trained teachers, nurses, and social workers limited the success of the new policies, creating outrage from secularists and anti-clericals. Priests and other religious personnel maintained a limited role in education. Some former Catholic charities also shifted into government welfare offices. Many of these welfare offices still completely resembled their Catholic predecessors, even denying welfare to Spaniards who refused to attend mass.² The removal of crucifixes and other Catholic affiliated symbols such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus from the public sphere, particularly in classrooms, furthered Catholics' contempt of the Republic.³

The right would soon shift religion back into the public with their 1933 electoral victory due in part to disunity amongst the left's coalition.⁴ To form a majority in the Cortes (Spanish

¹ Maria Thomas, *Faith and the Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence & Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936* (Sussex Academic Press, 2019), 47.

² Ibid, 49.

³ William J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain: 1875-1998* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 296.

⁴ Julián Casanova, *Short History of The Spanish Civil War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 9.

Parliament), (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas) the CEDA, the largest Catholic right-wing political party, and the radical republicans formed a parliamentary coalition in order to govern. With the right's control over the Republic, enforcement of the Church restricting constitutional acts were halted.⁵ In spite of the CEDA's newfound political power the Church faced attack during the 1934 Asturias miners' uprising.

The Asturian miners' revolted both in opposition to CEDA's newly gained political powers and the recovery of the Church's privileged position under the new government, amongst other issues. The intensity of anti-clericalism taking place during the miners' revolt in Asturias in October 1934 differed heavily from past anti-clerical acts. Miners not only put churches to the flame but also killed thirty-three priests, which prior to the July 18th, 1936 rebellion was a rare occurrence.⁶ The uprising triggered a panic through Spain's conservative factions and especially the Church, which feared a Bolshevik revolution akin to that of Russia's.

Largely due to the events in Asturias, the election of 1936 created a "win or die" atmosphere for the Church. The CEDA campaigned on utilizing Catholic fears that the left's victory would lead to a complete upheaval of Spanish society and the destruction of the Church, despite the majority of leftist politicians advocating to work inside of Spain's parliamentary system. Contributing to these fears a large portion of the left's political campaign focused on enforcement of the 1931 constitution's regulation of the clergy.⁷ The clergy pushed their flock to vote for the CEDA. Bishops were so overcome with fear of a leftist electoral victory that some nuns were allowed to leave their cloisters to cast their votes.⁸ Catholic support of the CEDA and

⁵ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936*, 67-69.

⁶ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Folio Society, 2014), 136.

⁷ Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain: 1875-1998*, 328-330.

⁸ José Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 35.

the right's coalition would be a contributing factor to the attack on Catholics after the left's electoral victory on February 16th, 1936. The left's victory brought more anti-clerical attacks and once again a widespread destruction of churches.⁹ Five months after the left's electoral victory the failed execution of a military coup led by Generals Mola and Sanjurjo would lead to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on July 18th, 1936.

⁹ Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Phoenix, 2007), 38-39.

Historiography, Methodology, and Theory

To analyze American and Irish Catholics' aid to the Nationalists, it is crucial to understand the context and timeline of the Spanish Civil War. General histories such as Julián Casanova's *A Short History of The Spanish Civil War*, Hugh Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War*, and Antony Beevor's *The Battle for Spain*, provided grounded analysis and provided detailed timelines of Spain before and during the civil war. For more specific narratives of religious matters, I found essential William J. Callahan's *The Catholic Church in Spain: 1875-1998*, José M. Sánchez's *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, and Maria Thomas's *The Faith and The Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936*. Thomas's analysis regarding the first six months of the Spanish Civil War, when the most anti-clerical acts took place, was very helpful in interpreting how Irish and American Catholics often viewed the war through Nationalist and Church propaganda. However, Thomas's writing on social class distinctions regarding the participants in anti-clerical actions is somewhat black and white, as she focuses overwhelmingly on the urban proletariat as representing the bulk of anti-clerical actors. In reality, the rural peasantry, the landless laborers of various Southern provinces, and Spaniards of all the socio-economic classes participated in anti-clerical acts.

Sánchez's *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* also had a strong impact on my writing, notably through his incorporation of the American, English, and Irish Catholics' reactions to Spain's Civil War. While each country only received one chapter, Sánchez did each grouping justice in a limited space, and he included ample primary sources mostly consisting of newspaper articles. When compared to other sources that primarily focused upon an individual nation's Catholic population, such as Fearghal McGarry's *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil*

War, Sánchez's analysis is limited. For example, Sánchez's study of the Irish Church's national collection of 1936 has no mention of the Irish Christian Front purchasing medical equipment.

For the second chapter of my thesis, which focuses upon American Catholics' relation to the Spanish Civil War, specialized scholarship regarding the Church hierarchy and Catholics was limited. Due to this, general histories such as Dominic Tierney's *FDR and The Spanish Civil War* formed the basis of this chapter. Other scholarly works, including Eric R. Smith's *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, and David J. Valaik's *Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937-1939*, provided my writing with a political lens focusing on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's reliance upon the Catholic vote that influenced American diplomatic policy regarding the Spanish Civil War. Tierney's research proved unique in providing newfound insight on FDR's covert aid to the Spanish Republicans, which in effect, circumvented Catholic lobbying against the Republicans. Additionally, unlike other scholarship regarding FDR and Spain, Tierney's work goes into detail regarding FDR's ever-changing view of the Spanish conflict, which further informs the reader on the tension between FDR's thoughts on Spain versus his actions.

In addition to the authors listed above, I must note Irish scholarship's effect on the formation of my third chapter. Fanning, Stradling, O'Brien, and, in particular, McGarry, have been critical in the formation of my analysis regarding Irish Catholics' support of the Nationalists. McGarry's *Irish Politics and The Spanish Civil War* guided my writings regarding the Irish government and the Irish Catholic Church's role in the Spanish Civil War. McGarry's writing, with the exception of Mark O'Brien's journal article "In War-Torn Spain: The Politics of Irish Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War", is the only literature regarding Ireland and the Spanish Civil War that encompasses the major themes of Irish Catholics' relation to the conflict.

The majority of scholars covering Irish Catholic involvement in the Spanish Civil War tend to focus on the effects and evolution of Irish newspapers on Irish thought regarding Spain and the international brigades. My work, in relation to those who have influenced my writing, focuses upon the Catholic hierarchy's support of the Nationalists, a topic that is covered briefly in most scholarship but lacks extensive depth. My archival sources and reading of scholarship have allowed me to bridge this gap in the current scholarship.

My approach utilizes multiple lenses -including political, economic, social, and others- to analyze the Church's influence on Irish and American Catholics' thoughts and actions in connection to the Spanish Civil War. However limited, the diversity of scholarship by both American and Irish scholars allowed my thesis to incorporate these works to create a clear picture of the Church's and Catholics' influence on both nations' response to the conflict. By studying American and Irish domestic politics of the late 1920s and 1930s, and the Catholic Church's thoughts on the Spanish Republic prior to the outbreak of the war in 1936, I included in my analysis key pre-civil war influences. The study of domestic politics in both Ireland and the United States during the Spanish Civil War also allowed me to document how both churches attempted to influence foreign policy, alienate Republican supporters, and intimidate objective media outlets.

Non-intervention was the most important factor in the United States and Ireland in regard to the Spanish Civil War. Both countries' neutrality motivated citizens (for a wide variety of reasons political and religious) to raise aid to support their desired factions and also acted as a show of support. Pro-Nationalist aid committees' membership in Ireland and the U.S. contained a large number of Catholics in comparison to other religious groups. The clergy often pushed their parish members to join or send funds to these groups. These organizations were also to

lobby in support of or against their governments' policies related to Spain. In addition, many pro-Nationalist groups functioned as a tool to harass pro-Republican organizations and enhance the perception of a large organized Communist threat to their country. While both Loyalist (Republican) and Rebel (Nationalist) committees' material contributions had minimal effect in Spain's Civil War in comparison to the U.S.S.R., Germany, Italy, and American corporations, these groups were far more effective political tools by mobilizing voters in support of their agenda.

Thesis Structure

This thesis will be split between three chapters in the following order: Spain, the United States, and Ireland. Chapter one will focus on the formation of the Spanish Church's alliance with the Nationalists. Analysis of Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter of 1936, and the Bishops' Collective Letter of 1937, will be a core element of this section, as both letters are key signals of the Spanish clergy's support of the Nationalists. Analysis of the atrocities of both the Nationalists and Republicans will be noted, in particular, acts of anti-clericalism and the Nationalists' bombing of Guernica.

The second chapter focusing on American Catholics' support of the Nationalists will document Catholic media, pro-Nationalist organizations, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), and the false perception of a unified Catholic political opinion. Throughout this chapter, I rely on letters between NCWC officials and the organization's informants in Spain and the United States to showcase the clergy's covert support of the Nationalists and their harassment of American Republican sympathizers. The various tropes spread by the Church to denigrate the Spanish Republicans and their American supporters will also be examined, in particular, Catholics' targeting of Jews, Protestants, and liberals.

The last chapter of this thesis documents Irish Catholics' reaction and aid to the Nationalists. Topics such as the Church hierarchy's relationship with pro-Nationalist organizations, Catholic pressure on Prime Minister De Valera, and O'Duffy's Irish brigade are analyzed. The commonly held perspective of Ireland and Spain's special relationship due to cultural, historical, and religious ties is also examined, as this was a key factor in the majority of Irish Catholic support for the Nationalists. In a similar fashion to chapter two, letters between

Bishops, informants, and aid organizations are relied on throughout the chapter to display the Church's influence on Catholic aid to the Nationalists.

Chapter One: The Catholic Church's role in the Spanish Civil War

On July 18th, 1936 General Emilio Mola and General José Sanjurjo led a coup to overthrow the Republican government which ultimately failed. Although the coup failed, it quickly morphed into a full-scale rebellion across Spain. In the majority of Spain's cities, the military uprisings were quickly contained by a combination of armed workers and loyal police forces. The regions of Galicia, Castile, Leon, Navarre, most of Spain's islands, all the colonies, and a small number of cities including Seville, fell to the Nationalist revolt during the uprising. In the rest of the country, after Nationalist garrisons surrendered to the Republic's forces and leftist militias, the Church and Catholics faced ferocious violence. This violence was part of the Summer and Fall of violence that consumed Spain in late 1936. Most people assassinated during the war perished during this period. By the end of the conflict, pro-Republican forces had killed approximately 50,000 Nationalists, while the pro-Franco rebels had murdered nearly twice that number of Republicans.¹⁰

1. The causes and effects of the anticlerical fury

During the first six months of the civil war in the Republican controlled zone anti-clericalism was at an all-time high. Scholars have dubbed this six-month period as the fury. Historian José Sánchez claims "It was the greatest clerical bloodletting in the entire history of the Christian Church."¹¹ Over 7,000 clergy and laity were killed, 71% of religious personnel murdered throughout the entirety of the Spanish Civil War.¹² The reasons for this violence were extremely diverse but, in essence, anti-clericals' actions reflected resentment over both the

¹⁰ An overall view in Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust* (London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2008).

¹¹ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 7.

¹² Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 2.

control that the Church held over daily life and its alleged involvement in the failed coup against the Republic.

The Church's support of the right's electoral coalition during the election of 1936 led anti-clericals to believe that it had prior knowledge of the coup and supported the uprising. Militiamen regularly claimed that churches, convents, and other religious buildings were storing arms and supplies in support of the Nationalists, justifying the destruction that accompanied anti-clerical violence.¹³ Raids of churches, convents, and monasteries would sometimes find small arms such as hunting shotguns or outdated pistols justifying both their search and fear of the Church's support of the rebellion.¹⁴ During the assaults of religious buildings, anti-clericals also occasionally found valuable jewels, metals, and large sums of pesetas which would be confiscated and used to finance their militia, the local community or themselves.¹⁵ Religious objects of artistic value would frequently be lit or casted into flames by revolutionaries, symbolically purging Spanish society of the Church's influence.

In the countryside, past disputes over morality and the clergy's privileged status between peasants and their clergy were reignited during the fury, often leading to the murder of their parish priest and the pillage of their town's church.¹⁶ Anti-clerical peasants' violent actions were not exclusive to the clergy but often extended to ordinary Catholics. In Southern Spain, anti-clericalism took its own distinct form due to the harsh latifundia system which exploited the landless peasantry. There, landowners in the latifundia system employed day laborers for the production of agricultural goods such as olives, wheat, and wine. These peasants suffered from abysmal pay, dangerous working conditions, and an extremely rigid socio-economic hierarchy.

¹³ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 78-79.

¹⁴ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 123.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 150-152.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 153.

The Church was complicit in supporting the near feudal latifundia system by endorsing the wealthy's gross accumulation of wealth. In return for their support, a local parish would often receive patronage from the wealthy. This exchange enhanced the perception of the Church being an institution which exclusively benefited the rich.¹⁷ Laborers' distrust of the Church developed into both religious indifference and anti-clericalism among the lower classes.¹⁸

Anti-clericals' violence was not limited to oppressors such as landowners and priests but extended to the destruction of symbolically oppressive structures. Areas under Republican control such as Barcelona and Madrid saw the destruction and sometimes reconversion of the Church's property: pews became dance halls, committee meeting spaces, and other secular spaces.¹⁹ The pillage of Catholic affiliated buildings also occasionally reflected a mock Catholic ritual akin to revolutionaries' executions of Catholics.²⁰ Both the macabre flamboyance of the fury and the wholesale destruction of anything affiliated with Catholicism was quickly reported by the foreign press. International disgust against the Republican government quickly followed, particularly amongst Catholics. Worldwide reports of constant anti-clerical ferocity would follow the Republicans throughout the course of the war. However, contrary to the foreign press's portrayal of the Republic's sanctioning and involvement in anti-clerical activities such as church burning, the Republican government was not directly involved in anti-clerical violence. In reality, it was a result of the government's loss of political power after the failed military coup, that allowed non-government forces such as committees and militias to commit these violent acts.²¹ Militiamen were responsible for the vast majority of the anti-clerical onslaught taking

¹⁷ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 25.

¹⁸ Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain: 1875-1998*, 196-197.

¹⁹ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 133.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 169-170.

²¹ 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): 355-358.

place in Loyalist zones. However, they were often placed by international newspapers under the same umbrella as the government forces. The media's confusion between militia and government forces was due to simplification, sensationalist yellow journalism or general ignorance of the conflict, or just simple ideological bias. The Nationalists capitalized on this perception.²² In 1937 the Republic, in an effort to distance themselves from the perception of supporting violence against Catholics, allowed the opening of a limited number of churches. This operation attempted to promote to the international community the idea that freedom of worship was being observed in the Republican zone.²³ It was too late and too little. This new policy failed to shift the international perspective of the Republican zone away from the association of rampant violence against the Church.

2. The advent of the Nationalist-Church alliance

Nationalist zones in comparison to the Republican zone, protected and promoted the inclusion of the Church into education and welfare roles. There, the overwhelming majority of Spain's clergy supported the Bishop of Salamanca Enrique Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter "The Two Cities" written in September 1936.²⁴ This letter claimed that the Nationalist rebellion met the criteria of Thomas Aquinas's theory of a just war, as the Republic was ripe with political chaos and unjust violence.²⁵ Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter publicly aligned the Spanish Church with the Nationalists and launched the crusade narrative. This narrative portrayed the Nationalists as a Catholic force whose ultimate goal was to defend the Church. Over time this narrative became both a core component of the Nationalist identity and a very useful political

²² Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 138-139.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34.

²⁵ Ibid.

tool that would also be used as a propaganda tool to both foreign and domestic audiences. Shortly after General Francisco Franco's rise to the position of head of state in late September 1936, Nationalist propaganda began to reflect the religious narrative of a Reconquista. Nationalist officials soon claimed they were purifying Spain of foreign atheistic ideologies on behalf of both the nation and of Catholicism.

Franco's rise to power and tightening of the Church-Nationalist alliance were due to multiple factors. The early death of General Sanjurjo, the figurehead of the failed coup, led a direct pathway for Franco to gain complete control over the Nationalists. Franco also benefited from his rivals' flaws such as generals with a tainted political past. For example, discrediting Generals who supported the rebellion against the prior Dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, held freemason membership or heavily supported a particular political group inside of the Nationalists.²⁶ Franco appeared above of the internal squabbles of the Nationalists' various factions and created the image of not being politically like the other generals.²⁷ Franco was also the main diplomatic channel between the Nationalists and their largest foreign supporters, Italy and Germany. This was due to Franco's request for German and Italian transports to ferry the army of Africa from Spanish Morocco to mainland Spain. Most importantly, Franco was in control of the premier military force amongst the Nationalist ranks, the colonial army. These factors led to Franco's rise to Generalissimo first and subsequently to head of state.

As head of state, Franco utilized support from the Spanish clergy and weaponized clerical support against the Republicans by promoting the Nationalist crusade narrative shortly after his rise to power. As Nationalist officials put it, he was God's chosen person to save both Spain and

²⁶ Ibid, 70.

²⁷ Ibid, 70-71.

the Church.²⁸ Catholicism was also used by Franco to unify the factions that constituted the Nationalists. Franco's expansion of the crusade myth increased the unity between the factions that composed the Nationalists, as the bulk of the factions held varying Catholic elements to their diverse right wing political ideologies. Franco also utilized Catholics to his advantage by combining the Carlists and the Falange, two politically distinct rival factions into the one single party, the "Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensivas Nacional Sindicalista" or FET-JONS on April 19th, 1937.²⁹ All other political parties became outlawed. This allowed Franco to create one singular united party with one goal and one identity, centered around himself and his anti-democratic ideals and support of ultra-nationalist Catholicism. This unity benefited the Nationalists greatly in comparison to the Republican factions which too often fought between themselves.

The July 1st, 1937, "Collective Letter of the Spanish Bishops" further illustrates Franco's weaponizing of the Spanish Bishops' support. Franco requested that Cardinal Isidro Gomá y Tomás create the 1937 Collective Letter to denounce the Republicans and pledge the Spanish Church's support to the Nationalists.³⁰ The Cardinal's letter did so, claiming the Republican cause was under the influences of anti-clericalism, communism, and anarchism and was directed by the Soviet Union. It should also be noted that Franco intend to use this letter to distract from and justify the German Condor Legion's aerial bombing of the non-militarily strategic Basque city of Guernica (a strategically unimportant Republican held city) on April 26th, 1937. Forty-three bishops signed the Cardinal's letter in support while only five refused or were somehow

²⁸ Cazorla-Sánchez Antonio, *Franco: The Biography of the Myth* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis group, 2014), Chapter 2.

²⁹ Zira Box and Ismael Saz, "Spanish Fascism as a Political Religion (1931–1941)," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 4 (2011): 373.

³⁰ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 92-95.

restricted in their ability to do so.³¹ Translated to several languages, the collective letter was sent to multiple press outlets in August of 1937, widening pro-Nationalist Catholic support globally. This open letter further contributed to shift Catholic perception from viewing the Spanish Civil War as a political conflict with a religious element into a mainly religious war.³² The Vatican's neglect to direct Catholic opinion globally also simplified the complex civil war into a religious war, allowing pro-Nationalist Spanish Bishops to create and direct the crusade narrative globally while simplifying the Rebel's narrative to foreign Catholics.

3. Targeted Nationalist propaganda and its effect on foreign Catholics perception

Before analyzing Nationalist propaganda's effect on American and Irish Catholics it is crucial to define the political leanings of the various groupings of Catholics in relation to the Spanish Civil War. The Vatican's failure to create a unified narrative around the war was due in part to a flurry of international events in Europe and North America relating to Catholics. In the 1930s, for varying reasons, Catholics were suffering persecution in Mexico, Germany, the U.S.S.R., and Eastern Europe.³³ This persecution ranged from the ousting of the Church from previously held powers to fears over where Catholics' political loyalty lay. Italy's leader Benito Mussolini's tenuous alliance with the Vatican also stifled the Vatican's ability to speak at full effect regarding Catholicism and Fascism.³⁴ These various international events curtailed the Vatican's attention and ability to set a unified narrative on the Spanish Civil War. This allowed

³¹ Ibid, 95.

³² Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 78.

³³ Peter C. Kent, "The Vatican and the Spanish Civil War," *European History Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1986): 446.

³⁴ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 119.

American, Irish, and Spanish clergy, and other Catholic groupings, to create their desired spin on Spain's war.

The majority of American and Irish clergy, in particular the upper-level strata of bishops and cardinals, embraced and promoted the crusade narrative created by Franco.³⁵ Their clergy regularly incorporated pro-Nationalist propaganda into Sunday sermons and Church-run media, while exploiting conservative American and Irish Catholics' fears over the spread of communism and anti-clerical attacks on the Church. However, lay Catholics were not entirely unified in their support of the Nationalists in Ireland or the U.S.

In the U.S., the Catholic pacifist movement of World War I and the relaxation of conservative morals dubbed by historians as the "Revolution of Morals" of the 1920s contributed to an increase of young liberal Catholics. These younger Catholics were concerned chiefly with the application of Catholic social justice, rather than with clerical dogma.³⁶ Domestic concerns over the morality of capitalism and social issues such as the accessibility to medical resources for the poor were among their main concerns. This small and relatively uninfluential grouping was divided between pacifists who believed that Catholics should refuse to take sides in the Spanish conflict and those who sympathized with the Republic.³⁷ Those sympathizing with the Republic portrayed the Loyalists as defenders of the working class and liberalism.

