

# Identities In Conflict: New York Irish-Catholics' Response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939

By Julie K. Wood

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## INTRODUCTION

The 1930s was a decade polarized by conflicting ideologies worldwide. Hitler and Mussolini had created fascist dictatorships in Germany and Italy which were not content to stay within their own borders. The Germans remilitarized the Rhineland. The Italians invaded Ethiopia. On the other end of the political spectrum, while Stalin carried out his purges in the Soviet Union, his troops forceably annexed areas in central Asia, the Ukraine, and Transcaucasia. The world waited anxiously for the inevitable conflict between the two political spheres into which Europe was dividing.

Some would say this conflict began with the outbreak of World War II; others might place the date earlier—with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. General Francisco Franco's military revolt against the Spanish Republican Government, a Popular Front of Communists, Socialists, and other left-wing groups, was supported clandestinely by Hitler, Mussolini, and the fascist government of Portugal. Moscow sent war material to the Republic, and Communists worldwide helped organize the International Brigades, a group of volunteers who joined the Republican Army.

While the United States declared its neutrality, American citizens quickly chose sides. Those sympathetic to the Republican Loyalists viewed the struggle as one between fascism and democracy. Some believed so strongly that Spanish democracy had to be defended that they volunteered for the Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades. An ardently pro-Franco element led by the Catholic Church,<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, saw Spain as the battlefield for the war against world communism.

Hundreds of histories have been written on the Spanish Civil War—its causes, its military campaigns, International Brigaders' memoirs, international repercussions of the war, and the United States' reaction to it. When studying the U.S. response, historians often discuss American activities in favor of one side or the other. The scholarship on pro-Franco propaganda has concentrated on the role of the Catholic Church hierarchy which led the pro-Franco drive in the United States throughout the war.<sup>2</sup>

An intriguing question raised by this scholarship is why the Catholic establishment failed to persuade a majority of the laity of the rectitude of Franco's cause.<sup>3</sup> The Pope, the American hierarchy, the majority of the clergy, the Catholic press, and Catholic lay organizations all endorsed Franco. Most Catholics, however, remained unconvinced—a fact of which Catholics were painfully aware. "As a body," the Catholic journal *Ave Maria* lamented in 1938 with the Spanish situation in mind, "we seem dismally incapable of unified action for a worthy objective."<sup>4</sup> Historians have noted this discrepancy between the views of Catholic leaders and those of the Catholic masses with regard to the Spanish war. Much like the priests and bishops of the

1930s, however, they have been at a loss to account for it. As J. David Valaik, one of the leading scholars of American Catholics and the Spanish Civil War, has written: "The record of failure is clear, but the reasons for the 'dismal' lack of unified action, although a matter of conjecture, have never been discussed."<sup>5</sup>

Through a case study of New York Irish Catholics, this paper will attempt to explain "the record of failure" of the Catholic hierarchy and will discuss why the laity was not unified behind it regarding the Spanish Civil War. While Irish Americans were more sympathetic to Franco than were some other ethnic groups [Figure 1], fully half of them were neutral or pro-Loyalist.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1**

Attitudes toward Spanish Civil War, by Ethnic Group  
February 1939

Ethnic group <sup>a</sup>	Pro-Loyalist	Pro-Franco	Neither	No Opinion
Irish	28	49	18	5
German	35	27	30	8
Italian	20	55	15	10
Russian <sup>b</sup>	53	17	21	9

Source: American Institute of Public Opinion [Gallup] Poll 147 (February 2, 1939) cited in Ronald Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 91.

<sup>a</sup>By country of birth of father

<sup>b</sup>Many Jews would be expected to be found among this group.

In addition to the hope that this paper will make a contribution to what Sean Wilentz has called "so undeveloped a field as Irish-American history,"<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to study Irish-Catholic Americans