Liberal Irish Catholics in relation made up less of the Catholic congregation than their American counterparts. The overwhelming majority of Irish Catholics sympathized with the Nationalists or with the Spanish Catholic Church, while condemning the anti-clerical acts

³⁵ Dominic Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 92-93; J. Bowyer Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39," *The Gun In Politics*, (1987): 142.

³⁶ J. David Valaik, "American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War," *The Catholic Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1968): 539.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 541.

associated with the Republic.³⁸ There was also a significant number of Catholic Irish and Americans who stood neutral on the conflict for many reasons. Many feared entanglement in a foreign conflict. It is also important to note that some Catholics were more influenced by secular media than by clerical outlets and therefore had a more pragmatic and less biased idea of the conflict. The economic downturn caused by the Great Depression also meant many citizens desired their country was focused on improving the economy, rather than in foreign affairs. In conclusion, it might be safe to assert that the Nationalist crusade narrative mostly influenced conservative Catholics.

During the war, Catholic-owned newspapers, radio, and other forms of media frequently reported on Catholic intellectuals' thoughts on the conflict, reflecting an animosity towards the Republicans and a glorification of the Nationalists. Catholic media heavily exaggerated anti-clerical actions in the Republican controlled zones while ignored or at most downplayed Nationalist violence.³⁹ Clerical newspapers did not avoid sensationalism and truculence, for example describing lynchings of priests carried out by women and helped by children as frequent events.⁴⁰ The recent affordability of radio in both Ireland and the U.S. widened clergy's reach, providing near constant coverage of pro-Nationalist Catholic opinion.⁴¹ Fulton J. Sheen, a Catholic intellectual and former Professor of Philosophy at the Catholic University of America, is the best example of this, devoting weekly radio shows to discuss his thoughts on the events of Spain's Civil War. Secular media outlets also had a strong effect on traditionalist Catholic

³⁸ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39," 143.

³⁹ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 58-60.

⁴⁰ "Violent Mobs in Spain", *The Boston Pilot*, April 10, 1937, 14.

⁴¹ Jennifer Turpin and Philo C. Wasburn, "Broadcasting Propaganda: International Radio Broadcasting and the Construction of Political Reality," *Contemporary Sociology* 23, no. 3 (1994): 36-37.

opinion during the first six months of the war, covering in gruesome detail both the anti-clerical violence and the chaos of the Republican zone.

For example, Jay Allen, an American reporter of *The Chicago Tribune*, documented his car being riddled with bullets and his chauffeur sustaining a chest wound after being shot by Republican syndicalists in La Línea, a city located in the Southern Republican held zone.⁴² Sensationalist stories similar to Allen's captured pages of other newspapers documenting disorder and violence of the Republican zone. In another example, the *New York Times* reported on August 1st of 1936 with brutal detail how six Dominican nuns were executed by Republican militia men in a forest North of Barcelona.⁴³ These reports contributed to the perception that the Republican zone was violent and lawless.

These reported events reflect the looseness of censorship practices in the Republican zones, primarily during the initial months of the Spanish Civil War. The fragmentation of the Republic's government made enforcement of censorship difficult. In comparison, Nationalist authorities maintained a tighter hold over foreign journalists. Both American and Irish newspaper columns describing the Nationalist zone systematically went through military censors. Through their strict control over the foreign press, the Nationalists portrayed themselves as orderly and the Republic in comparison as chaotic and unruly. In this last regard, American and Irish newspapers frequently highlighted the lack of food, cooking oils, and everyday products such as soap in Loyalist Spain.⁴⁴ This reinforced the conservative Catholic perspective that civilian life under the Republican government was in total disarray when compared to Nationalist zones.

⁴² "Spain Checks Rebels' Drive", *The Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1936, 1,12.

⁴³ "Barcelona in Grip of Left Terror; Nuns, Preists and Fascist Slain", *New York Times*, August 1, 1936, 1.

⁴⁴ "Barcelona Lacks Food", *New York Times*, July 22, 1937, 13.

When possible, Franco took full advantage of employing censorship and propaganda techniques by utilizing foreign journalists. For example, he allowed Russell Palmer, a Catholic American journalist, to create a pro-Nationalist propaganda film *The Defenders of The Faith. The Spanish Civil War In Color (1938)*. This film features Spaniards “liberated” from a former Republican held town, now living in peace. It also showcases Falangists handing out bread to women and children. Palmer’s film also displays speeches by Nationalist leaders, often with a priest on-hand, demonstrating the relationship between Spain’s Church and the Nationalist government. Depictions of the Republicans in comparison highlight mainly two aspects: the brutality the Republic practices against its own citizens and the Soviet aid fueling the Republican military. The Nationalist foreign supporters of Portugal, Italy, and Germany are alluded to once only and on the topic of airplane production, but never mentioned by name. This is done to most likely shield the primarily American audience from associating the Nationalists with Nazism or Fascism.⁴⁵

4. Limitations of the Nationalist crusade narrative

The framing of the Nationalist crusade as a mere religious conflict in Ireland and America faced strong backlash from Republican supporters and those who were neutral. Franco’s over simplistic crusade narrative was riddled with flaws. This narrative, in its attempt to narrow the scope of the war, failed to acknowledge the complexity of the conflict such as the foreign support of the Nationalists. German and Italian support of the Nationalists was completely at odds with papal doctrine. Fascism and Nazism were deemed as political systems alien to Catholic doctrine by Pope Pius XI. Papal encyclicals denounced fascism’s placement of

⁴⁵ Palmer, Rusell, dir., *Defenders Of The Faith The Spanish Civil War In Color (1938)*, film.

the state above all else in 1931 and Nazism's attempt to supplement Christianity with German neo-paganism in 1937.⁴⁶ Opponents of pro-Nationalist Catholics would contend that Catholic support of the Nationalist faction was at odds with domestic and papal opinion regarding fascism. Catholic clergy and intellectuals in response had two main arguments in defense of their endorsement of the Nationalists regarding fascist nations intervention.

The August 1936 Non-Intervention Pact adhered to by the U.S., France, Britain, and other nations blocked, in theory at least, both the Nationalists and Republicans from receiving foreign aid. Pro-Nationalists would claim, falsely, that the Soviets went skirted this agreement by supplying the Republicans with military advisors and material aid, prior to the intervention of the fascist powers.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Nationalists said they were justified in their acceptance of German and Italian aid. This claim was baseless as the Nationalists were the first to receive foreign aid in the form of aerial and naval transports by Germany and Italy. Specifically, during the ferry of the army of Africa between late July and early August of 1936.⁴⁸ However, conspiracy theories of prior Soviet material and propaganda aid were common and used as justification for fascist intervention.⁴⁹ American and Irish clergy also framed German and Italian support as a transactional relationship, portraying Franco as a non-fascist. The Archbishop of Boston William Henry O'Connell, famously remarked to a journalist "Aid from fascist nations no more made Franco a fascist, than French aid to Americans during the Revolution made Americans Royalists."⁵⁰ Many Pro-Nationalist Catholics would follow suit, arguing that foreign aid was a means to an end rather than allegiance to a foreign power or a particular ideology when

⁴⁶ "Non abbiamo bisogno," *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 29, 1931; "Mit brennender Sorge", *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 14, 1937.

⁴⁷ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 132, 148.

⁴⁸ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 26.

⁴⁹ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 148.

⁵⁰ "Cardinal O'Connell on Spain", *Boston Post*, March 19, 1938, 1.

applied strictly to the Nationalists.⁵¹ While both Irish and American Nationalist supporters noted the involvement of Italy and Germany, few would acknowledge or denounce the innocents imprisoned, tortured, and killed by the Nationalists.

The mass murder of Republicans was a core concept of General Mola and the Nationalists' plans prior to the onset of the rebellion. These actions mark a stark contrast to conservative Irish and American Catholics' belief that the Nationalists were the faction of order and justice. General Mola instructed Nationalist generals to practice extreme violence against leftist groupings and at random to sow fear amongst the local population, in an attempt to control the conquered.⁵² Mola's policy of repression of political opponents ran directly counter to the crusade narrative, in which the Republics were depicted as the sole faction of brutality.

The Nationalist slaughter of Badajoz would be a prime example of Mola's blueprint. After the city was conquered in August 1936 by Franco's Army of Africa, 3,000-5,000 Republican soldiers and non-combatants including women were executed.⁵³ When asked why these executions took place, Lieutenant Colonel Yagüe replied to an American reporter "Of course we shot them. What do you expect? Was I supposed to take 4,000 reds with me as my column advanced, racing against time? Was I expected to turn them loose in my rear and let them make Badajoz red again?"⁵⁴ Yagüe was promoted to the rank of colonel after the conquest of Badajoz. Due to the scope of this slaughter international press quickly picked up this story documenting the massacre of Badajoz. The *Chicago Tribune* described Badajoz as "A city of horrors."⁵⁵ This was not an isolated case. Foreign reports would still document Nationalist

⁵¹ Donald F. Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939," *The New England Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1971): 84.

⁵² Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, 132-134.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 321.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 323.

⁵⁵ "Execution of 4,000 at Badajoz, "City of Horrors"" *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1936, 2.

atrocities through Southern Spain such as Badajoz, recording frequent mass killings of the innocents during the first three months of the civil war. Learning from the negative coverage gained through the massacre of Badajoz, Franco created a Nationalist propaganda unit to further regulate reports of the Nationalist zone.⁵⁶

Torture, rape, and murder by Nationalist forces would be administered throughout the South. Nationalist officials often claimed uninvolved peasants were leaders of socialist, communist or anarchist militias which pillaged churches, the wealthy's property, and murdered innocents. Frequently, peasants were picked at random to stand on a non-jury trial for fabricated claims such as promoting rebellion or gathering in small groups.⁵⁷ Men, women, and children were tortured, killed, and even raped in full view of their village to spread terror through the local population. Bodies of the executed were left to rot in the street for days to further the example.⁵⁸ Personal and business relationships between landowners and Nationalist officers additionally influenced the targeting of civilians who in the previous months had reappropriated the wealthy's land or demanded better working conditions. Some wealthy landowners took full advantage of the Nationalist slaughter by funding personal militias to attack peasants to both recover their property and spread terror amongst the peasantry.⁵⁹ The routine violence that engulfed the Southern provinces would frequently attract international attention, in response Franco appointed new ministers in hopes for more discreet mass executions.⁶⁰ In response, Spain's clergy shielded the Nationalists' international image by turning a blind eye to the

⁵⁶ Peter Anderson, "The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War: Symbols and Souls," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 2 (2016): 302.

⁵⁷ Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, 142.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 192.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 165-166.

⁶⁰ Anderson, "The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War: Symbols and Souls," 302.

systematic killing of Republicans.⁶¹ Some clergy claimed such measures were necessary to eliminate Marxism and purify Spanish society further justifying the mass killings, such as Father Martínez Laorden who complained to Nationalist command that they have been “too lenient” in their repression of Republican supporters.⁶² Akin to the Spanish clergy, Irish, and American clergy justified the violence or refused to address that Nationalist forces had committed such atrocities. Many foreign clergy claimed that Rebel forces were incapable of committing such cruelties as they received the eucharist daily.

American and Irish clergy would denounce writers and publishers of articles recounting the unjust bloodshed in defense of the Nationalist narrative. Some Catholics were regularly demanded by their parish priest to not purchase pro-Republican newspapers or magazines such as *Time*, in fear that reading it would corrupt oneself.⁶³ The clergy’s practices of denial or justification of the multiple Nationalist slaughters came to the forefront with the Nationalist offensive on the Basque country on March 31st, 1937 as the Nationalist forces fought against the most devout Catholics in all of Spain. International newspaper reports of the Catholic Basque people’s defense against the Nationalist military muddled the sole religious lens portrayed through the narrow crusade narrative.

The Basques’ motive of siding with the Republic, despite the majority of Basque people being Catholic, during the civil war reflects the Basques’ well-grounded fear that a Nationalist government would not permit Basque autonomy. The Republic in turn worked with Basque officials to enact full Basque autonomy on October 1st, 1936, gaining full political autonomy

⁶¹ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, 148.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Letter regarding “Life’s critical article regarding the Catholic Church support of the Nationalists as a fascist faction” by C.D, Jackson, box 8, folder 17, Manuscript collection, USCCB OGS, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

from the Republic including control of an independent army.⁶⁴ The newly created Basque Government headed by President José Antonio Aguirre held independent power over its regional military, rarely using it for offensive attacks outside the Basque country. The offensive push into the Basque country by General Mola's force on March 31st, 1937 met strong resistance from Basque forces firmly entrenched in the North's mountainous terrain, leading to a five-month campaign.⁶⁵ Nationalist forces utilized their superior airpower over the Basques and other Republicans with frequent bombing runs often targeting civilian targets, which triggered international condemnation.

The first major aerial bombing of a non-military target Guernica on April 30th, 1937 was part of Nationalist Northern offensive and brought international condemnation to the Rebels. The bombing by the German Condor legion of Guernica, a non-strategic civilian target far behind the front, was another effort by the Nationalist forces to terrorize non-military inhabitants. The slaughter, paired with the cultural destruction of the spiritual capital of the Basque people, created shock waves throughout the world. The bombing mobilized secular neutral newspapers such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Life* towards a pro-Republican editorial stance.⁶⁶ Foreign reports described hours of air raids leveling homes, churches, and other structures leaving the vast majority of the town on fire. In the *New York Times* April 28th, 1937 edition the bombing of Guernica made front page news, describing the timing of the bombing as matching when most civilians are concentrated in the town market. The article also highlighted the Rebels' intended goal of "...demoralizing of the civil population and destruction of the cradle of the Basque

⁶⁴ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 223.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 228.

⁶⁶ Fearghal McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 129 (2002): 78.

race.”⁶⁷ Franco, in reaction to the international outrage, claimed that Guernica was destroyed by a group of retreating anarchist arsonists, thus shifting blame to the Republicans.⁶⁸ Despite the absurdity of Franco’s claim, a significant number of foreign clergy and conservative Catholics accepted his version of events, asserting that the Nationalists would not bomb a defenseless target especially a well-known Catholic inhabited city. Not all foreign pro-Nationalist Catholics believed Franco’s false narrative.⁶⁹ Many neutral Irish and Americans became disenchanted with the Nationalist bombing and shifted to a pro-Republican stance after a flurry of media reports regarding the bombing.

Pro-Republican factions in Ireland and the U.S. turned the bombing of Guernica into a critical piece of propaganda. Alberto Onaindía, a Basque priest, recounted the horrors during the bombing by British newspaper in the *Dailey Express*, describing corpses of men, women, and children charred beyond recognition by incendiary bombs, and hundreds of bodies riddled with machine gun fire from diving planes.⁷⁰ Accounts such as *The Dailey Express’s* documented the Nationalists’ intention of civilian slaughter filled secular Irish and American newspapers, becoming a focal point of Republican propaganda. The international outrage from the bombing of Guernica and the frequent bombing runs of the Nationalist’s Northern campaign also unintentionally highlighted the vast number of refugees. Foreign news coverage spread to document Spaniards’ exodus from the Southern Nationalist held zones. In particular, Basque children became the focal point of a refugee humanitarian crisis in Spain, and many were

⁶⁷ “Historic Basque Town Wiped Out; Rebel Fliers Machine-Gun Civilians” *New York Times*, April 28, 1937, 11.

⁶⁸ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 232.

⁶⁹ Eric R. Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2013), 80.

⁷⁰ “Priest Blesses City as Bombs Fall” *Daily Express*, April 28, 1937, 5.

shipped for the duration of the war to several countries such as France, Britain, and the U.S.S.R. (for U.S.S.R. the return of the Basque children took well over a decade).⁷¹

American humanitarian and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt advocated for the Basque children to reside in the U.S. until the end of the conflict. In response, the Catholic clergy, media, and intellectuals, rallied against Mrs. Roosevelt's support of the Basque children.⁷² Many claimed that sheltering the children diminished the U.S. isolationist foreign policy stance. In reality, American conservative Catholics were attempting to protect the image of the Nationalists as reports of large numbers of refugees fleeing from the Nationalist zones casted a negative light on the Rebels. In similar fashion to FDR's reservations, the Prime Minister of Ireland Éamon De Valera feared losing the political support of Irish Catholics and the clergy by harboring the Basque and other children from Republican Spain. In order to protect their political capital, both men were compelled to stick to an isolationist stance.⁷³ The American and Irish governments' refusal to take in the children was portrayed as a diplomatic victory by the clergy and conservative Catholics in their support for Franco. The conquest of the Basque country in August of 1937 and the subsequent brutal executions and cultural repression by the Nationalists went unheard by conservative American and Irish Catholics.⁷⁴ Catholics' support for Spain's return to a Catholic state under Franco trumped the human rights of the Basque and other Spanish people.

During the defense of its homeland from March to August 1937, the Basque government attempted a separate negotiated peace with the Nationalists mediated by the Vatican and Italians

⁷¹ Anita Casavantes Bradford, "Better off with 'Their Own People': Basque Refugee Children, Catholic Anti-Communism, and the Geopolitics of Compassion in FDR's America," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 14, no. 2 (2021): 211.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷³ Niall Cullen, "'Oh Ireland! What a Disappointment You Have Been to the Basque People': Irish Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War," *Society* 58, no. 2 (2021): 108.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 700.

on May 6th, 1937.⁷⁵ Pope Pius XI requested that Cardinal Gomá the author of the Bishops' Collective Letter of 1937 mediate the Basque's surrender. Gomá mediated the terms of peace with General Mola and agreed to ensure following the surrender of the Basque country unjust reprisals would not take place such as in Southern Spain. The terms of peace were accidentally sent to the Republican Valencia government instead of their intended recipient, President Aguirre.⁷⁶ This prompted the Republic's further distrust of Aguirre's government. Infighting between the Basque political coalition of Basque communists, socialists, and centrists dragged the Nationalist assault on for another four months until August 24th, when the Basques surrendered when promised by the Italians that no unjust reprisals would take place.⁷⁷ General Mola's successor General Dávila quickly announced these terms were non-binding and ordered the execution of some Basque officers, soldiers, and priests. However, compared to the mass killings of the South, reprisals and the Nationalist sanctioned execution of civilians were limited in relation.⁷⁸ The small scale of executions was due in part to the diplomatic fallout of Guernica, which turned many neutral international observers towards a more pro-Republican attitude and brought many foreign reporters to the Basque country. In an attempt to defend the Nationalists' international image, generals limited their executions.

⁷⁵ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 235.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 235-236.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 235-238.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

5. Franco's motives of the creation of the crusade narrative

The Nationalists' utilization of Catholicism as an identity for their cause was due primarily to the limitations on the applicable narratives in which they could claim the rebellion was just against a democratically elected government. Catholicism provided to be one if not the most useful political and diplomatic tool.⁷⁹ Catholic cults to Marian figures and other religious icons symbolized allegiance to the Church and showcased a political identity in opposition to leftists and liberal ideologies. Spain's Catholics also heavily supported conservative politicians during the Second Republic from 1931-1936.⁸⁰ Many Spanish Catholics therefore were already ideologically anti-Republic before the advent of the civil war and prone to supporting its overthrow. Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter of September 1936 cemented Catholic support by firmly declaring that the Spanish clergy endorsed the Rebels. The clergy's overwhelming support of the 1936 pastoral letter and the effects of the anti-clerical fury gave the military rebellion political legitimacy. By claiming that the uprising was an effort to protect the Church rather than overthrow a democratic government the Nationalists gained validity in the eyes of conservative Irish and American Catholics.

Nationalist leadership and the clergy combined their defense of the Church narrative with the claim of protecting a western nation from the influence of communism. This was widely reflected in Rebel propaganda, which capitalized on the widespread fear of communism in Western nations during the 1930s.⁸¹ The Nationalist reinforced this anti-communist fervor by highlighting Soviet involvement in a perceived historically devout Catholic country. Franco's manipulation of Catholicism to an extent also protected the Nationalists from being regarded as a

⁷⁹ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 78.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1.

fascist movement by foreign conservative Catholics, in spite of being heavily backed by Germany and Italy. Rather, Franco was portrayed as a traditionalist and even a democrat by clergy and Catholics in Ireland and the U.S.⁸² In the eyes of their foreign supporters the Rebels were Spain's liberators, saving their homeland from foreign leftist ideologies and defending Catholicism.

The construction of the Nationalists as Spain's Catholic liberators functioned as a key piece of propaganda to raise financial, material, and propaganda support for their alleged crusade.⁸³ The most common form of foreign support for the Rebels was the creation and spread of propaganda, this aid was also by far the most influential form of foreign support. Both the American and Irish Church were heavily involved in directing and facilitating these various forms of aid but were particularly effective in their creation of pro-Nationalist propaganda aid. Clerical propaganda had multiple wide-reaching effects, such as politically mobilizing conservative Catholics in support of foreign policy which benefited the Rebels. Church controlled or influenced media outlets also contributed to the false perception that the overwhelming majority of Catholics were in support of the Nationalists, by publicly condemning organizations or figures who were pro-Republican or "communists".⁸⁴ The effectiveness of this clerical propaganda was due to the clergy's willingness to intimidate or publicly condemn those who oppose its pro-Francoist agenda. The allusion of Catholic unity directed by the clergy and the simplicity of the crusade narrative proved an effective combination.

Before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Americans and Irishmen both held simplified historical ideas of Spain, with little to no knowledge of Spain's complex relationship

⁸² Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 81.

⁸³ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 78.

⁸⁴ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 96-97.

with the Catholic Church. Both traditionalist Catholic Americans and Irishmen held the perspective of Spain as an extremely devout country, where the overwhelming amount of the population were practicing Catholics.⁸⁵ This meant that leftist and republican ideologies, such as socialism and liberalism that had been a part of Spain's political scene for decades were portrayed as a product of foreign influence. This false perception held by many Catholic Irish and Americans further enhanced the conservative Catholic opinion of the Nationalists, as Franco's forces were representative of their ill-informed perceptions of Spain. This also justified the aid sent to Franco by the fascist powers.

Foreign clergy and pro-Nationalist propaganda frequently painted Franco as a sort of a founding father of a new Spain, in the manner of George Washington. This analogy constructed an image of Franco and the Rebels as righteous in their uprising, as were the American revolutionaries of 1775 when they rose to overthrow England's tyrannical rule.⁸⁶ Irish clergy and conservatives Catholics also likened the Nationalists to Irish historical figures. One common theme used by pro-Franco Catholics was to frame Ireland's resistance to England's forced conversion of the Irish as akin to the Nationalists rebellion against the anti-religious Republic.⁸⁷ This propaganda tactic was another simple method to successfully streamline the simple crusade narrative to a foreign audience, by painting the Nationalist leadership in the same light as Ireland and America's revolutionary forefathers and folk heroes. The Republicans in comparison were vilified by associating them to historically notorious figures and governments. Other historical

⁸⁵ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 80.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 81.

⁸⁷ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 147.

states or figures who persecuted Catholics or Christians, such as Rome, Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian were drawn as parallels to Republican officials routinely by foreign propagandists.⁸⁸

This tactic of framing the Spanish Civil War through simplified history was extremely effective in both establishing the Nationalists as saviors of traditional Spain and the Republicans as a bloodthirsty faction non-representative of the Spanish people. This strategy of ahistorical comparisons (such as painting the Spanish Republic as an authoritarian regime) also capitalized on conservative Irish, and Americans panic over the growth of radical leftist political philosophies in Western nations during the 1930s. This was often done by claiming that the Republic was influenced by Stalin's policies, specifically his purges of the 1920s and 1930s in which numerous Christian clergy were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.⁸⁹ Catholics were quick to remember past events in which their fellow brothers and sisters in faith suffered at the hands of a leftist state. As Donald Crosby noted "...the cries of American Catholics for redress of grievances had gone largely unheeded."⁹⁰ The flurry of relatively recent events regarding the persecution of Catholics was therefore fresh in Catholics' minds and made both Irish and American conservative Catholics quick to side with the Nationalists. By utilizing recent history and highlighting the growth of radical leftist parties in Europe conservative foreign Catholics saw their support for Franco as the best means to prevent a genocide of their fellow Catholics in Spain.

Europe's political scene during the 1930s was undergoing a period of a significant increase in radical left- and right-wing political parties and membership. This political trend was profound throughout all of Europe with the relative exceptions of Ireland and the United

⁸⁸ Pamphlet "to the Irish Brigade fighting in Spain", Card Catalog Russell Library, by Unknown, box 84, folder 3, Seminary/National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.

⁸⁹ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 100.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Kingdom, which saw no significant increase in extremist political parties.⁹¹ An increase in membership of radical political parties and the lingering effects of the First Red Scare of the late 1910s and early 1920s created a hysteria amongst conservatives in both the U.S. and Ireland. Pastoral and reactionary propaganda exploited Irish and American Catholics' fear of a growing radical leftist threat by framing the Republicans as a contingent linked to the same local socialists, communists, and anarchists, all of them allegedly under the direction of the Soviet Union. In actuality, the composition of the Republic's supporters featured many groupings with moderate political views, such as liberals, democrats, and unionists, rather than consisting entirely of radical leftists.

In order to frame the Nationalists in a positive light the majority of pro-Rebel Catholic Americans and Irishmen tailored the Nationalist political tenets as pro-Western and democratic.⁹² Franco was frequently portrayed as a Catholic democrat who wished to defend Spain's sovereignty and Church from radical leftists. This narrow-minded image represented the fear mongering tactics American and Irish clergy spouted to their congregation. The anti-clerical actions spanning from the reign of the Republic to the end of the Spanish Civil War were commonly referenced by Irish and American clergy to showcase how a devout Catholic country such as Spain could fall under the control of communism. This heightened fears amongst Catholics domestically, fueling fears of a subversive Marxist force growing more or less undetected in Ireland and the U.S. Both nations however, had a mere handful of communist and revolutionary groups, which lacked membership, and influence on politics during the 1930s.⁹³

⁹¹ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 1.

⁹² J. David Valaik, "Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937-1939," *The Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (1967): 78; McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 71.

⁹³ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 1.

In this context, pro-Loyalist Americans and Irish were targeted by pro-Nationalists largely through media smear campaigns and propaganda.⁹⁴ Catholic propaganda in the form of weekly parish bulletins and newspapers were used as clerical mouthpieces, directing conservative Catholic opinion. The National Catholic Welfare Conference is a prime example of clergy weaponizing Catholic media.⁹⁵ The NCWC was an organization directed by a conference of American Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals with the goal to mobilize Catholics politically nationwide. Through the weekly newspaper the *NCWC News Service* upper-level clergy portrayed a narrative of unified Catholic support for Franco's Nationalists, while denouncing the Spanish Republicans.⁹⁶ This grouping technique silenced a substantial number of pro-Republican Catholics, by creating a sole stance in which dutiful Catholics would agree with. This in turn led to the fabricated notion that the overwhelming majority of Catholics opposed the Spanish Loyalists. NCWC's media arm the *NCWC News Service* also denounced secular newspapers which painted domestic Catholics or the Nationalists in a poor light or objectively, such as the *Boston Globe* and *Washington Times*. The NCWC in sum was a key tool for clergy to harass secular media outlets. As stated prior, upper-level clergy would also often intimidate writers into retracting their article or reediting their product.⁹⁷ In this way, clerical intimidation in effect functioned as a means to censor Catholic writers employed by the secular press. The Irish newspaper the *Irish Independent*, despite not being directly affiliated with the Irish Catholic Church, used similar practices. It whitewashed the Nationalist fascist political leanings while masking the Rebel cause as a crusade and, at the same time, promoted the perception that the

⁹⁴ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 82-83.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

⁹⁶ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 85.

⁹⁷ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 82.

Loyalists and their Irish supporters were made up of mostly radical leftists.⁹⁸ Clerical and clerical influenced news organizations in both Ireland and the U.S. also had a large effect in intertwining the perception of Catholics supporting the Nationalists and their crusade narrative.

The perception of Catholics as a politically unified front in support of the Nationalists headed by their clergy also had the effect of intensifying sectarianism between Catholics and pro-Loyalist Protestants in the U.S. and Ireland.⁹⁹ This further divided two rival religious groups which constituted the majority of citizens in both countries. The Spanish Civil War's effect on American and Irish religious relations enhanced already present divisions and thus harmed political unity. The perception of rigid political division between Catholics and Protestants in turn lead to both Irish and American governments fearing backlash by shifting their foreign policy regarding Spain, resulting in little to no adaption of foreign policy. Both groups however, heavily lobbied their government by creating committees dedicated to urging their rulers to shift their policy regarding Spain. Many of these groups would also raise aid in support of their favored side and spread pro-Nationalist or Republican propaganda.

Pro-Nationalist aid organizations often incorporated Catholicism into their committees' core ideology (if not already present) endorsing the crusade narrative. Catholic organizations that existed prior to the start of the Spanish Civil War such as the Knights of Columbus adopted a pro-Nationalist platform and raised aid.¹⁰⁰ These pro-Rebel committees were often influenced or championed by their nation's clergy, who promoted the raising of funds and encouraged their flock to become members. Clerical involvement was not limited to supporting these mostly small-scale organizations but also keeping tabs on pro-Republican committees. In some cases,

⁹⁸ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 75.

⁹⁹ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 159, 185.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 82.

this included detailed reports on membership, ideology and approximate funds sent to the Republicans. To obtain this information, Bishops and other clergy members would employ informers or spies to gather these details. The Church's collection of this intelligence reflects the Catholic hierarchy's fears of a growing domestic leftist threat tied to the U.S.S.R. and the Spanish Loyalists.¹⁰¹ The domestic polarization of American and Irish Loyalist and Rebel supporters shows how the ideological battle of the Spanish Civil War spread to other nations and was enhanced by already present political and religious divisions. The Church in both countries facilitated this division by fully endorsing Franco's crusade narrative, which reinforced the perception that the clergy were speaking on behalf of all domestic Catholics. This perception of Catholic unity regarding the Spanish Civil War would lead to the Irish and American Catholic Church wielding substantial political power.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 82-83.

Chapter Two: The Catholic Church of the United States and its effect on the Spanish Civil War

This chapter will analyze the American Catholic Church hierarchy's support of the Nationalists and its effects. These forms of aid include diplomatic, propaganda, and material aid, differing in effect and execution. The Catholic Church's effect on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's foreign policy relating to Spain will be highlighted as well throughout this chapter. The commonly held false perception that the overwhelming majority of American Catholics were pro-Nationalists will also be thoroughly analyzed. The perceived power that American conservative Catholics and their clergy held over American foreign policy will be crucial in understanding why White House foreign policy on Spain failed to shift, despite the growth of pro-Republican sentiment by FDR and his cabinet throughout the civil war.

1. The American Catholic Church's effect on political mobilization

Before analyzing the American Catholic Church's effect on political mobilization of Catholics, it is critical to briefly note their demographic and social standing in 1930s. American Catholics in 1936 represented approximately 15.5 percent of the USA's total population and the second largest religious group in the U.S.¹⁰² The majority of Catholics lived in large urban settings such as Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York and typically came from working class backgrounds, mainly in industrial employment. The ethnicity of Catholics during the 1930s varied but the majority of Catholics consisted of Italian, Irish, and Polish Americans. These groups resided in tight-knit ethnic communities often with large immigrant

¹⁰² U.S. Census Bureau; *Census of Religious Bodies, 1936, Table No.52*; generated by Kyle Frattasio; using data.census.gov.

populations.¹⁰³ Catholics' local parishes would typically consist of a priest from the same ethnic background as their congregation and featured a mix of cultural elements from their ethnic group.¹⁰⁴ Catholics' community ties with the influx of immigrants between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Protestant fears of Catholics being unable to separate faith and politics led to widespread discrimination of Catholics.¹⁰⁵ The Ku Klux Klan's attack of Catholics in the 1920s illustrates the tension between both groups as well.

WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) also sought to preserve their political dominance from Catholics in all forms of government and maintain the American socio-economic hierarchy of the 1930s, which placed Protestants on top. Despite this class difference, during the 1930s Catholic socio-economic status grew, resulting in an emergence of a Catholic middle class and Catholics gaining prominent political positions.¹⁰⁶ One of the largest historical indicators of this growth was the first Catholic candidate for President Democrat Al Smith, who lost the Democrat primary election of 1928.¹⁰⁷ These events in part formed the general perception of Catholics as a valuable voting coalition. Catholics would be a key foundation of FDR's New Deal Coalition, consisting of Catholics, poor Southern whites, and minorities. FDR's appeal to the marginalized groups of the New Deal Coalition and his progressive stance on the Great Depression led to his Presidential campaign victory in 1932. The President's reliance upon the Catholic vote would directly influence the course of American non-

¹⁰³ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 185-187.

¹⁰⁴ James Hennesey and John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 235.

¹⁰⁵ Lynn Duménil, "The Tribal Twenties: 'Assimilated' Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (1991): 22.

¹⁰⁶ Casanova, *A Short History of the Spanish Civil War*, 185.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 185.

involvement in the Spanish Civil War. The flawed perception of Catholics as a politically united front in regard to the Spanish Civil War was heavily influenced by clerical media.

2. The Catholic Church's propaganda power in the U.S.

Prior to the start of the Spanish Civil War, Spain was regarded as a relatively unimportant backwater European country by the West. Americans' knowledge of modern Spain's history was extremely limited as reflected by occasional newspaper reports of Spain's ever-changing governments. Reports of Spain's political turmoil in which an authoritarian government would rise to power were common subjects in the American press. The media portrayed American-held stereotypes that violence and dictatorship was a natural phenomenon to Latins.¹⁰⁸ Newspaper reports of the establishment of Spain's newly founded democracy in 1931 were generally celebrated by the majority of Americans.¹⁰⁹ However, American clergy and conservative Catholics harbored great fear over the Church's fall from power in Spain and the new anti-clerical legislation.¹¹⁰ Throughout the five years of Spain's Republic, American Bishops would keep a watchful eye over the events unfolding in the Republic.

American Bishops utilized the National Catholic Welfare Conference to discuss international news affecting Catholics and used its newspaper wing *NCWC News Service* in an attempt to unify and mobilize Catholic political thought. In order to gain information on foreign affairs regarding the Church, the NCWC maintained contacts throughout the world.¹¹¹ These contacts gathered a wide variety of information ranging from foreign governments' legislation to

¹⁰⁸ Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 244.

¹⁰⁹ J. David Valaik, "American Catholics and the Second Spanish Republic, 1911-1936," *Journal of Church and State* 10, no. 1 (1968): 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

¹¹¹ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 85.

anti-Catholic groups. Prior to Spain's 1931 Republic, NCWC officials collected information during the 1920s regarding Catholic political groups in Spain such as the Catholic Action (Acción Católica).¹¹² Initial reports regarding the Church and the Second Spanish Republic's relationship by NCWC informants document American Bishops hopes for the Republic's Catholic President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, to defend Church privileges against the many pro-secular parties in Spain's parliament.¹¹³

Despite the devout Catholic Alcalá Zamora being the President of Spain's new Republic, both Spanish and American clergy held reservations on the Republic's potential relationship with the Spanish Church. A significant fear of both the Spanish clergy and NCWC Bishops was the confiscation of Church property.¹¹⁴ American and Spanish Bishops feared that the Spanish Church's property could be transferred to the state's ownership. NCWC officials and Spanish Bishops attempted to transfer land ownership to the American Church to protect the Spanish Church's property from confiscation by the Republic, this transfer however, failed as it was blocked by the Republic. American Bishops' fears grew in December of 1931 with the ratification of the Spanish Republic's constitution, which officially stripped Catholic clergy and laity of prior privileges in education and other areas.¹¹⁵

In order to reinstate the Church's privileged standing in Spain through legislation, a NCWC informant and the director of the NCWC legal department William F. Montavon created a detailed report on the steps Spain's Bishops should take to politically unify Catholics to create

¹¹² Letter documenting "National Catholic Welfare Conference list of Catholic Action groups in North America and Europe" Manuscript Collection, Special Collection Box 20 Folder 27, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹¹³ Report evaluating "Azaña government's relationship with the Church" by William F. Montavon, box 50, folder 5, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹¹⁴ Report evaluating "The possibility of shifting ownership of the Spanish Church's properties to the American Church" by William F. Montavon, Box 50 Folder 20, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

a political coalition against the leftist government. This letter was sent to the NCWC office in November 1931 to be reviewed by American Bishops and then presumably sent to contacts in Spain. Many of the Spaniards the NCWC contacted were important figures amongst Catholic political groups. These figures included Ángel Herrera, the founder of *El Debate*, Spain's largest Catholic newspaper until 1936. Communications between Herrera and NCWC officials primarily focuses upon creating an organized Catholic political front similar in structure to the NCWC or the Knights of Columbus.¹¹⁶ These communications led to Montavon giving a speech on October 9th, 1931 in Madrid in front of Herrera, his brothers, and other professional class Catholics, informing the audience of the NCWC "...origin, organization and purpose."¹¹⁷ In essence, the NCWC and Herrera worked together in an attempt to create a Spanish political organization similar to the NCWC to politically unify and mobilize the Catholic vote in Spain.

The NCWC's involvement in Spanish politics showcase the concern American Bishops held over the state of Spain's Church prior to the Spanish Civil War. Montavon's firsthand knowledge of Spain's political scene and his critique of the Republic's relationship with the Church was also published in secular newspapers such as the December 5th, 1931 edition of the *New York Herald*.¹¹⁸ Montavon attacked the Republic's constitution, particularly the articles of freedom of religion as hypocritical, as "It thus denies to the Church liberty to direct educational institutions..."¹¹⁹ This was done in part to inform pro-Republic Americans that Spain's Republic was not reflective of American democracy. It's noteworthy that Americans, with the exclusion of

¹¹⁶ Letter describing "Angel Herrera's attempt to creating a similar Catholic political organization to the NCWC and the Knights of Columbus" by William F. Montavon, box 50, folder 20, Manuscript collection, Special Collection Box 50 Folder 20, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ "Church and State in Spain", *New York Herald Tribune*, December 5, 1931, 5.

¹¹⁹ Letter describing "Angel Herrera's attempt to creating a similar Catholic political organization to the NCWC and the Knights of Columbus" by William F. Montavon. Box 50, folder 20, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

conservative Catholics, were not nearly as interested in pre-Spanish Civil War politics as the NCWC Bishops. These disparate perspectives were due to the flurry of worldwide events taking place during the early and mid 1930s, such as the Great Depression. Despite American Catholics' blind eye regarding the Spanish Republic, the NCWC and generally American upper-level clergy, kept a watchful eye of Spain's Republic.

The Spanish election of November 1933 saw the CEDA win the largest number of parliament seats in the Cortes. Spain's political right won this election in part due to the unification of the politically diverse Catholic vote (a tactic recommended by Montavon to unify the politically diverse Catholic vote).¹²⁰ The conservative American Catholic press and the NCWC celebrated the CEDA's parliamentary victory, believing Spain would undergo great strides of improvement and anti-clerical acts would decrease.¹²¹ Many American clergy members hoped that the leader of the CEDA, José María Gil Robles would continue agricultural reform to benefit Spain's peasantry. However, the CEDA would be unable to accomplish much due to frequent strikes, internal political division, and the Radical Party being unwilling to work with the CEDA. The left under Alcalá Zamora refused to grant the CEDA its ministerial seats despite winning the most seats in the Cortes.¹²² When the Radical Party relented in October 1934 and gave the CEDA three ministerial positions, revolts broke out across Spain however, most were quickly suppressed apart from the Asturian miners' uprising.¹²³ International news coverage of the Asturias uprising displayed the extreme violence between civilians, clergy, militias, and the army. The Asturias events, and the two following years afterward brought many American Catholic liberals and intellectuals to disapprove of the CEDA. Many criticized José María Gil

¹²⁰ Valaik, "American Catholics and the Second Spanish Republic, 1911-1936," 22.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 67-69.

¹²³ Ibid.

Robles, the party's leader, who was overly focused on reinstating the Church into politics and in defended established interests, rather than making the necessary reforms which affect common Spaniards, disregarding Catholic social teaching.¹²⁴

In the election of February 1936, the left's unity brought electoral victory and soon an outburst of anti-clerical actions, most notably Church burnings throughout Spain during May of 1936.¹²⁵ *NCWC News Service* published a flurry of accusations regarding the new leftist government as communistic or a Soviet influenced government. NCWC capitalized on Catholics' fear over the spread of communism resulting from the First Red Scare. Additionally, by branding the Republic as communist this simplified and conveyed to conservative American Catholics that Spain's leftist government was in total opposition to Catholicism. This perception ignored the complex truth that Spain's 1936 government and parliament was reflective of a variety of political views. The President of the Republic, Manuel Azaña, was a center-left politician. The Government was a coalition of bourgeois parties (not even the Socialists were present in the cabinet), and the Cortes (Spanish Parliament) included very few communists.¹²⁶ Media outlets such as the NCWC's propaganda regarding the Republic predisposed many Catholics and clergy into disdain of Spain's political left. These growing negative attitudes directly influenced America's traditionalists Catholics and clergy to support the Nationalists attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government such as their own.

¹²⁴ Valaik, "American Catholics and the Second Spanish Republic, 1911-1936," 23.

¹²⁵ Thomas, *Anticlerical Violence & Violence & Iconoclasm*, 47.

¹²⁶ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "The Russian Revolution and Spanish Communists, 1931-5," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 4 (2017): 904.

3. First perceptions of the Nationalists and Republicans during the Spanish Civil War and their evolution over the war

America during the Spanish Civil War was relatively remote from the European conflict both politically and mentally. However, the Spanish Civil War would come to divide American society through factors such as religion, political ideology, and social class. The outbreak of Spain's Civil War on July 18th, 1936 immediately caught American media attention. First documenting the leadership and military capabilities of both the Republicans and Nationalists but it was quickly followed by gruesome reports of the ongoing violence.¹²⁷ American reports on Spain grew to encompass other country's reactions to the uprising, the political factions in Spain, and the initial skirmishes of the conflict. The burning of churches and slaughter of citizens would become a focal point throughout the American coverage of the Spanish Civil War. The frequent Nationalist massacres of civilians and the anti-clerical onslaught that took place in the Republican zones captivated secular and non-secular papers alike and were reported daily. A robust Catholic news network consisting of parish bulletins, a wide variety of clergy-led newspapers and a strong radio presence brought clerical propaganda regarding anti-clerical attacks to every Catholic. This propaganda throughout the civil war often highly exaggerated the rape of nuns, torture of priests, and the burning of Churches in an effort to mobilize Catholics against the Republicans and later in support of the Nationalists.¹²⁸ However, prior to the September 1936 pastoral letter by Plá y Deniel clerical conservative Catholic opinion was indecisive in their support of the Nationalists. Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter would create a signal to foreign clergy that the Rebels held the Spanish Church's support.

¹²⁷ "Spain Checks Army Rising as Morocco Force Rebel; 2 Cities in Africa Bombed", *New York Times*, July 19, 1936, 3.

¹²⁸ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 188.

Reports during the early stages of the Civil War regarding the protection of clergy under the Nationalist rule and anti-clerical violence would sway some Catholics' support to the Rebels. However, the majority of American Catholics in 1936 did not support the Nationalists, as many feared supporting a foreign faction associated with fascism and being dragged into another European conflict.¹²⁹ This fear is reflective of secular and non-secular values of Catholics during the 1930s, who feared the expansion of authoritarianism over Europe, and the recurring persecution of European Catholics by authoritarian states, most notably by Germany and the U.S.S.R.¹³⁰ However, Plá y Deniel's letter and the Nationalist appropriation of Catholicism portrayed by secular and non-secular media outlets would lead to a growing pro-Nationalist Catholic lobby in the U.S. The high point of American Catholic support for the Nationalist would be after the spread of the 1937 Bishop's Collective Letter between 1937-1938.

The 1937 Bishop's Collective Letter had the largest effect on American Catholic perception of Spain's Civil War. Franco's request for a collective letter by Cardinal Gomá and its later world-wide publication mobilized conservative Catholic opinion to reach its height during the conflict.¹³¹ Catholic news agencies such as the NCWC published the collective letter throughout the U.S. resulting in an outpouring of clerical propaganda for the Nationalists. The signatures of the majority of Spanish Bishops paired with the letter claiming the war was a battle between Christian civilization and Bolshevism gave clergy a blueprint on the manner in which to display to war to their congregation. The support of Spain's Bishops and the further simplification of the conflict into a sole religious war provided a straightforward and uniform narrative in which foreign clergy could spread with ease. American clergy worked vigorously to

¹²⁹ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 63.

¹³⁰ Valaik, "American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War," 546.

¹³¹ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 193.

shift their congregations' view on Spain's conflict, especially through clerical media. Clerical newspapers such as the *Boston Pilot* described the whole of the Republican forces as godless, bloodthirsty, and radical in their ideology, while describing their Nationalist counterparts as crusader type figures.¹³² Some clergy members forbade their congregation members to read secular newspapers that reported on the Nationalists' atrocities or casted the Republicans in a positive light. However, this failed to mobilize the majority of American Catholics to a pro-Nationalist stance as most Catholics consumed both clerical and secular media.¹³³

Catholics' consumption of secular media provided a more nuanced perspective of the Spanish Civil War and often directly countered clerical propaganda. This balance in news sources had an enormous effect on the percentage of Catholics who supported the Rebels. Scholars' estimates on the total amount of Catholic support of the Nationalists vary significantly but lie in the 30 to 58 percent range between 1937 and 1939, with most scholars agreeing with the lower 30 to 40 percent range.¹³⁴ Despite this, statistics show that American Catholics' opinions on Spain's Civil War varied dramatically. The immense amount of pro-Rebel clerical propaganda however, created the perspective that the overwhelming majority of Catholics were in support of the Nationalists and reinforced the long-held notion that clergy dictated Catholic political opinion.

Conservative Catholics supported the clergy's narrative of framing the Nationalists as just and defending a Catholic nation from radical foreign ideologies. These traditionalists tended to be fiercely anti-communist, extremely devout, and read a limited amount of secular press,

¹³² Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939," 87.

¹³³ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 78.

¹³⁴ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 186; Beevor, *The Battle for Spain the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, 240-242.

which made this group the most susceptible to accepting clerical propaganda.¹³⁵ Catholic immigrants formed a significant portion of this group and were overwhelmingly pro-Nationalist in comparison to non-immigrants.¹³⁶ Neutral Catholics generally perceived the Republicans in poor light due to the actions of anti-clericals but did not support the Nationalists for a wide variety of reasons, such as Franco's military being fueled by fascist nations and in some Catholic circles a lack of interest in foreign politics that did not directly impact the U.S.

Both neutral and conservative groupings tended to encompass a wide variety of supporters, many of which believed in a total isolation stance regarding Spain's Civil War. Liberal American Catholics were the smallest of the three groupings and favored the Republicans over the Nationalists. Many Catholics from this cluster were liberals, unionists, socialists, and proponents of Catholic social justice.

Dorothy Day's newspaper *The Catholic Worker* and *Commonweal* (after the bombing of Guernica) would come to represent liberal Catholic thought due to their progressive pacifist principles.¹³⁷ It should be noted however, that both publications refused to endorse either side of Spain's conflict to the clergy's dismay. Many liberal Catholics condemned both the Republicans and Nationalist use of violence, particularly the Nationalists' rebellion against a democratic government.¹³⁸ Liberal Catholics were by far the least vocal group of the three. Their silence was due to fear of clerical retribution and public embarrassment at the hands of their parishioner or Bishop. A lack of visible internal disagreement between Catholics amplified the perception that the overwhelming majority of Catholics detested the Republic.¹³⁹ Unsurprisingly, the Church

¹³⁵ Ibid, 185-187.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 185.

¹³⁷ Valaik, "American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War," 550-553.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 538-544.

¹³⁹ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939," 85.

hierarchy and NCWC spent ample resources to document pro-Loyalist Catholic groups. Bishops feared Catholic organizations that represented a liberal ideology could break the perception of political unity and manipulate other Catholics to become leftists. Clerical fears of a divided Catholic opinion on the Spanish Civil War due to outspoken liberal Catholics and their organizations were prime targets for harassment.

4. Clerical harassment against pro-Republican groups and the Church's fear of the fifth column

American Catholic clergy utilized a two-prong approach in support of the Nationalists. The first prong represents directly aiding the Rebels, this was done through raising funds and propaganda. The second prong focused on the attack of American pro-Republican groups. The verbal harassment of pro-Loyalist groups was commonly paired with groupings many American Catholics already distrusted in an attempt to further mobilize anti-Republican sentiment. For example, Jews were often portrayed as radical leftists who pro-Republic committee and were attempting to spread communism throughout the world.¹⁴⁰ These perceived threats by American clergy were extremely similar to Franco's propaganda directed against the Republicans and in part influenced by Franco's crusade narrative. In order to combat Republican sympathizers' support of an alleged communist faction the Church spied on pro-Loyalist aid committees and media outlets. The NCWC provided a valuable tool to collect reports through its strong ties throughout the U.S. and around the world.¹⁴¹ Through its international connection the NCWC frequently attempted to tie pro-Republic groups to foreign communist parties.

¹⁴⁰ J. David Valaik, "In the Days before Ecumenism: American Catholics, Anti-Semitism, and the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Church and State* 13, no. 3 (1971): 466-468.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 79.

One of the main targets of the NCWC was the *Catholic Worker*, for a large variety of reasons. The *Catholic Worker* directly represented Catholic opposition to clerical propaganda regarding Spain and the socially conservative beliefs which the clergy held. Dorothy Day, the organization's co-chief was amongst the most politically radical of modern-day Catholic figures, being a socialist and an avid supporter of women's reproductive rights. The *Catholic Worker* reflected many of Day's radical ideas including Christian socialism and equality for both minorities and women. These leftist ideas, the absence of clerical control, and growing membership created fear amongst the upper-level clergy. The *Catholic Worker* maintained a large distribution of their weekly newspaper of 120,000 in 1938, targeting both rural and urban markets.¹⁴² The membership of the organization is estimated by NCWC officials to be between 300,000 and 1,000,000.¹⁴³ The wide reach of Day's newspaper was a clear threat to the clergy's domination over Catholic led press and control over the overall narrative. This threat was heightened during the added political polarization that accompanied Spain's Civil War in the U.S. Unsurprisingly in response, the NCWC kept multiple reports regarding the *Catholic Worker's* ideology, membership, and other defining factors.

On November 1st, 1938, a nineteen-page report on the *Catholic Worker* was sent to the NCWC office regarding the structure of the organization and the newspapers standing on the Spanish Civil War. In this report an E.G. Hara, a possible informant, discloses their perception that the membership of the *Catholic Worker* believed the root cause of Spain's Civil War was Spain's conservative Church hierarchy and lack of economic mobility. These ideas of an over-orthodox Church hierarchy and lack of economic movement also describe the *Catholic Worker's*

¹⁴² Seventeen-page report "regarding goals, demographics, leadership and other information on the Catholic Worker" by E.G. Hara, box 31, folder 20, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

pre-Spanish Civil War assessment of the U.S., which can be seen in the report.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, in the eyes of the American Catholic hierarchy the *Catholic Worker* was both a threat to the Church's domestic power and the unified Catholic support of the Nationalists. This report claims however, that the *Catholic Worker's* membership beliefs regarding the Spanish conflict shifted in 1938. The informant states that many *Catholic Worker* supporters have shifted to a more impartial pacifist stance, due to "[Giving] too much of a concession to communism" and "Destroying Catholic unity."¹⁴⁵ In reality this informant's perception was unlikely, due to the maintenance of the newspaper's popularity and the widespread belief that the Nationalists were making a mockery out of Catholicism in liberal circles, and therefore, failed to represent true Catholicism. The *Catholic Worker* regularly railed against the war until the end in 1939 and continued to publish critical articles regarding the many Nationalist slaughters which took place and Franco's alliance with the fascist powers.¹⁴⁶

Day and other leaders of the *Catholic Worker* frequently highlighted the gaps in the Nationalist crusade narrative through her publication, such as describing the colonial army of Africa composed of Muslims participating in a Catholic crusade.¹⁴⁷ Clerical media in response would attack her newspaper with a slew of claims such as being a puppet organization of the American communist party or being led by delusional socialists. Often, battles between Dorothy Day and the Church hierarchy were featured in other prominent newspapers. The July 16th, 1938 edition of the *Brooklyn Tablet*, described Day and other members of her organization at a rally railing against the Church's support of the Nationalists Day was quoted referring to Church

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ J. David Valaik, "American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War," 543.

¹⁴⁷ Bernard Doering, "Jacques Maritain and the Spanish Civil War," *The Review of Politics* 44, no. 4 (1982): 508.

officials as “Belligerent, militant and nasty.”¹⁴⁸ The *Catholic Worker* was one of the few Catholic organizations that openly resisted the hierarchy’s support of the Rebels and, due to this, faced denunciations from the clerical newspapers such as the *Boston Pilot*, *The Register*, *The Brooklyn Tablet*, and *Catholic Digest*.¹⁴⁹

The assault against the *Catholic Worker* and its leadership reflects the Church’s strategy of supporting the Nationalists. The American clergy, in order to create the perception of a unified Catholic front in support of Franco, required the media to strike out against groups of Catholics that challenged the crusade narrative. The perception of Catholic political unity required that the majority of American Catholics support the Nationalists and there is no major group division between Catholics, as this would fracture said perception. The Church in its creation and defense of Catholic unity by illusion was extremely successful. This illusion was further reinforced by Catholic media outlets’ strong organization and coherent depictions of Spain. Despite large-scale Catholic publications such as *Commonweal* and the *Catholic Worker*, both Catholics and non-Catholics held the notion that most Catholics were unified in support of the Rebels.¹⁵⁰ This false perception reinforced the notion that American Catholics are controlled by their clergy and are therefore, a unified and powerful group. This made Catholics as a group a large target for pro-Republican Americans, resulting in a war of words throughout the Spanish Civil War.

The American clergy was not short on any enemies prior to the start of the Spanish Civil War. Catholics were not yet on the same social standing as their Protestant counterparts and were discriminated against. While the bulk of American Catholics were born in the U.S. by the mid-1930s Catholics to many Protestant groups, were portrayed as invaders unable to separate their

¹⁴⁸ “Does Not Agree With “Indoctrination” Program”, *Brooklyn Tablet*, July 16, 1938, 6.

¹⁴⁹ Valaik, “American Catholic Dissenters and the Spanish Civil War,” 545.

¹⁵⁰ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 61-63.

faith and politics.¹⁵¹ In relation to their Catholic counterparts the majority of Protestants were in support of the Republicans for a variety of reasons. Protestants' belief in a secular government and the commonly held presumption that Catholics wish to combine Church and State was a driving force to support Spain's Republicans. The Loyalists were also more ideologically similar to the U.S. to many Americans' perceptions, such as the Republic's use of a parliamentary system and implementation of modern social programs, akin to FDR's New Deal policies. To many Protestants the Nationalists however, resembled Mussolini and Hitler, two enemies of American interests in preserving European peace. Some American Protestants also claimed that the Nationalist forces were persecuting Spanish Protestants, these claims, despite their truth, were denied by American Catholics.¹⁵² Catholic clergy also grouped both Protestants and Jews as controllers of pro-Loyalist secular media, therefore making these groups an enemy of the Catholic Church's pro-Franco narrative. American Jews' support of the Republic stemmed from similar and separate principles than Protestants'. Generally, both Jews and Protestants supported the preservation of the liberal Spanish Republic, Hitler's support of Franco further mobilized the Jewish community. From 1933 to 1939 Germany's persecution of its Jewish population was commonly reported on in both non-secular and secular media outlets, contributing to many Americans' fears of fascism.¹⁵³

A 1938 poll found only nine percent of Protestants and two percent of Jews were in support of the Nationalists, showing a lack of or overwhelming support for the Republic.¹⁵⁴ Both groups' support of the Loyalists was highly visible through their assistance to pro-Loyalist organizations such as the North American Aid Committee to Spanish Democracy, which was a

¹⁵¹ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 185.

¹⁵² Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939," 85.

¹⁵³ "Nazi Press Policy of Racial Purging", *New York Times*, March 18, 1933, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 63.

committee composed of both Jews, Protestants, and other groupings. Bishop John Leech of Harrisburg Pennsylvania denounced Jewish leaders for allowing this organization or as he referred to it as a “Trojan Horse” for communism, to be hosted at a Jewish community center.¹⁵⁵ Bishops’ attacks of Jews and their support of the Republic happened frequently and brought controversy to their local communities. These battles between Jewish/Protestant supported Loyalist committees and the Church were frequently echoed by Catholic newspapers such as the *Brooklyn Tablet*, increasing religious and political divisions. Father J. Coughlin’s wide reaching weekly radio addresses also contributed to the Church’s attack on the Jewish community in particular. He described Jews as being in control of the banking and the media systems, which allowed them to direct a pro-Republican communistic narrative in the U.S.¹⁵⁶ This added to Catholics fears of a domestic threat of communism and further associated American Jews with revolutionary leftist ideologies. By creating an echo-chamber of false associations such as the Republic being affiliated with communism and other radical ideologies the Church hierarchy cemented conservative Catholics support of the crusade narrative, by banning Catholics from consuming “Jewish” secular media.

The denunciation of secular media or any form of media that failed to agree with the clergy’s narrative led to a war of words between the hierarchy and secular media outlets. The largest media feud during the Spanish Civil War occurred with *Time’s* publishing of the article “Catholicism vs. Democracy” on January 3, 1938, which critiqued the Church hierarchies’ endorsement of a fascism in Spain and Italy.¹⁵⁷ The main premise of *Time’s* article stated that the Church hierarchy, especially Pope Pius XI, favored a fascist faction taking control of Spain

¹⁵⁵ Valaik, “In the Days before Ecumenism,” 469.

¹⁵⁶ Father Coughlin, “Father Coughlin’s weekly Sunday radio program”, Royal Oak, MI: 12/11/1938.

¹⁵⁷ “Catholicism Vs. Democracy”, *Life*, January 3, 1938, 2.

rather than communists. The article stated that Pope Pius XI “Believes that the world is in a struggle between communism and fascism and he favors fascism.”¹⁵⁸ *Time*’s publication targeted the Church’s willingness to turn a blind eye or endorse fascist leaders such as Franco, as fascism has no official stance on religion unlike communism. This created a firestorm of American conservative Catholics and clergy against *Time* which resulted in aggression from Catholic newspapers directed by the clergy.

Clerical media such as the *Boston Pilot*, *Social Justice*, and the *Brooklyn Tablet* criticized *Time* and regarded the magazine as an anti-Catholic and sympathetic towards Spain’s communists. Letters between NCWC and *Time* uncovered threats by NCWC officials regarding the large number of Catholics who subscribe to the magazine who would stop doing so if *Time* continued with discriminatory articles. *Time* also faced internal pressure from some Catholic shareholders. These shareholders reached out to NCWC officials to compile a list of anti-Catholic charges against the magazine to present before the board of the company.¹⁵⁹ Church leaders also exhibited cut-throat tactics to distance the Church’s support of fascism as well, such as publishing private letters exchanged between Church officials and *Time* employees in an attempt to discredit them and *Time*.¹⁶⁰ All of these tactics failed to shift or silence *Time*’s stance on the Catholic Church’s endorsement of a fascist faction in Spain. This event displayed the organization and vigor that clergy and Catholic media outlets wielded against large publishers to protect the Church from becoming identified with fascism. The Church and any organizations

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Letter regarding “Catholic stockholders of Life asking clergy for a formal list of complaints to bring to Life’s company board” by Arthur Griffin, box 8, folder 17, Manuscript collection, USCCB OGS, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹⁶⁰ Letter to “NCWC official Micheal J. Ready regarding NCWC publishing private letters between the NCWC and Time” by T.S Matthew, box 8, folder 17, Manuscript collection, USCCB OGS, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

under clerical control, attempted to censor or alter any narrative that criticized their support of Franco or challenged the crusade narrative.

Despite failing to intimidate *Time*, the clergy had some success censoring reporters and secular media. This happened to the *New York Times*'s journalist Lawrence Fernsworth, a devout Catholic, who admitted to being coerced to edit his writing by Church officials or face public embarrassment by Church officials.¹⁶¹ Pro-Republican documentaries also faced censorship, in part due to the lobbying of Catholics. Films depicting the famine and bloodshed caused by the military's rebellion such as the 1937 pictures *Spain in Flames* and *Spanish Earth* were fully censored in some states and cities with strong Catholic lobbying.¹⁶² Catholic organizations such as The Knights of Columbus also aided in censoring pro-Republican media such as the 1938 film *Blockade*, which depicts a Spanish farmer taking up arms to defend the Republic. In response to "the incursion of Leftist propaganda" that *Blockade* provided The Knights of Columbus wrote the Studio Relations Department director Will Hayes asking for censorship of the film.¹⁶³ *Blockade* and other films deemed as sympathetic to the Loyalist cause were boycotted and picketed by Catholics, often through the direction of their local clergy and other Catholic organizations. Censorship of media by Catholic pressure groups endorsed by the clergy further polarized American society, by regarding pro-Republican Americans as communist sympathizers or socialists. These pickets and clergy-led boycotts were featured frequently in newspapers and reinforced the image that a large majority of Catholics were supportive of the Nationalists.¹⁶⁴ The relatively small number of vocal anti-Nationalist Catholics were completely drowned out by

¹⁶¹ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 82.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ R. MacKay, "The Good Fight and Good History: The Spanish Civil War," *History Workshop Journal* 70, no. 1 (2010): 97.

¹⁶⁴ "Blocking 'Blockade'", *New York Times*, June 26, 1939, 7.

these constant reports of Catholic beratement towards anything unaligned with the crusade narrative, critical of the Church or objective in its reporting.

Clergy and traditionalist Catholics also harassed pro-Loyalist aid committees, despite this abuse pro-Republican aid organizations proved to be far more effective in raising aid than their pro-Nationalist counterparts. Organizations such as the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy shipped medical supplies, funds, and medical professionals to aid Republican forces. In order to raise these forms of aid Republican committees hosted rallies, concerts, and other cultural events.¹⁶⁵ In comparison to pro-Nationalist committees, Republican aid organizations raised far more funds and appealed to a more wide-ranging assortment of American society which reached across religion and social class. Republican aid organizations also attracted a wide range of celebrities and intellectuals in support. Reports sent to the NCWC by outside sources document many intellectuals and celebrities' support of aid organizations such as Albert Einstein. Along with other prominent intellectuals sponsored a pro-Republic aid organization, the American Speaking Tour on Behalf of Loyalist Spain.¹⁶⁶ Hollywood films such as *Fury Over Spain* (1937) also contributed to the Republican aid committee through propaganda and inadvertently increasing financial assistance to Loyalist organizations.¹⁶⁷

The multi-faceted approach in which Republican supporters raised funds and appealed to a wide base, overlapped American Nationalist aid organizations efforts. From 1937 to 1938 State Department records show that pro-Republican organizations sent over \$833,674 to the Loyalists, in comparison aid organizations which identified as Catholic or appealed to Catholics sent over

¹⁶⁵ Martin F. Shapiro, "Medical Aid Provided by American, Canadian and British Nationals to the Spanish Republic during the Civil War, 1936–1939," *International Journal of Health Services* 13, no. 3 (1983): 445-447.

¹⁶⁶ Report documenting "The League of American Writers and other prominent intellectuals including Albert Einstein's support of a Loyalist donation tour around the U.S." by Franklin Folsom, box 50, folder 22, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

¹⁶⁷ MacKay, "The Good Fight and Good History," 94.

\$105,757 to Franco's regime.¹⁶⁸ While these figures obviously show greater American support for the Republic, it is important to analyze the primary strategy of pro-Nationalist Catholic leaders. This was not to raise money or medical supplies to aid Franco's already heavily supplied military, but rather harass American Republican supporters and create the illusion of a unified political front in support of keeping the embargo. The American clergy most likely realized that the financial support in which Americans could raise on behalf of the Republics was trivial compared to that of Italy and Germany, especially during a time of economic downturn.

5. Pro-Nationalist Catholics support of the Nationalists

While the aid raised in support of the Rebels by Catholic Americans was meager compared to their Loyalist counterparts, these organizations showed a segment of the American population's support of Franco. Such is the case of the Spanish Relief Committee of San Francisco, which sent foodstuffs, medical supplies, and medical volunteers to Nationalist Spain.¹⁶⁹ To raise funds these organizations sold magazine subscriptions, pamphlets, and organized lectures and donation rallies.¹⁷⁰ However, the primary effect of these organizations was not raising aid on behalf of the Nationalists as noted earlier, but rather to spread false narratives. These aid committees utilized Catholics and conservative Americans' fear of a global rise in communism. To accomplish this, Nationalist aid committees claimed Spain's Civil War was a current battle between democracy and communism. This tactic was also used domestically by Francoist aid committees to inflate anti-communist hysteria amongst its members, by

¹⁶⁸ Chart showing "funds sent by American Nationalists/Republican aid committees to respective factions" by the U.S. State Department, box 50, folder 11, Manuscript collection, Special Collection, Catholic University of America.

¹⁶⁹ Austin J. Clements, "The Franco Way: The American Right and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* (2021): 9.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

claiming that pro-Republican organizations were led by members of the American Communist Party. While mostly false (a small amount in fact were), this strategy worked well with conservative Catholics who tended to be extremely anti-communist.¹⁷¹ Republican committees' moral and material support to the American international brigades who volunteered to fight on behalf of the Republic also triggered pro-Nationalist outrage, slandering the volunteers as communists and unpatriotic while in reality the majority fought for democratic ideals.¹⁷² The Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and John Brown battalions also suffered verbal harassment by the clerical press, who attempted to further spur Catholics' domestic fears of communism.

Between December 1936 and June 1938 approximately 3,000 Americans volunteered to fight on behalf of the Republic for a large variety of reasons ranging from halting the spread of fascism, to experiencing the thrill of war or fighting for their radical leftists' ideas.¹⁷³ Reports of American volunteers fighting in support of the Republicans added to the current domestic battle between Republican supporters and the Pro-Rebel Catholics. Republican aid organizations and secular press outlets were generally supportive of these volunteers. Such as *Life* article "Americans Have Died Fighting for Democracy in Spain", painting these men as heroes protecting a foreign democracy from fascist rebels.¹⁷⁴ Clerical press and Francoist aid organizations portrayed these volunteers as radicals and un-American in their actions, by fighting on behalf of a communist regime. The clerical newspaper the Boston *Pilot* was one of many Catholic organizations to denounce Americans' participation in the international brigades. The

¹⁷¹ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 80.

¹⁷² Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," *The Journal of American History* 54, no. 2 (1967): 327.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ "Americans Have Died Fighting for Democracy in Spain", *Life*, March 28, 1938, 7.

August, 27th, 1938 edition of the *Pilot* published two former members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, Abraham Sobel and Alvin Halpern's criticisms of their time in Spain.¹⁷⁵ Abraham Sobel described his former brigade members as "disillusioned" and "virtually prisoners" of the Republicans, forced to fight against their will.¹⁷⁶ The Knights of Columbus also aided in attacking Republican volunteers by testifying before the House of un-American Activities Committee after the Spanish Civil War in 1940 that these volunteers and Loyalist aid organizations leaders were tied to the American Communist Party.¹⁷⁷ If deemed a communist by the un-American Activities Committee one could be black listed from government employment and face harassment due to being labeled a communist.

The Catholic clergy's influence, membership, and leadership cannot be understated, clergy recruited and requested their flock donate to pro-Nationalist organizations. Even in many non-religious or co-religious Nationalist aid committee's Catholic clergy held large influence over the organizations, due to the number of Catholics involved in these groups. Catholic clergy supported these associations' growth by asking the members of their congregation to join, volunteer or give funds in support.¹⁷⁸ Catholic parishioners made up a large portion of these groups as many were predisposed to the crusade narrative from clerical media, Sunday sermons, and the community itself. The Knights of Columbus and other religious pre-Spanish Civil War groups also aided in propaganda efforts such as lobbying against the harboring of the Basque Children after the Bombing of Guernica on April 26th, 1937.¹⁷⁹ While Nationalist aid

¹⁷⁵ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 86-87.

¹⁷⁶ Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 181.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 81-82.

¹⁷⁹ Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War," 97.

committees and Catholic pre-civil war groups raised little in funds for Franco, their value as propaganda and political lobbying machines cannot be understated.

6. FDR and federal politics surrounding the Spanish Civil War

Before analyzing American Catholic effects on American foreign policy regarding the Spanish Civil War historical context of American politics and Catholic social positioning must be noted. The global economic crisis of the Great Depression shook the U.S. to its core and influenced the election of a domestically focused Democratic President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. FDR campaigned on the creation and improvement of unemployment assistance programs, improving the U.S. agricultural output and other domestically focused policies referred to as the New Deal. Catholics' support of FDR was key as Catholics created a portion of his electoral coalition widely known as the New Deal Coalition. The concentration of Catholics in America's industrial cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and others were a vital group for FDR's election in 1932 and reelection in 1936.¹⁸⁰ Catholics were relatively unified in their support of FDR, particularly in the election of 1936 in which FDR won 70 to 80 percent of American Catholics' votes.¹⁸¹ FDR's domestic focused policy embodied by the New Deal was a key factor in this support. As stated earlier, Catholics during the 1930s usually hailed from industrial working-class backgrounds, with many having direct ties to their immigrant community. Therefore, the effects of the Great Depression disproportionately affected Catholic communities and increased Catholic support of the President's New Deal policies. Much of FDR's proposed domestic legislation was put into law by a likeminded Democrat controlled

¹⁸⁰ Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, 185-186.

¹⁸¹ George Euitmann Flynn, *American Catholics and the Roosevelt Presidency, 1932-1936* (Lexington, Ky: U. of Kentucky, 1968), 231-233.

Congress, showing his ability to direct policy as President. The Spanish Civil War was one of very few issues in which both Democrats and Republican Congress members widely agreed, keeping prior isolationist policy in place by renewing the Neutrality Acts of 1935 from 1936-1939.

America's adherence to the Non-Intervention Pact of 1936 handicapped the Republicans by limiting their aid to mainly the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union in return expected Spain's gold at a Soviet calculated rate, unlike the fascist powers which supplied Franco aid on credit and raw resources such as bauxite.¹⁸² It should also be noted that Soviet aid and equipment was meager and sometimes outdated in comparison to that from Italy and Germany which further put the Republicans at a disadvantage. American corporations such as Texaco, Shell, General Motors, Ford, and others heavily supplied Franco's military with oil, vehicles, and spare parts on credit.¹⁸³ American corporate support of the Nationalist was an opportunity both to make a sizable amount of money and support a faction which would prove better for business than its counterpart consisting of socialists, communists, and anarchists. It was also widely known due to press reports that the Nationalist received far more aid in both quantity and quality than the Republicans. America, France, and Britain were the Spanish Republic's last hope of receiving the equipment needed to have a chance to beat back the Rebels.

FDR's political strategy emphasized public opinion over his personal preference.¹⁸⁴ This governing style has led many scholars to claim that FDR's political thoughts and actions were an "enigma" full of contradictions and complexities.¹⁸⁵ FDR's shift in perspective during the

¹⁸² Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*, 90.

¹⁸³ Robert Whealey, "How Franco Financed His War — Reconsidered," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 1 (1977): 146.

¹⁸⁴ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 63.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Spanish Civil War caused him to believe it was in America's best interests to support the Republicans in hopes of limiting the spread of fascism, especially regarding the spread of fascism to South America. This section will state FDR's thoughts versus his actions in regards to the politics of the Spanish Civil War.

Prior to the start of Spain's Civil War FDR had little knowledge of Spain or its politics. He also held a negative view of the Republic due to threats of confiscation of American foreign investments such as of the International Telephone and Telegraph company in 1931.¹⁸⁶ After the election of the coalition of the political right in 1933 FDR expressed hope that Spain's new government would bring better relations, as the coalition of the right appeared to be more friendly to foreign investors in Spain. Despite this, relations between the U.S. and Spain never sustainably grew between 1931 and 1936.

At the start of Spain's Civil War in July of 1936 FDR found himself slightly sympathetic to the Republicans. The main reason why the President preferred the Loyalists over the Rebels was his fear that fascism was spreading throughout Europe at the expense of democracy, with the aid of Hitler and Mussolini. The President in contrast downplayed the threat of Soviet influence in Spain. In late 1936 and 1937 FDR saw the aggressive spread of fascism as far more of an international threat to peace than the spread of communism.¹⁸⁷ By this logic, the President privately supported the Republicans, as FDR was generally extremely secretive and concerned about his pro-Republican sympathies due to fear of angering his Catholic supporters.

Between 1936 and 1937, FDR publicly maintained a non-sympathetic stance to both sides, supporting the Neutrality Acts of 1936-1937. Catholic clergy in response praised FDR's endorsement of renewing the Neutrality Acts. Catholic organizations and clergy knew that

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 32.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 37.

politically promoting the embargo on Spain was the most productive support that they could muster for the Nationalists. The NCWC in order to keep the embargo in place wrote personal letters to Catholic congressmen urging them to fight to renew the Spanish embargo. These letters included one from Representative John McCormack of Massachusetts who claimed “Any change in policy now would only aid the communist-dominated government.”¹⁸⁸ Many Catholic politicians such as House Representative Patrick J. Boland were members of the Knights of Columbus and other Catholic organizations which firmly supported Franco, influencing their ideas of the Spanish issue.¹⁸⁹ Patrick McCarran, a Catholic Senator whose two daughters were nuns, would be nicknamed “the Senator from Madrid” by his fellow Senators, due to his unwavering support of Franco’s supposed battle against communism.¹⁹⁰ Catholic Congressmen were firmly in support of the embargo to appeal to the perception that the majority of Catholics were pro-Franco. Catholic Congressmen were also amongst the most zealous anti-communists in government, and most likely wished to be portrayed as so in secular and clerical media, in order to appeal to their Catholic voting base. This was also true for other Senators, in particular Democrats who relied on the Catholic vote. Clerical media organizations such as the NCWC took advantage of this support by being perceived as the moderm of Catholics’ thought on the Spanish Civil War.

Fulton J. Sheen’s wide reaching radio broadcasts also had a large effect on Catholics and their relation to the embargo. On his January 15th, 1937, radio broadcast Fulton J. Sheen warned listeners that there were over 200 pro-Loyalist groups that wished to end the embargo. If these groups were successful, Sheen claimed that American democracy would be shattered and

¹⁸⁸ Valaik, “Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937-1939,” 81.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Michael J. Ybarra, *Washington Gone Crazy: Senator Pat Mccarran and the Great American Communist Hunt* (Steerforth Press, 2005), 504.

replaced by communism. Sheen went on to embellish the intensity and frequency of anti-clerical actions and claim that only radical anti-clerical communists wished to end the embargo. He then pleaded with his listeners to write letters to their local legislator in support of the embargo with great effect. Some legislators received thousands of letters from concerned listeners regarding the embargo.¹⁹¹ These letters demonstrate the media power that Church officials held over the narrative and its influence on American politics particularly through radio. Catholic communities including parochial schools, Catholic councils, and other organizations repeated the same message, that the embargo was the only means to protect American democracy from entanglement in Europe and defeat the clerical bloodletting of the Republicans.¹⁹² In turn, this contributed to politicians' fears of alienating Catholic voters regarding their stance on the embargo. This perception shaped FDR's actions and effectively forced him to closet his support of the Loyalists.

FDR's personal sympathies for the Loyalists grew significantly by 1938 as the President feared the expansion of fascism to South America.¹⁹³ Nations such as Argentina and Chile sent foreign diplomats to the Nationalists and maintained a close relationship with Nationalist officials.¹⁹⁴ FDR feared that if Spain turned fascist South American countries such as Argentina were the next most likely place a fascist rebellion could take place.¹⁹⁵ This fear was due in part to Germany sending aid to fascist South American political parties and the establishment of fascist

¹⁹¹ Valaik, "Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937-1939," 81-82.

¹⁹² Ibid, 84.

¹⁹³ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 166.

¹⁹⁴ "Decanos Del Humanitarismo y La Perfidia." La Colaboración De Las Misiones Diplomáticas De Argentina y Chile Con La Causa Franquista Durante La Guerra Civil Española (y Después), 1936-1969," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 10, no. 1: 11.

¹⁹⁵ Justus D. Doenecke, "No Longer a Sphinx: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Spanish Civil War," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 1 (2009): 141.

propaganda units in South America throughout the 1930s.¹⁹⁶ The desire of protecting America's backyard and the numerous breakings of the Treaty of Versailles by Germany heightened FDR's fear of the growth of fascist states. Europe's leading democracies, Britain and France, only intensified FDR's panic over fascism by appeasing Hitler. This panic is shown through FDR's conference with Spain's Republican ambassador, comparing appeasement to the Chief of Police making a deal with gangsters.¹⁹⁷

1938 also marked a significant reduction in FDR's political capital as conservative Southern Democrats broke away from the President's progressive Northern democratic coalition. Republicans also doubled their representatives in the House of Representatives in the elections of 1938, which gave Republicans a majority in the house over FDR's democrats, limiting FDR's influence over legislation.¹⁹⁸ The economy was in the midst of the 1937 recession, and Catholic political mobilization against the embargo was at its strongest point between 1937-1938. FDR was aware that the political climate of 1938 would not allow for the President or internationalist politicians to attempt to repeal the Spanish embargo. FDR instead envisioned using the Pan-American conference to mediate an armistice between the Loyalists and the Rebels. While devising these plans, the President directed Adolf Berle to consult New York Catholic Bishops if they would support his initiatives.¹⁹⁹ The letter to New York's Bishops voiced concern over the millions of Spaniards killed during the conflict and the harm the war had caused on global Hispanic culture.²⁰⁰ The New York Bishops may not have replied or even seriously consider the letter, but FDR's request for Berle to contact the Bishops shows his deep concern for both the

¹⁹⁶ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 80.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 115.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 116. Adolf Berle was the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs from 1938-1946.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

Spanish Republicans and his approval amongst Catholic voters. Despite the lack of approval by the New York Bishops, FDR instructed Berle to propose a cooperative mediation by the countries of the Americas.

The Pan-American committee typically met every few years to discuss cooperation between the various countries of the Americas. This conference was used by the U.S. to set policy revolving around the Monroe and Good Neighbor doctrines. Usually, American supported policy would be passed, however when the Pan-American committee convened at Lima in December 1938 FDR's mediation proposal in the Spanish Civil War was shot down.²⁰¹ However, the U.S.'s mediation initiative received very limited media coverage in both secular and clerical press. Instead, the media focused upon the ratification of a mutual defense treaty of Pan-American Conference members. This treaty sought to defend the Americas from "American, European or Asiatic sources..." while highlighting, and rejecting, the recent conquests by European nations such as Italy's conquest of Ethiopia.²⁰² It should be noted that FDR's fears of a growing fascist threat in the Americas if the Nationalists were victorious must have influenced this decision. Therefore, FDR circumvented angering Catholic opinion while preparing for the spread of fascist influence in America's backyard by the ratification of a treaty which lawfully allowed the U.S. to interfere in potential civil wars in the Americas.

While the ratification of the mutual defense treaty of the American Republics of 1938 was a success and did not trigger a negative response from the Catholics, FDR faced increasing backlash from the Catholic establishment. To international spectators it was clear that the Republic's position was worsening rapidly by 1938. The Republicans' loss of Spain's agricultural lands and an influx of 3 million internal refugees resulted in a widespread famine

²⁰¹ Doenecke, "No Longer a Sphinx: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Spanish Civil War," 148.

²⁰² "Common Problems Face Republics of Americas", *New York Times*, June 26, 1939, 11.

throughout Loyalist controlled zones.²⁰³ FDR, while being discreetly involved with the American Red Cross's shipments of wheat to the Republican zone in 1936 and 1937, overtly led the creation of an impartial aid committee during January of 1938. This committee's goal was the raising of money and the shipment of wheat to both the Nationalist and Republican zones based upon each side's need for the wheat (Undisclosed to the public was FDR's plan to distribute the wheat on a 4:1 ratio, favoring the Republic due to their larger population and lower wheat production). The leadership of the Committee for Impartial Civilian Relief in Spain was handpicked by the President, consisting of notable figures of differing faiths and backgrounds.²⁰⁴

In an attempt to lessen Catholic backlash, FDR appointed a Papal marquis, George MacDonald, as Chairperson of the committee.²⁰⁵ This organization worked in tandem with the Red Cross and raised approximately \$100,000 out of the \$500,000 goal. Catholic criticism of MacDonald's involvement in a committee which would directly aid the Republicans turned the committee's own Chair against his task. By refusing to cooperate with other members or agree to a replacement, MacDonald hindered fundraising efforts.²⁰⁶ Catholic media quickly picked up the story and news of the committee prompted a media frenzy. Clerical news agencies lambasted the leadership of the committee, the President, and the Red Cross. The clerical press tied the impartial relief committee to a concurrent scheme to aid the Loyalists by lifting the embargo headed by radical leftists. The domination of Catholic media by pro-Nationalist Catholics and their disapproval of the President's involvement in perceived pro-Republican organizations must have concerned FDR, as he maintained a reliance on American Catholic support through his

²⁰³ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 121.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 122.

²⁰⁵ "Spanish Civilians to Get U.S. Flour", *New York Times*, December 30, 1938, 16.

²⁰⁶ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 122-123.

Presidency, especially in 1938 when his political capital was at an all-time low.²⁰⁷ FDR's perceived loss of some support from Catholics in reality was over exaggerated in the President's mind. However, FDR's political blunder with his creation of the Impartial Civilian Relief Committee and the rapidly worsening position of the Republicans dissuaded him from any overt actions he could take to benefit the Republic.

These fears were reinforced on February 1, 1938, when sixty Senators and Representatives from mostly Southern and Midwestern states (regions with low amounts of Catholics compared to the Northeast) spoke out in support of the fifth session of Spain's Cortes.²⁰⁸ This message went on to encourage the Republic to continue its fight to preserve its democratic institutions and traditions. Despite the legislators being members of both Democratic, Republican, and other minor political parties, the clerical press branded them all as communist sympathizers or communists. Pro-Nationalist media quickly tied these politicians' message to an attempt to overturn the embargo and involve the U.S. in another European war. This clerical media hysteria most likely bolstered FDR's perception that preserving his popularity and supporting the Loyalists overtly was an impossible task.

In order to maintain political capital and support the Republic, FDR organized elaborate covert operations to aid the Loyalists. Dominic Tierney's *FDR and the Spanish Civil War* outlines these covert operations created by FDR to benefit the Republicans, such as purchasing several tons of silver from the Republic.²⁰⁹ These covert missions took place from 1937 to 1939 and reflected the President's fear of both a Nationalist victory and alienating his perception of his Catholic supporters. The President's construction of covert aid operations shows that FDR fully

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 115.

²⁰⁸ "60 U.S. Congressmen Praise Loyalist Parliament Session", *Washington Post*, February 1, 1938, 9.

²⁰⁹ Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle That Divided America*, 159.

believed that a Republican victory was advantageous to America by halting the spread of fascism. However, the President's political ambition and his perception of Catholic opinion limited his willingness to make an unpopular decision to overtly support the Loyalists. Electoral politics and public opinion, primarily FDR's flawed understanding of his Catholics supporters, likely influenced FDR to agree to the embargo. Despite his fears over the spread of fascism and his sympathies for a budding democracy, FDR failed to make an effective change in the outcome of the Spanish Civil War due largely to clerical influence. Politicians whose campaign supporters didn't rely upon the Catholic vote had the ability to speak their mind on the embargo and general policy regarding Spain, a luxury FDR did not have.

7. Conclusions

The American Catholic Church's influence upon FDR and congressional political thought regarding American involvement in the Spanish Civil War cannot be understated. The reliance upon Catholics to form the New Deal Coalition and the false perspective that American Catholics were overwhelmingly pro-Nationalists rather than a diverse political grouping hindered FDR's willingness to adapt American foreign policy regarding Spain. FDR and other politicians, mostly Democrats, believed they were forced between maintaining Catholic support or attempting to support the Republic. In reality, Catholic thought surrounding Spain's Civil War varied substantially and was not necessarily pro-Franco according to most scholars. The common perception that the Catholic clergy successfully directed Catholic thought regarding Spain obstructed American policy and was a factor which led to the downfall of the Spanish Republic in late March 1939.

Chapter Three: The Catholic Church of Ireland and its effect on the Spanish Civil War

This chapter will examine the Irish Catholic Church's support of the Nationalists and its effects. In uniform fashion to the previous chapter, Catholic diplomatic, propaganda, and material aid will be examined. Throughout this chapter the clergy's effect on Irish foreign policy regarding the Spanish Civil War will be analyzed, in particular why the Irish government stayed neutral throughout the conflict despite the majority of Irish citizens supporting the Nationalists.

1. Irish political background prior to the Spanish Civil War

Up until the late 20th century, the Catholic Church was by far the most impactful institution of modern Irish history. Catholicism for the past (and current to a degree) generations was the bedrock for Irish culture. Eight hundred years of occupation combined with both physical and cultural persecution by the English strengthened the Irish's identification with Catholicism. The end of English domination with the ratification of the Anglo-Irish treaty on December 6th, 1921, led to the creation of the Irish Free State.²¹⁰ Through this treaty, Ireland became an autonomous dominion of the British empire, but still a member of the Commonwealth. The English continued to directly control the six majority Protestant counties in the North of Ireland.²¹¹

Civil war soon broke out in June of 1922 between Irish supporters of the Anglo-Irish treaty and anti-treatyites. This was due largely due to two provisions of the treaty: the ceding of the six Northern counties to England and continuation of the English Monarch as the head of the

²¹⁰ Basil Chubb, *Government and Politics of Ireland* (Routledge, 2016), 5.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 5-6.

Irish government.²¹² The defeat of anti-treaty forces in 1923 resulted in both the formation of the anti-treaty leftist Irish Republican Army or IRA and the rule of the center-right and pro-treaty party Cumann na nGaedheal. Due mostly to a lack of political competition, Cumann na nGaedheal would remain in power until 1932.²¹³ Despite being falsely labelled as a communist by Cumann na nGaedheal officials, the election of 1932 would bring Eamon De Valera of the center left Finná Fáil party would come to power in the election of 1932. Prime Minister De Valera would navigate Ireland through the economic, social, and political turbulence of the 1930s, including the effects of the Spanish Civil War.

Ireland during the late 1920s to the end of the 1930s was undergoing a massive amount of political fragmentation due to the breaking down of the first political parties, such as Cumann na nGaedheal.²¹⁴ The largest anti-treaty party Sinn Féin, would split into Finná Fáil, a center-left party headed by De Valera. Finná Fáil would come to dominate the Irish government through the 1930s due to the weakness of other Irish political parties and the strong leadership of Eamonn De Valera. Finná Fáil's rival Fine Gael, a center-right party formed from Irish corporatists and conservatives, often criticized De Valera claiming that he was a communist or some other form of radical.²¹⁵

²¹² Michael Hayes, "Dáil Eireann and the Irish Civil War," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 58, no. 229 (1969): 10, 14.

²¹³ Ferghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 4.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

2. Anti-Communism and the Irish Catholic Church's effect on political mobilization prior to the Spanish Civil War

The Catholic Church during the 1920s and 1930s held immense influence over Irish politics and Irish popular thought due to a variety of factors. The majority of education in Ireland was under Church control, politicians often depended on the good graces of their clergy to win political campaigns. Most importantly, the Church was the heart of Irish cultural life, especially in the countryside. The clergy were seen as leaders in their community and often influenced major political decisions, at both the local and national levels. It should also be noted that the late 1920s and the 1930s are commonly noted by Irish scholars as periods of increased religious devotion, and of growing clerical influence on non-laity Catholics.²¹⁶

The Irish clerical press was also one of the most influential forms of religious media in the world at the time. Clerical media was as influential as its secular counterpart during the late 1920s and the 1930s, resulting in the clergy wielding a powerful amount of influence over the formation of public opinion. This is also partially due to the lack of accessibility to secular newspapers. When compared to American Catholics, Irish Catholics had far less access to secular media due to the economic barriers relating to the price of newspapers.²¹⁷ Newspapers such as the *Irish Press* with its three pence cost priced out Ireland's working class.²¹⁸ Clerical media in comparison was often free and always affordable in order to spread influence rather than raise a profit. Many Irish also refused to buy English newspapers due to general distrust of anything English. Poor relations between the Irish Free State and the British government due to an economic trade war from 1932 to 1938 also intensified resistance to purchasing English

²¹⁶ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 89.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 71.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

goods, including newspapers.²¹⁹ The lack of diverse sources of information and perspective heavily influenced Irish Catholic perceptions of domestic and global politics. This was particularly true when it came to the clergy's exaggeration of a growing radical leftist movement, both nationally and throughout Europe.

The Irish Civil War of 1922, the First Red Scare, and the brief establishment of Irish Soviets between 1919 and 1921 created a general political atmosphere fearful of political change, especially the perceived threat of communism.²²⁰ The often violent establishment of worker-ran communes or "soviets" terrified an already extremely anti-communist Ireland and added new political dimensions to the Irish revolution which concurrently took place. Clerical press and secular media published a flurry of articles claiming a Bolshevik revolution was due to take place in Ireland due to the establishment of these socialist communes.²²¹ These media reports fueled fears of a domestic communist threat for decades.

The Irish Catholic Church heavily contributed to Irish society's fear of a domestic communist uprising. In a similar fashion to the American NCWC organization, Irish Bishops and other Church officials employed informants to research "communist" threats to the domestic security of the Church and Ireland. For example, an expansive fifteen-page report documenting the location, total members, political strength, leadership, and finances of various communist groups was sent by a Church informant named Joseph Hughes, to the Priest of St. Columba's Church in Dublin, Msgr. Watters on November 22nd, 1932.²²² Hugh claimed in the attached letter of the report that he infiltrated the Irish Communist party and worked with a network of

²¹⁹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 163.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²²¹ Mike Cronin, "Catholicising Fascism, Fascistising Catholicism? the Blueshirts and the Jesuits in 1930s Ireland," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007): 407.

²²² Report evaluating "membership, strength, leadership and finances of leftist/communist groups in Ireland" by Joe Hughes, box 2, Archbishop Byrne Government Collection, Arch-Diocese of Dublin Archive, Dublin, Ireland.

informants to gain the sources necessary to compose this report. Hugh then suggests that clerical action needs to be taken place in order to cull the influence of communism.²²³ Whether or not this report was true or exaggerated showcases the fear the Irish clergy possessed of a domestic communist threat. The development of these spy rings by the clergy represents a coordinated attempt to gather information on perceived radical leftist groups which threatened Catholicism. Clerical media could then be used to spotlight radicals further discrediting them in the eyes of a largely anti-communist Irish society. Despite the lack of a politically influential communist organization in Ireland during the 1920s and 30s, communism remained a constant threat in the mind of Irish Catholics and a common topic in both secular and clerical press.

Clerical media's strong influence was due in part to the price point of clerical media but more importantly to its appeal to a wide socio-economic range.²²⁴ Clergy controlled newspapers and magazines covered wide ranges of topics from entertainment to cooking, by mixing causal reading with political issues Catholic media influenced wide ranges of Irish society.²²⁵ Overall, clerical media was less focused on reporting on topics revolving around Irish politics, and rather reporting on what threatened Irish and foreign Catholics, specifically the spread of communism and anti-clericalism.

Common tropes of blaming Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants (where applicable) were often used, capitalizing on unpopular groups in Irish society to further reinforce clerical narratives.²²⁶ Catholic media often claimed that these groups were a part of a network of secretive communist forces that led the multiple leftist revolutions which Europe experienced from 1917 to the late 1930s. Clerical forces and its press also exaggerated Europe's recent

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 144-146.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 84-85.

political fragmentation to support the narrative of an impending communism uprising in Ireland. The most popular of which were reports of the U.S.S.R.'s violent actions against the Orthodox and Catholic Church. In comparison, the anti-clerical actions of Hitler were less reported and less criticized in the Catholic media, as the clergy's main concern was the spread of communism.²²⁷

In relation fascism and right-wing authoritarianism was admired by many Irish clergymen, as numerous clergy regarded fascism as a positive reaction against communism, halting its spread. Mussolini and in particular António de Oliveria Salazar, the dictator of Portugal, were deeply admired by much of the Irish Catholic hierarchy.²²⁸ This was due mostly to the fact both leaders willingly worked to incorporate the Catholic Church in their regime. Cornelius Lucey, a prominent priest and the head of the St. Patrick's College's Philosophy department, claimed Salazar was his ideal dictator in the *Irish Independent*.²²⁹ The Irish laity's outpouring of support for Salazar's regime was also due to the dictator's portrayal of Portugal as a modern Catholic state and the Portuguese corporatist economic system, which was the Church's preferred form of organizing the economy.²³⁰ The Irish clergy during the Spanish Civil War would relate Franco's leadership to that of Salazar's frequently. It should also be noted that a small, yet significant number of Irish laity members were disillusioned with democracy, possibly due to the frailty of European democracies during the interwar period. Other anti-democratic members of the clergy claimed that Ireland's democracy was at its core a corrupt system, and an English perversion of true democracy.²³¹ Some clergy preferred a stable dictatorship. However, despite many clergy members' infatuation with Salazar and general

²²⁷ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 138.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Dilectissima Nobis, *L'osservatore romano*, June 3, 1933.

²³¹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 137.

authoritarian government, the majority of non-laity Catholics were in support of democracy. Due to this the clerical press would portray Franco as a Catholic democrat rather than a dictator.

The establishment of the Second Spanish Republic on April 14th, 1931 was generally well perceived by the non-laity Irish. While both clerical and secular media reported on the church burnings of May 11th, 1931, Irish media lacked extensive coverage.²³² At the same time, in contrast to the American press, both clergy led, and secular Irish press would frequently report on the Spanish Republic through its existence.²³³ A substantial number of secular media outlets were anti-Republic from its onset, due in part to church burnings and the government's poor relationship with the clergy. Secular newspapers such as the *Evening Herald's* May 26th, 1931, article, "Outrages in Spain" documented Pope Pius XI's rejection of the Spanish Republic's ambassador, Luis de Zulueta. An obvious statement of the Vatican's stance on the new Republic.²³⁴ The Pope's rejection of the Republic's ambassador was due to the Vatican claiming Zulueta was an anti-clerical and a Freemason. The Vatican also claimed the Republic failed to punish those responsible for the church burnings. Reports of the Republic's poor relations with the Vatican directly affected Irish Catholic opinion, which was staunchly defensive of the Papacy. The day to day of the Vatican was also heavily covered in both secular and clerical media, and well read by a fervently Catholic country. Irish Catholic thought therefore was heavily influenced by the Vatican's political positioning.²³⁵

Coverage of the Church's treatment in Spain was continually reported on by the clerical and secular media outlets throughout the existence of the Republic.²³⁶ A small number of secular

²³² Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 115.

²³³ Ibid, 19.

²³⁴ "Outrages In Spain, Holy Father Request for Justice.", *Evening Herald*, May 26, 1931, 12.

²³⁵ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 86.

²³⁶ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 7.

newspapers such as the Cork based *Evening Echo*, covered Spanish politics with relative objectivity. However, the majority of secular outlets such as the *Irish Examiner* inflated the amount of anti-clerical violence under the Republic. The October 29th, 1934, article “Monk Boiled Alive” (Asturias miners’ uprising) claims one monk had both his legs “chopped off” and had been “boiled alive by the rebels.”²³⁷ These overdramatized and often false reports had a large impact on Catholics’ thoughts regarding the Republic and reinforced clerical media narratives, creating an echo chamber of anti-Republic thought.

The strength of clerical influence also limited some secular newspapers from providing objective coverage due to the willingness of Catholic businesses to pull their ads from newspapers which countered the clergy’s view.²³⁸ While this was not as profound prior to the Spanish Civil War, the loss of a key source of revenue for many secular newspapers limited the willingness to challenge the Church hierarchies’ narratives. Some newspapers such as *Ireland To-Day* went out of business due to being labeled as an anti-clerical publication by the clergy, and as a result fell in circulation and advertising revenue.²³⁹

Further unifying the negative perception of the Republic by Irish Catholics was the lack of Catholic social justice ideals in Ireland. When compared to the U.S., England, and France, the spread of Catholic social thinking was not as prevalent in Ireland during the 1920s and 30s, resulting in a lack of empathy and understanding why anticlerical violence took place during the rule of the Spanish Republic.²⁴⁰ In contrast to the U.S., Ireland lacked large-scale newspapers led by liberal Catholics such as Dorothy Day’s *Catholic Worker* or *Commonweal*. Additionally, Ireland was void of any major political groups that supported the Republicans. A tremendously

²³⁷ “Monk Boiled Alive., Atrocities During the Revolt in Spain,” *Irish Examiner*, October 29, 1931, 1.

²³⁸ McGarry, “Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War,” 83.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, 85.

²⁴⁰ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 148.

influential Catholic Church and a fervent Catholic population of 93.5% in 1936, led to a lack of varied thought regarding Spain's conflict.²⁴¹ This lack of diverse perceptions of the Spanish Republic and a clergy puppeted secular press led the majority of Irish Catholics predisposed to supporting the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War.

3. The Irish Government, Catholics, and the Spanish Civil War

De Valera's Finná Fáil government's diplomatic position regarding the Spanish Civil War can only be described as awkward in its nature. De Valera, while sympathizing for Spain's Catholics, was a key supporter of Irish neutrality. The Irish government faced immense pressure from mid-August 1936 until the end of 1937 in which public focus shifted towards the new Irish constitution. Despite the majority of Irish Catholics sympathizing with the Nationalists, De Valera was quick to institute Ireland's neutrality by joining the Non-Intervention Committee on August 25th, 1936 and maintained this stance until the end of the conflict in 1939.²⁴² The Irish government's action of taking a neutral stance was due to wide ranging factors. Ireland's recent independence was a key element of this diplomatic stance, as De Valera and other government officials wished to legitimize Ireland's sovereignty by involvement in international affairs. The Spanish Civil War provided an opportunity to project Ireland as both a sovereign state and a global model for smaller states by engaging in diplomacy. De Valera himself also sought to maintain and improve diplomatic relations with other nations, such as France and Britain.

Prior to widespread media reports of German and Italian involvement in Spain some Catholics criticized the government's neutrality, wishing for the Irish government to support the

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 211.

Spanish Rebels. The limited Catholic protest against Ireland's neutrality would quickly shift once widespread media reports of German and Italian aid were published. During the initial weeks of the Spanish Civil War many Catholic Irish also lobbied the government to end trade with the Spanish Republic. This movement was short lived and eclipsed by the growing influence of the pro-Nationalist aid organization, the Irish Christian Front (ICF) and its political agenda.²⁴³ Irish Catholic aid to the Nationalists would shift with the ICF rallying many towns, trade unions, and other forms of local government to lobby the federal government to recognize the Rebels as the true government of Spain through the Clonmel resolution and maintain neutrality.²⁴⁴ The Clonmel resolution became a popular topic in secular media outlets such as the *Irish Independent* which further spurred the resolution's growth.²⁴⁵ Due to the widespread pressure put on the federal government, the Dáil (Irish Parliament) held a vote on which Spanish faction should be recognized as the legitimate government on November 27th, 1936.²⁴⁶ The Labor party and Fianná Fáil votes gathered 65 votes in favor of maintaining relations with the Spanish Republic, while Fine Gael and independents combined 44 votes in their support of recognizing the Nationalists.²⁴⁷ Despite the failure to shift government diplomacy with Spain, the significance of the Dáil proposing a vote related to the Clonmel resolution showcases the popular support and the pressure put on the government to recognize the Nationalist regime. More legislation regarding Spain would come in February 1937 which primarily focused upon halting Irish from volunteering in Spain. Legislation forbidding Irish citizens to volunteer on behalf of both factions passed through the Dáil, but lacked strong enforcement from the Irish government,

²⁴³ McGarry, "*Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War*," 70.

²⁴⁴ Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1999), 9-10.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁴⁶ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 152.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

rendering the legislation useless.²⁴⁸ However, De Valera's government was most likely not fixated upon Irish volunteers, but rather wished to bolster their role in European diplomacy by passing similar laws to other European states, which forbade citizens to volunteer for martial service in Spain. Ireland would also support Non-Intervention Committee proposals restricting the flow of foreign volunteers.

The Non-Intervention Committee, led by the British, failed miserably and accounted for many vessels from neutral nations being attacked by Nationalist planes. Despite the plan's failure, Ireland's involvement in the coalition worked to further promote the image of Ireland as a sovereign state contributing to greater European politics. In essence De Valera used the Non-Intervention Committee as a tool to build the Irish state's international legitimacy rather than maintain European peace. De Valera's motives are further shown through Ireland's protest against the proposed dismantlement of the Non-Intervention Committee by Britain and France in September 1937.²⁴⁹ Especially considering by 1937 Irish fervor regarding Spain decreased as the debate over the new constitution, the decline of the ICF, and other European events such as appeasement, became the focal points of Irish media until the Spanish Civil War's end in 1939.

The Irish Catholic Church's relationship with De Valera and the hierarchy's thoughts on the Spanish Civil War also reflect a complex balance. The Church hierarchy maintained a strong relationship with De Valera through his time in office, yet openly aided the Nationalists. To further unpack the Irish hierarchy's relationship with De Valera proper background must be noted. De Valera was widely known as a devout Catholic, attending daily mass and maintaining strong relations with members of the laity. The Prime Minister also kept the privileges of the Church such as its role in education, and frequently expressed dread regarding the rise of anti-

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 154-155.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 158

clericalism and anti-Catholicism throughout Europe during the 1930s. The strong relationship between the Prime Minister and the Church provided benefits to both De Valera and the Church. The Church maintained its privileged position in Irish society and De Valera used his public relationship with the clergy to gain popular support and dispel claims by conservatives of his (very mild at best) leftist political leanings.

This reciprocal relationship restricted the Church's ability to condemn De Valera's actions regarding Spain directly or threaten a break between the two. This relationship is largely the rationale of the Church refusing to endorse movements critical of De Valera directly such as the ICF. Furthermore, the clerical press would rarely criticize De Valera directly in comparison to pro-Nationalist secular newspapers, showcasing the Church's prioritizing of their relationship with the Prime Minister over Spanish politics.²⁵⁰ Controversial figures such as O'Duffy and the ICF's President Patrick Belton also factored into the Church's reluctance to publicly support pro-Rebel organizations due to multiple elements. The most important of these was the fear that the Church would be perceived as aligning itself with political radicals which had the potential to threaten the Irish government, something that would obviously bring conflict between the Irish state and the Church.

²⁵⁰ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 83.

4. General Irish Catholics' perceptions of the Spanish Civil War and Irish media

In comparison to their American counterparts, Irish Catholics as a whole were far more conservative in their thoughts and obedient to their clergy. Economic barriers and clergy-imposed boycotts of some secular media created an Irish society dependent upon clerical narratives. Pro-Nationalist conservative Catholics made up the overwhelming majority of Ireland's population (scholarship has been unable to report approximate numbers of pro-Rebel Irish Catholics). This group was also the most vocal in their support of their desired faction in Spain. It should be noted that Irish Catholics were expected by their clergy to support the Spanish Rebels, which must have had a strong effect on the number of pro-Nationalist Catholics.

Groups of neutral Catholics were far fewer than their American counterparts, as the clergy would often brand neutral Catholics as "Pink" (rather than red), and pro-neutrality Irish to Loyalist supporters.²⁵¹ Publications such as the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* were also often labelled as "Pink" for their neutral stance throughout Spain's Civil War. Many neutrality supporters also expressed their sympathies regarding Spain's Catholics or the overthrow of the Spanish democracy. Liberal pro-Republican Catholics represented a miniscule group, this was due to multiple factors including the lack of progressive Catholic social justice values in Ireland, lack of a substantial socialist movement paired with a conservative labor party and workers unions.²⁵² Due to the small amount of neutral and liberal Catholics, conservative Catholics were the most influential and vocal group among the three groupings. Irish newspapers were reflected

²⁵¹ Ibid, 84.

²⁵² Ibid, 148.

in these groupings, as the majority of media outlets maintained pro-Nationalist editorial stances or sympathized with Spain's Church.

Irish media quickly reported the uprising of the Rebels and the violence that followed. From the July outbreak of the failed coup until early to mid-August 1936 Irish Catholic opinion was generally unsure of which Spanish faction to support.²⁵³ Despite many Irish Catholics being opposed to the Republic prior to the war, there was little information on the political identity of the Rebel forces. This factor limited Irish support of the Nationalists during the initial weeks of the civil war. However, reports of anti-clericalism committed by government forces would further alienate Irish Catholics away from the Republic.²⁵⁴ Cardinal Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter would shift Irish support firmly onto the Nationalists side by affiliating the Nationalists with Catholicism.²⁵⁵ The protection of the Spanish clergy in the Rebel zones combined with reports of government led anti-clerical violence also contributed to Irish Catholics' endorsement of the Nationalists.

Reports of the Republicans' anti-clerical actions dramatically increased the amount of coverage Spain received by the Irish media. Spain's conflict became one of the most popular newspaper subjects until the end of the civil war in 1939.²⁵⁶ Newspapers both secular and clerical were quick to report anti-clerical events. The *Irish Independent's* August 6th, 1936, edition printed a report from an English Catholic priest who described "Priests battered to death in their churches and their heads stuck on railings outside..."²⁵⁷ Reports regarding anti-clericalism in the Republican zone filled the pages of secular and Catholic newspapers and described the brutal

²⁵³ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 141.

²⁵⁴ Mark O'Brien, "In War-Torn Spain': The Politics of Irish Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War," *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 3 (2017): 349.

²⁵⁵ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 142.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 150.

²⁵⁷ "Priest Hunting In Spain, Shocking Stories of Atrocities," *Irish Independent*, August 6, 1936, 7.

treatment of priests, nuns, and religious brothers. Despite the bulk of anti-clericalism taking place during the first six months of the Spanish Civil War, gruesome coverage of torture, rape, and murder filled Irish newspapers until Franco's victory on April 1st, 1939. Clerical media in particular frequently fixated their articles on gruesome reports.²⁵⁸ The Irish clergy also had direct reports of current events in Spain from their affiliated religious orders present during the conflict, further fueling the media frenzy.

Irish clergy often possessed firsthand reports of Spain, as Irish and Spanish religious orders, such as the Dominicans or Cistercians maintained close communications prior to and during the Spanish Civil War. The Irish College of Salamanca, a Catholic seminary for Irish students, and The Sisters of Loreto Convent based in Zalla, provided first hand Irish accounts to clerical publishers.²⁵⁹ The resident Rector of the Irish seminary in Salamanca, Alexander J. McCabe, described in his (1936) yearly report to the Primate of Ireland, Joseph MacRory, his admiration for Franco and noted that a Rebel victory was to be more advantageous for the college than a Republican one.²⁶⁰ Throughout this report McCabe noted the general peace that was maintained around Salamanca and that the college had been treated well by Nationalist officials. Yearly reports and communications such as McCabe's heavily influenced the Irish clergy's perceptions of the conflict. Firsthand reports describing the favorable treatment which Irish lay people received from the Nationalists paired with reports of anti-clerical aggression by the Republicans were routinely sent to Irish Bishops, which formed the basis of their knowledge

²⁵⁸ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 149.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 138-140.

²⁶⁰ Report regarding "financial and educational status of Irish College of Salamanca, also notes Macabe's thoughts on the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War." By Alexander Macabe., box 84, folder 3, Irish College of Salamanca Collection, Card Catalog Russell Library, SP/S/88/3/3, St.Patrick's Seminar/National University of Ireland: Maynooth, Ireland.

of the civil war. Clerical media also utilized reports by Irish lay people in Spain for articles, giving readers a firsthand Irish perspective of the Spanish Civil War.²⁶¹

Clerical media after Plá y Deniel's 1936 pastoral letter painted the Nationalists as crusaders fighting against a Marxist force led by the U.S.S.R. Both secular and nonsecular media would often portray the Nationalists as the faction representative of "true" Spain, reinforcing the perception that Irish Catholics were supporting the legitimate faction.²⁶² The perception that Ireland and Spain maintained a unique relationship is mostly an inflated one, however it was used as a common position in Irish media to create pro-Nationalist support. To reinforce the romanticized image of Spain as a holy country, film showings of *Castles in Spain* and *The Crusades* were played throughout Ireland in September 1936 and bolstered the image of the Spanish people as pious Catholics.²⁶³ The presentation of these movies show in part how common Irish formed their perception of Spaniards as devout and passionate. Historical, and sometimes mythical, events such as the shipwreck of the 1588 Spanish Armada leading to a mix of Irish and Spanish descendants referred to as "Black Irish" were used to bind Irish and Spanish history together.²⁶⁴ Irish media would also note that many Spaniards had Irish blood, due to the employment of Irish mercenaries by the Spanish Empire (commonly called by historians the Flight of the Wild Geese).²⁶⁵

Most Irish propaganda however, focused upon Spain's and Ireland's shared faith. Typically, the Irish pictured the common Spaniard as fervently devout, and therefore reasoned that the anti-clerical violence was perpetrated by an outside force and not representative of true

²⁶¹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 138-141.

²⁶² McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 71.

²⁶³ Preston and Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, 118.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 141.

Spaniards. A common Irish rationale for understanding Spain's anticlericalism was to blame Jews, Freemasons, and Communists who tricked the once devout Spaniards into these violent acts. The retelling of ahistorical events allowed Irish clergy to create a simple narrative that supported the preconceived notions which many Irish held regarding Spain. By tying groups ill-perceived by Irish Catholic society to anticlericalism and the Republicans, Irish clergy used domestic fears held by many Irish and directly applied them to Spain. The largest of these fears was the clergy's claim that if the Spanish Republicans were victorious communism would spread to Ireland from a Soviet satellite Spain.²⁶⁶

The framing of Spain as a battle between U.S.S.R. supported communists and crusaders fighting on behalf of Catholicism heavily reinforced a decade long fear of the threat of communism. The crusade myth created by Franco and the Spanish Church directly related to recent Irish political conflict, in which mostly Catholic Irishmen rebelled against their English Protestant oppressors in 1919.²⁶⁷ The perception of Spain's Civil War as a religious conflict Irish Catholics immediately sympathized with the Nationalists. The inflation of Ireland and Spain's relationship was a crucial propaganda theme as it simplified the clerical pro-Nationalist narrative. In relation to Plá y Deniel's 1936 pastoral letter and the outpouring of pro-Rebel propaganda, the Bishops' Collective Letter of 1937 had a smaller impact on Irish Catholics' perception of the conflict. This was due in part to the timing of the 1937 collective letter in relation to domestic Irish politics and Irish Catholic attention of the Spanish Civil War being at its highest in 1936.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 139-140.

²⁶⁷ Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, 118.

²⁶⁸ O'Brien, "In War-Torn Spain": The Politics of Irish Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War," 357.

In comparison to the U.S. where the Catholic pro-Franco lobby grew with the publication of the 1937 Bishops' Collective Letter, Irish Catholic support of the Nationalists was already at its strongest point. It should be noted that the letter had some effect on the Irish clergy's endorsement of the Nationalists which can be seen through the Irish Bishops' written response to the letter.²⁶⁹ The main theme of the Irish Bishops' response to the letter was noting the international press's "cunning and malevolent distortion of the facts."²⁷⁰ This response by the Irish hierarchy showcases their goal of dominating the narrative surrounding Spain's Civil War. However, Plá y Deniel's pastoral letter had the strongest effect on Irish thought surrounding Spain.

The Irish clergy from the publication of Plá y Deniel's pastoral was quick to fully support the Nationalists as the Rebels represented anti-communism and Catholic Spain according to the Spanish Church. Much of secular media due to clerical control was quick to follow suit. Catholics in Ireland in comparison to the U.S. had few objective forms of media regarding the Spanish Civil War; therefore, Irish Catholics were less likely to develop a nuanced view of Spain's conflict. Clerical officials' censorship tactics of denouncing a newspaper or writer as a communist would often accompany the loss of advertising-based revenue from Catholic owned businesses. This censorship tactic was common during the Spanish Civil War.²⁷¹ This form of newspapers and magazine censorship relied on a Catholic audience to perpetuate the crusade narrative, rather than supply objective coverage. Many members of the clergy also forbade many Catholics from reading media which sympathized with the Republic.

²⁶⁹ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 82.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 82-83.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 85.

Pro-Franco media coverage of the evacuation of the Basque children in 1937 further illustrated the influence of the Irish clergy's narrative, by claiming that the children were being used as the Republic's political tool to create an image of the Nationalists' treatment of civilians as brutal. The *Irish Independent's* November 3rd, 1937, article "Basque Children in Britain" posted several quotes of both English and Irish politicians who claim these children would be better off in Spain or were a part of some red propaganda campaign.²⁷² Many other pro-Franco newspapers followed suit and most likely influenced De Valera's government decision to refuse any refugees. Irish pro-Nationalist newspapers also criticized the English government's agreement to shelter the children until the end of the war, with many claiming the English government fell into a communist plot.²⁷³ The media's spotlight, however, would quickly shift with the bombing of the spiritual capital of the Basques of Guernica on April 26th, 1937.

The bombing of a defenseless Guernica saw very little objective coverage from Irish secular and non-secular media outlets. Rather Irish media outlets which depended upon the clergy's blessing repeated Franco's absurd claim that anarchists set fire to the city before fleeing. Newspapers which provided objective coverage such as the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Press* were bashed by the clerical press for spreading communist lies.²⁷⁴ In comparison to the U.S., Irish Catholics generally believed Franco's lie, as a Catholic military who received Eucharist daily couldn't have done such an unspeakable act. To further reinforce the narrative that the Rebels were innocent of any wrongdoing in Guernica and further slander the Republicans, Church officials organized speaking tours of those who had seen the firsthand horrors of the Republicans.

²⁷² "Basque Children in Britain, Repatriation Problem," *Irish Independent*, November 3, 1937, 3.

²⁷³ Cullen, "'Oh Ireland! What a Disappointment You Have Been to the Basque People': Irish Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War," 108.

²⁷⁴ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 78, 83.

Edward J. Byrne, the Archbishop of Dublin, maintained a strong relationship with both Nationalist officials and Spanish priests throughout Spain's Civil War, such as Father Gábana, a Spanish priest. Gábana worked as a liaison and interpreter between Byrne and the Bishop of Barcelona Manuel Irurita y Almándoiz during the 31st Eucharistic Congress in Dublin in 1932, which already gave him some rapport with the Irish Church's hierarchy. Gábana, between the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and April 1st, 1937, fled to England and was appointed by the Catholic Bishop of Westminster as Chaplain for Spanish Refugees. During Gábana's time in England he exchanged letters with Irish Bishops and was commissioned by Bishop Byrne to start a speaking tour on Spain's conflict. Gábana's lectures often gave accounts of the horrors that took place at the hands of the Republicans such as the burning of Guernica.²⁷⁵ In order to stop the violence of Spain and the destruction of its Church, Gábana requested Irish Catholics to raise money on behalf of the Nationalists.²⁷⁶ Byrne's use of Gábana as a propaganda tool and frequent communication between the two further shows the importance which the Irish Church placed upon Spain, while also trying to sow fear and hatred of the Republicans through often exaggerated eye witness accounts. Gábana's speaking tour was widely published in both secular and non-secular newspapers and successfully reinforced Franco's crusade narrative. British media's criticism of Gábana during his time touring England in support of the Nationalists gave way to Irish newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* defending Gábana and calling British Parliament members "communists" who disapproved of the priest's fear mongering.²⁷⁷ This

²⁷⁵ Letter to Archbishop Byrne describing "the Ancient Order of Hibernians plans for Fr. Gabana's speaking tour" by John J. Nugent, box 2, Archbishop Byrne Government Collection, Arch-Diocese of Dublin Archive, Dublin, Ireland.

²⁷⁶ "A Campaign of Absurd Lies, British Propaganda About Spain.", *Limerick Leader*, June 2, 1937, 12.

²⁷⁷ "British Lies About Spain, Lecture in Carlow," *Irish Independent*, May 25, 1937, 3.

event reflects a larger theme of constant criticism between Irish Catholic and Protestant read newspapers.

Newspapers which typically appealed to Irish Protestants and some members of the Irish professional class such as the pro-unionist *Irish Times*, would face constant attack by Irish Bishops, as these newspapers were typically neutral or pro-Republic. The *Irish Times* analysis of Spain's Civil War, according to historian J. Bowyer Bell, was "some of the most factual, balanced editorial analyses to be found in Europe."²⁷⁸ By portraying the Spanish Civil War and in particular anti-clericalism as an extremely complex event rather than accepting the Church's simplistic narrative that communists took control of Spain, the *Irish Times* subsequently was constantly attacked by Irish Catholics. For example, in the Fall of 1936 eleven religious orders blacklisted the *Irish Times* for their supposed sympathetic coverage of Spain's Reds.²⁷⁹ Irish Protestant/Unionist media outlets routinely received sectarian-based harassment from Catholics, who commonly claimed that Irish Protestants and the English were attempting to subvert Irish Catholic unity and thought.²⁸⁰

Church officials also harassed newspapers which held a neutral stance on Spain, such as the *Irish Press*. Many clergy claimed these newspapers were abandoning their fellow Catholics by not supporting the Nationalists. One of the most circulated secular newspapers, the *Irish Press*, a Fianna Fáil newspaper called by historian David O'Brien "De Valera's mouthpiece," faced frequent criticism on its intense neutrality by the laity.²⁸¹ Clerical condemnation of the newspaper's neutrality however, rarely if ever turned into criticism of De Valera or his political stance directly. It should be noted that the *Irish Press* reported on Spain far less than other

²⁷⁸ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 140.

²⁷⁹ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 86.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 83.

²⁸¹ O'Brien, "In War-Torn Spain': The Politics of Irish Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War," 347.

newspapers as its main purpose was to support De Valera and Fianna Fáil's agenda which was primarily domestically focused.²⁸² Despite not frequently reporting on Spain and maintaining a neutral stance, clergy's attack on neutral news outlets further showcases the control the Irish Church wished to maintain over all forms of secular media. Often clerical attacks against neutral newspapers were undergone in a discreet manner, such as Primate of Ireland MacRory suggesting that the *Irish Press* shift its coverage to be more pro-Franco.²⁸³ Due to being one of the largest and most profitable newspapers in Ireland, the *Irish Press* didn't have to shift its stance on Spain, however one can imagine how clerical intimidation would shift smaller media organizations' coverage.²⁸⁴ These threats show that the growth of the crusade narrative through secular and clerical media was a top objective for the Irish Catholic Church.

Secular pro-Nationalist newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* were praised and endorsed by Irish clergy for the spread of the crusade narrative. For example, the Bishop of Killaloe Patrick Fogarty claimed the *Irish Independent* provided "unflinching and unequivocal support" to the pro-Franco cause.²⁸⁵ The *Irish Independent's* coverage of the Spanish Civil War actually benefited the newspaper, which saw its circulation grow throughout the Spanish Civil War, growing 12% above its 1935 circulation level by 1939.²⁸⁶ This was due in part to the newspaper having one of the highest amounts of coverage of Spain and the newspaper's steady pro-Nationalist editorial stance. The reinforcement of the majority of Irish Catholics opinion on Spain combined with clerical praise, led to a growth of the *Independent's* sales and image, as the newspaper became regarded as the typical Catholic Irishmen's source of news. It should be

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 86.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 83.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 88.

stated that the *Independent* also was one of the cheapest major newspapers in Ireland which also drove its level of high circulation during a period of economic downturn.

Irish media's frequent coverage and public attention on the Spanish Civil War would wane from the end of 1937 onward.²⁸⁷ During 1937 and 1938 Spain would be the most common topic for pastoral letters; however, by 1939 pastoral letters regarding Spain would drop significantly to the tenth most common subject.²⁸⁸ This decline in attention was a direct result of domestic political reform regarding Ireland's new constitution which would remove Ireland from the British Commonwealth. De Valera's government abolished the oath of loyalty to England's monarch and ratified a new constitution on July 1st, 1937, which made Ireland a fully independent country.²⁸⁹ The 1937 constitutional debate would overtake Irish media coverage of the Spanish Civil War as it was a hotly contested topic which divided Ireland. Another key factor leading to the decrease of Irish interest in Spain was due in part to the lack of large and stable pro-Nationalist organizations. Unlike the American clergy their Irish counterparts were often hesitant to endorse or promote publicly any political groups. This is largely due to Irish laity wishing to maintain their strong relationship with De Valera and fear of aligning the Church by endorsing far-right organizations, who were not directly under the control of the clergy. Without unified and public clerical support these groups were quick to lose support and interest from Irish Catholics. Generally, the Irish far-right during the 1930s lacked strong leadership which further influenced the decline of public interest in Spain, as large pro-Nationalist organizations often fell apart due to internal divisions.²⁹⁰ Ireland also lacked large organizations which supported the Republicans resulting in limited potential functions for pro-Nationalists committees.

²⁸⁷ O'Brien, "In War-Torn Spain": The Politics of Irish Press Coverage of the Spanish Civil War," 357.

²⁸⁸ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 150.

²⁸⁹ Chubb, *Government and Politics of Ireland*, 43.

²⁹⁰ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 138.

5. Irish Catholics' financial and physical support of the Nationalists

Akin to their American counterpart, the Irish Church's support of the Nationalists was mainly through propaganda aid. However, the Irish Church both directly and indirectly supported the raising of aid on behalf of the Spanish Rebels. The largest direct form of aid raised by the Irish Church was the National Collection of October 1936 in which the Church raised £43,331 to send to the "suffering Catholics" in Spain.²⁹¹ The mid-Southern counties such as Killaloe, Cashel, and Tipperary raised the most money for the collection. These counties were made up of mostly dairy, beef, and small estate farmers who hailed from rural communities where the Church held immense influence over everyday life.²⁹² In terms of the national collection's image, clergy presented the fundraiser as a collection for Spanish Catholics but were sure to include Franco and other Nationalist figures. By fastening the national collection to Franco this further supported the image that the Nationalists were fighting a holy crusade against violent communistic force who persecuted Catholics. In response to the large amount of funds raised by the Irish Church a Nationalists consul stationed in Liverpool, Ignacio de Mugiuro, relayed to Nationalist officials a report documenting the funds and support from the Irish Catholic Church. De Mugiuro went on to pressure the English and Welsh Catholic Church to use Ireland's October 1936 national collection as a blueprint to raise funds.²⁹³ In contrast to the Irish, both English and Welsh Bishops were extremely hesitant to raise funds, due to fears of being depicted as directly supporting a fascist movement, as British society was more fearful of the growth of fascism than Ireland.²⁹⁴ Church officials' communications with Nationalist officials such as De Mugiuro and others also had the intended effect of giving legitimacy to the Rebels. Irish Bishops were

²⁹¹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 161.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid, 162.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 7.

unwilling to push De Valera's government into recognizing Franco's government, but through collections and communications gave the Spanish insurgents legitimacy and grew popular Irish support of the Nationalists.

Ireland had a host of Catholic affiliated Nationalist aid organizations, but none were as influential as the Irish Christian Front (ICF). The pro-Nationalist newspaper the *Irish Independent* urged the formation of a committee to benefit Catholics in Rebel controlled zones. Patrick Belton, a staunch Catholic, anti-communist, anti-Semite, and corporatist in-turn founded the ICF. Belton's involvement in the Easter Rising of 1916, membership in the Dáil, and his former membership in Ireland's pseudo-fascist party the Blueshirts, made him a famous figure in Irish society during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹⁵ His record of fanatical anti-communism through his membership in the anti-communist Blueshirts party and organizational ability led him to be elected as the President of the ICF on August 31st, 1936. President Belton would dominate the leadership of the ICF and dictate the committee's planning and identity.²⁹⁶ In an effort to amass the largest number of members Belton would claim that the ICF was neither a political or a Catholic movement, rather it encompassed individuals that wish to send aid to the Nationalists and combat the growth of communism in Ireland and abroad. Membership of the ICF due to the lack of barriers and its identity of militant Catholic anti-communism would swell the organization's membership in 1936. The ICF's first rally in Dublin on August 30th attracted approximately 15,000 people. A ICF rally in Cork would also bring great crowds to come and support the ICF in September.²⁹⁷ The ICF leadership during their Dublin rally would denounce direct intervention or the shipping of arms to Spain but rather the raising of funds to supply the

²⁹⁵ Ibid, Chapter 4 "The Irish Christian Front".

²⁹⁶ Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, 121.

²⁹⁷ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 151.

Nationalists and their families with much needed medical equipment.²⁹⁸ During the early months after the formation of the ICF many clergy including notable Bishops approved and pushed for Catholics to join the organization.

The multiple factors which spurred the ICF's early growth in 1936 was due to a combination of opportune timing and the organization's affiliation with Catholicism, despite defining itself as a movement for all Christians. By creating a movement that was tied in with anti-communism and Catholicism the ICF was quick to gain followers, as these tenets already heavily resonated with Irish society. The establishment of the ICF in late August of 1936 was tied with the growth of pro-Nationalist sentiment in Ireland, largely due to the widespread reporting of anticlerical violence in Spain. The initial months of the ICF saw widespread support throughout Ireland with 19 branches being established throughout the four provinces of Ireland, but it was mostly concentrated in Leinster and Munster.²⁹⁹ The Church hierarchy was essential in the establishment and growth of the ICF throughout Ireland. Vicar Generals Msgr. O'Leary, Msgr. Water, and others were key figures to founding new ICF branches in their respective counties of Dublin and Kerry.³⁰⁰ Church officials brought legitimacy to the aid committee by their involvement in the organization and pushed their parishioners to join, attend rallies, and raise funds on behalf of the ICF. Despite claiming its organization was void of politics, many clergy members were hesitant to endorse a non-laity led organization that could potentially tarnish the Church's image. Many clergy due to fear of affiliating themselves with a non-clerical led organization covertly supported the Belton's committee financially such as Archbishop Byrne. A letter sent by Belton on December 22nd, 1936, expresses his admiration for Byrne's

²⁹⁸ Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, 121-122.

²⁹⁹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 117-118.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

donation of £50 received on the 30th of October.³⁰¹ The Archbishop's donation but lack of overt support showcases many of the clergy's stance on the ICF.

In late September 1936, Primate of Ireland MacRory indirectly endorsed the organization by stating that all Catholics if able, should raise funds for Spain's Catholics through donating medical supplies.³⁰² This subtle nod to the ICF further promoted the organization to Catholics but didn't directly involve the Church with the organization, this was most likely due to the common fear amongst clergy of tying the Church to non-clergy led organizations as stated above. In October of 1936 the ICF increased their fundraising effort due to the Rebel advance on Madrid, which would require much medical equipment. This claim by the ICF clearly states that the aid was going directly to the Nationalist military rather than the Spanish civilians as claimed by the organization in late August and September of 1936. Until November of 1936 the ICF's membership and activity grew rapidly, continuing to hold huge rallies in Ireland's largest cities and raise funds on behalf of the Rebels. The ICF's use of the simple crusade narrative and its wide reach across all economic classes and political parties (including the labor party) quickly created an enormous unorganized movement. Due to poor organizational skills, lack of competent leadership, and the organization's emergence as a political movement would lead to the quick downfall of the ICF into obscurity by the Spring of 1937.³⁰³

The main component of the ICF fall was Belton's poor leadership. Despite a core tenet of the organization being its lack of political agenda outside of aiding Spanish Catholics, Belton frequently expressed his own political goals, most notable of instituting corporatism (the control

³⁰¹ Letter "thanking Archbishop Byrne of Dublin for his contribution to the ICF" by Patrick Belton, box 2, Archbishop Byrne Government Collection, Arch-Diocese of Dublin Archive, Dublin, Ireland.

³⁰² McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 120.

³⁰³ Donal Fallon, "Saint Patrick, Animal Gangs and Blueshirts: Anti-Communism in 1930s Dublin," *Dublin Historical Record* 67, no. 2 (2014): 77.

of the economy by the state by large interest groups). Many scholars including McGarry and Stradling claim that Belton attempted to turn the organization into a clerical-fascist political party by mobilizing Catholics and the clergy through the ICF. In his attempt to create his own political base Belton alienated himself to both laity and non-laity Irish. Belton's leadership triggered the breakdown of clerical support that can be tied to the fall of the ICF from prominence in late November 1936. Belton frequently butted heads with the clergy and in turn lost much of their support from late October until the end of the ICF in May 1937.³⁰⁴

For example, in November 1936 at a Belfast rally Belton became embroiled in a heated argument with Msgr. Arthur Ryan, a philosophy professor at the University of Queens. This argument regarding the ICF's growing political agenda of corporatism and fascism led to calls for Belton to step down as President and for new elections to take place. Belton promptly refused.³⁰⁵ This refusal turned many of the clergy against the ICF for fears of being associated with a radical organization. Belton and other prominent leadership reinforced this perception by frequently praising German fascism despite general Catholic opinion as disapproving of Nazi anti-clericalism. The arrest of the ICF's secretary Alexander McCabe due to his membership in the pro-Nazi People's National Party in 1939 illustrates how entrenched fascist thought was throughout the leadership of the organization.³⁰⁶ The ICF's claim of its non-political nature was also frequently challenged both by the *Irish Press* and within the organization. During January of 1937 Belton attempted to use the ICF as a tool to pressure the Irish government into politically recognizing Franco and the Nationalists as the legitimate government of Spain. Within the ICF branches were divided between supporters of pressuring the government to recognize Franco and

³⁰⁴ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 132.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 125

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 123.

other branches that deemed recognition of the Nationalists as a political action. Clergy's reluctance to directly critique De Valera came at odds with Belton's new campaign, causing many prominent clergy members to withdraw public support.

The largest fallout between the Belton and the Church hierarchy, however, was over the Church's national collection of October 1936. Primate MacRory wished to directly send the funds to Cardinal Gomá while Belton attempted to persuade MacRory to give a portion of the funds to the ICF in order to buy medical supplies, which could be sent directly to the Nationalists. MacRory was hesitant to give Belton a cut of the national collection for multiple reasons including fear of directly tying the Church to a non-clerical led organization and MacRory's general distrust of Belton. Despite MacRory's wishes to directly send all the funds to the Spanish Church, Gomá was persuaded by Belton to give a portion of the national collection to the ICF to buy medical equipment. MacRory relented Gomá's request of giving a portion of the funds to the ICF, however this alienated the ICF from much of the Irish hierarchy including MacRory and Byrne. Belton's disagreement with Primate MacRory would also cause internal divisions amongst the ICF leadership, the organization's Vice President Joseph Brennan and Secretary Alexander McCabe would resign in disagreement of opposing MacRory's wishes.³⁰⁷ Belton's alienation of both the clergy and the leadership of the ICF was the main cause of the committee's decline. However, other factors heavily contributed to the disappearance of the ICF from the public eye in May of 1937.

In comparison to the U.S., Irish pro-Franco aid committees had very limited objectives outside of raising material and propaganda aid, this was due to the lack of large pro-Republican aid organizations. The lack of a visual enemy to harass was a key factor that led to the end of the

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 125-128.

ICF, as members were primarily focused internally on leadership rather than harassing pro-Loyalists groups. The draw of being a non-political movement functioned as a positive by attracting a wide political range but also a negative one, by limiting the mediums in which the ICF could support the Nationalists and keep members interested. Some scholars including J. Bowyer Bell attributed the lack of fresh ideas as an additional reason why the organization lost mass support.³⁰⁸

While the ICF by far was the largest and most influential of all pro-Nationalist aid groups, others' impact on the Spanish Civil War should be noted. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, a Catholic order created to oppose the Protestant Orange Order in the early 19th century, aided with the transport of Father Gábana for his pro-Franco speaking tour in 1937 in tandem with Archbishop Byrne.³⁰⁹ Other members of the order volunteered for O'Duffy's Irish brigade to defend Catholicism. However, in comparison to the ICF all other pro-Rebel aid organizations had a miniscule effect on Irish Catholics' support of the Nationalists, due to the popularity of the ICF and the shift in Irish public interest from Spain's Civil War to the 1937 constitution.

³⁰⁸ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 161.

³⁰⁹ Letter to "Archbishop Byrne describing The Ancient Order of Hibernians plans for Fr. Gábana's speaking tour" by Patrick Belton, box 2, Archbishop Byrne Government Collection, Arch-Diocese of Dublin Archive, Dublin, Ireland.

6. The Irish Brigade's use of the Church and Catholicism

Analysis regarding Irish Catholics' support of the Spanish Nationalists must include Eoin O'Duffy's famous (or notorious) Irish brigade. However, prior to documenting the relationship between Catholicism and the Irish brigade O'Duffy himself must receive proper background. Prior to leading a force of men to Spain, O'Duffy was one of the most politically prominent figures in modern Ireland. He was a key figure in the Gaelic revival, a movement that attempted to revive Irish sport, culture, and language during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He would later join the IRA in 1917 and quickly rise through the ranks due to his recruitment skills and savage yet effective guerilla tactics. O'Duffy after the Irish War of Independence would side with the victorious pro-treaty faction during the Irish Civil War. Following the Irish Civil War, O'Duffy was then appointed the Chief of the Garda (Chief of Police) in 1922. He would further his fame during the course of his strong leadership of the Garda; this would come to an end however in 1933, when De Valera sacked O'Duffy from his position due to their political rivalry. His dismissal from his Garda position would forever alienate O'Duffy against De Valera and cause O'Duffy to take leadership of the Blueshirts in July 1933.³¹⁰

O'Duffy would redesign the Blueshirts to resemble Hitler and Mussolini's fascist movements and incorporated Catholicism as a main tenet of his movement; this has led many scholars to label O'Duffy as a clerical fascist. The Blueshirt movement during July and August of 1933 grew rapidly due to O'Duffy's charismatic leadership and included other famous politicians such as Patrick Belton of the ICF, as mentioned previously. The rapid growth of the Blueshirts under De Valera's rival worried the Irish government which announced a ban on the Blueshirts on August 22nd, 1933. In reaction to the ban O'Duffy merged the Blueshirts with

³¹⁰ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, 18-24.

Cumann na nGaedheal and the minor political organization, the National Center Party to create Fine Gael, with O'Duffy as its first acting President in September of 1933. Fine Gael's decisive 1934 election defeat ultimately led to the ousting of O'Duffy from President and his political isolation.³¹¹

The Spanish Civil War provided an opportunity for O'Duffy to relaunch himself into Ireland's political scene by raising volunteers to fight on behalf of the Nationalists. The Church was instrumental in the creation of the Irish brigade and heavily aided O'Duffy's plan. When approached by a Carlist noble Ramírez de Arellano on the possibility of a volunteer troop of Irishmen, Primate MacRory recommended O'Duffy as a stout Catholic and a talented organizer of men.³¹² The Primate's recommendation to Arellano led to O'Duffy devising an Irish brigade with General Mola in September of 1936. It's crucial to note that MacRory wished to keep his support a secret in fear of having his name tied to a disgraced fascist politician and harming the clergy's relation with De Valera. Once back in Ireland, O'Duffy worked tirelessly to raise the necessary men for his brigade. Catholic media rarely reported on O'Duffy's venture, in comparison, Irish secular media frequently covered the volunteers. The Church hierarchy denied O'Duffy's request of a Chaplain to his brigade; this illustrates that the Church wished to publicly keep total distance from O'Duffy.³¹³ By publicly disagreeing with the formation of the brigade the Church distanced themselves from both O'Duffy and a seemingly poorly planned expedition to Spain. However, clergy such as MacRory supported O'Duffy covertly as a means to not alienate the government and appear to be supporting a self-proclaimed fascist.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid, 160.

³¹³ Ibid.

The minority of clergy members that openly supported the establishment of an Irish brigade represented the lower rankings of the Church hierarchy which held far less political reservations than Bishops. By judging where most of the Irish brigade's volunteers hailed from its most likely that these priests were also from rural agricultural counties.³¹⁴ Many pro-brigade clergy portrayed deployment to Spain as both a crusade and a duty to a nation which aided Ireland against its English oppressors. The perceived "special" historical connection between Ireland and Spain was especially harped on by pro-brigade clergy, and in turn the leadership of the brigade. O'Duffy in particular frequently discussed Ireland and Spain's unique relationship as Celtic and Catholic nations in his book *Crusade in Spain*, a retelling of his expedition.³¹⁵ While the intertwining of faith and ahistorical narratives brought many of the Irish brigade to volunteer, some volunteered for other reasons. These reasons include adventure and employment, as Ireland was suffering both from the Great Depression and effects of the Economic War. In fact, the majority of O'Duffy's volunteers came from areas most affected by the tariff conflict with England.³¹⁶ The approximate 700 volunteers left from Galway in two waves, the first in October and the second in November of 1936.³¹⁷ The second wave was sent to Spain with a ceremony in which priests blessed the volunteers and were given an assortment of religious trinkets. This sendoff, however, would mark the steady decline of morale of the brigade.

From O'Duffy's brigade arrival and training in Spain cultural differences, poor leadership, and the over drinking of wine eroded the brigade's morale. On their arrival to Cáceres, Bishop McCabe of Salamanca College held mass and described the hardships at the

³¹⁴ Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 23-34.

³¹⁵ Eoin O'Duffy and Michael McCormack, *Crusade in Spain* (Orkney, Scotland: Reconquista Press, 2019), 17-23.

³¹⁶ Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 23-34.

³¹⁷ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 154.

front such as the rarity of fresh water, which forced soldiers to consume wine instead.³¹⁸ Pledges of temperance were lost with the volunteers during their military training in Cáceres, as O’Duffy’s men frequently over drank and fought with their Spanish liaison officers. This, coupled with the harsh training of the Spanish Foreign Legion, drove a wedge between the Spanish and Irish. This would be a trend throughout their service to Franco, resulting in abysmal morale. Prior allusions of pious Spaniards were also shattered when the brigade attended mass and found very few men in the churches. Spanish officers also frequently poked fun at the Irish’s piety viewing it as womanly in nature.³¹⁹

The Irish brigade’s first battle at Ciempozuelos on February 19th, 1937 further eroded morale when a separate Nationalist unit from the Canaries mistook the Irish for Loyalists, leading to a friendly-fire incident killing four Irish.³²⁰ Nevertheless, pro-Nationalist Irish newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* reported that the four dead Irishmen sacrificed their lives while fighting back “hordes of Russian atheists and French and English Communists almost to the outskirts of Madrid.”³²¹ Pro-Franco Irish newspapers went to great lengths to depict the reality of a friendly-fire to a narrative which reflected the brigade’s bravery and usefulness to the Nationalists, often dubbing the Irish volunteers holy warriors or crusaders. Pro-neutrality newspapers such as the *Irish Times* did not report on the incident and generally gave little attention to the brigade. On March 12th the Irish brigade was once again sent into battle at Titulcia, a small town outside of Madrid. The Irish brigades’ battle took place in the Jarama Valley in a muddy field which bogged O’Duffy’s men down, allowing Loyalist artillery to shell

³¹⁸ Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 44.

³¹⁹ Tim Fanning, *The Salamanca Diaries: Father Mccabe and the Spanish Civil War* (Co. Kildare, Ireland: Merrion Press, 2019), Electronic reader location- 2843.

³²⁰ Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 63-65.

³²¹ “Courage of Volunteers Under Rain of Shells: The Reds Routed.”, *Irish Independent*, March 25, 1937, 1.

the retreating Irish.³²² One brigadist died, and nine others were injured in battle, but more importantly the pitched battle destroyed the unit's morale. Again, most Irish newspapers claimed O'Duffy's men secured another victory over the communist forces while claiming that the Irishmen were fighting on behalf of Christ. After the retreat O'Duffy refused to mount another offensive, which has been ordered by the Nationalist command, and subsequently the Irish were placed in a quiet sector for the remainder of their time in Spain. The boredom, drunkenness, and overall disillusionment prompted a vote amongst the unit to go home. The last days of the volunteers' time in Spain resulted in factionization regarding leadership and overall internal divide. Spirits further soured once the men landed in Dublin on June 21st, 1937.³²³

Once the volunteers landed in Dublin their reception was small as the government quarantined the arrival of the men away from crowds, most likely due to fears of a potentially armed militia headed by a known fascist. Garda officers rummaged through the volunteer's luggage in search of weaponry, confiscating pistols from the brigade's officers. Further embarrassing the troops, both men from Kerry and a separate group of officers formed their own march, an action intended to show the brigades division. Despite the widespread embarrassment, the soldiers received a warm welcome in Dublin's Mayoral building, the Mansion House. On their arrival to the Mansion House O'Duffy and his men received praise from Bishops and other political figures.³²⁴ The victory lap however was short lived, as journalists sought out the brigadiers and published many negative portrayals of their time in Spain and in particular of O'Duffy. Pro-Nationalist newspapers generally wrote accounts of success describing the men's battle against communism. Though both negative and positive press accounts of the Irish

³²² Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-39: Crusades in Conflict*, 74-77.

³²³ Ibid, 104.

³²⁴ Ibid, 104-105.

brigades were short lived. Clerical news organs in similar fashion to their secular counterparts praised the men's crusade but this was also short lived.

The Irish Catholic Church hierarchy's feelings towards the Irish brigade throughout their journey can be described as lukewarm at best. The norm of the Church refusing to publicly align itself with non-clergy led organizations further applied to O'Duffy's brigade. However, akin to the ICF, O'Duffy's crusade received a sizable amount of support from the laity. Despite public support being an overall minority from the clergy this support had a positive effect on O'Duffy's ability to raise troops for the brigade, as O'Duffy received well over a thousand letters from prospective volunteers. While only approximately 700 men joined the brigade these letters show that O'Duffy's use of the crusade narrative and the rural clergy's support showed the willingness for many young men to volunteer on behalf of Franco.³²⁵ Primate MacRory's overt aid in connecting O'Duffy to Nationalist officials also showcases the support that the Irish Church gave to O'Duffy, even while publicly disagreeing with the sending of men to Spain. The Church was in support of the Irish brigade as it bolstered both the crusade narrative and the strong Catholic fervor that was present in Ireland. As stated, prior, the main reason that the Church failed to endorse O'Duffy's expedition was the fact that it feared to entangle itself in a non-laity run organization. If the Church was publicly attached to the Irish brigade, it would both harm the relationship between itself and De Valera, something the Church was keen on preserving. Many Irish Bishops refused to publicly endorse a self-proclaimed Irish fascist leader, as fascism itself was denounced by the Vatican encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* in 1931.³²⁶

³²⁵ Bell, "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939," 154.

³²⁶ "Non abbiamo bisogno", *Roman Catholic Encyclical*, June 29, 1931.

7. Conclusions

The Irish Catholic Church but more generally Catholicism itself, was the most important factor that led to the overwhelming majority of Irish supporting the Nationalists. The perception created and spread by both the Spanish Church and Rebel leadership that the insurgents' intention was to protect the Church and broadly traditional Spain had success in Ireland unlike any other country (with the possible expectation of Poland). This is obviously due in part to Ireland's overwhelming and fervent Catholic population, but also relates to the Irish Catholic Church's endorsement of the crusade narrative. Also, the crusade narrative's binding to the perception that Ireland and Spain held a unique relationship throughout history capitalized on previously held Irish ideas of Spain, further reinforcing this narrative. Many far-right Irish politicians such as O'Duffy and Belton were quick to act upon this fervor and create organizations which supported the Nationalists. However, the Irish Catholic Church was the largest contributor to Franco's cause, as the Church supplied funds, propaganda, and logistical aid to the Nationalists. Most importantly however, the Church intertwined the fate of Spain with that of Ireland, increasing anti-communist fervor while painting Franco as a just Christian ruler. The crazed zeal over events in Spain may have only lasted merely a year but provided Franco with an ample amount of aid. Spanish politics once again became irrelevant to Ireland after De Valera recognized Franco's forces as the legitimate government of Spain on February 11th, 1939.

Overall conclusions

While the effects of the crusade narrative of American and Irish Catholics widely differ, Irish and American Catholics' reception to Franco's myth was overall successful. Catholic's enthusiastic reception contributed to the success of Franco's myth in garnering support for the Nationalists. The large portion of Catholics in both Ireland and the U.S. who supported the Nationalists did it largely because of their priests' influence. As expected, conservative Catholics were the most susceptible to clerical influence and the least likely to consume secular media. The clergy's incorporation of false or manipulated narratives of the nature of the war and the conflation of the Republicans with the traditional "enemies" of the Catholic Church (such as Jews, Freemasons, Communists), further simplified Catholic perception that the Spanish Civil War was a holy war. Pro-Nationalist Catholic propaganda also utilized fears that the collapse of Catholic Spain would soon lead to a Communist revolution in their respective country. In order to combat the spread of godless communism and support their Catholic brothers and sisters, the American and Irish clergy directly and indirectly aided the Nationalists.

Both the American and Irish Church hierarchies endorsed organizations that supplied aid to the Spanish Rebels, such as the Knights of Columbus and the ICF. Parishioners asked their flock to donate both their money and time to these groups and actively support the harassment of pro-Loyalist organizations. Despite Ireland having few pro-Republican aid committees, the American and Irish clergy were relentless in their verbal harassment of pro-Loyalists, as well as news organs that published objective coverage of the civil war. This showcases the Church's attempts to have full control over the narrative regarding Spain. Another tool commonly used by the clergy to censor media outlets was coercion. Irish Bishops' and Catholic organizations wrote to secular newspapers demanding them to change their editorial stance regarding Spain, or lose

Catholic advertisement revenue. The American hierarchy threatened to publish confidential letters between editors and Church officials. However, in comparison, the Irish Church had more success in its threats than its American counterpart, as the Catholic Church was a national institution throughout Ireland, unlike in the overwhelmingly Protestant U.S. However, both Churches held power over the respective American and Irish political systems.

While the Irish Catholic Church was an extremely powerful institution, holding massive sway over politics, the American Catholic Church's political power was not comparable. Despite this, the American Catholic hierarchy used the common stereotype (if far from true) of Catholics as totally obedient to their clergy as an advantage. The perception of a zealous unified Catholic front forced FDR to choose between alienating a key component of his New Deal Coalition or supporting the Spanish Republicans overtly. In reality, American Catholics tended to be far more politically diverse than assumed during the 1930s. This was most likely due to the spread of liberal Catholic social teaching and access to affordable, politically diverse, secular media. In Ireland, De Valera faced far more pressure from the Catholic lobby regarding Spain than FDR did. However, Irish fixation over the Spanish Civil War lasted only about a year until the new Irish constitution overtook Spain's popularity in the media. Irish pro-Nationalist committees were also a key component of the loss of interest in Spain.

American pro-Rebel committees, compared to Ireland's only large-scale pro-Rebel organization, the ICF, were bigger and far more successful. While the ICF raised a massive amount of material aid for Franco, its leadership quickly became disorganized and visibly radical, leading to the collapse of the largest mouthpiece of the pro-Nationalist lobby in Ireland. American aid committees commonly lasted throughout the war and were typically far less politically radical on the surface than the ICF. In conclusion, while different in their approaches,

effects, and supporters, both the Irish and American Catholic Church had a sizable impact on their country's support of the Nationalists.

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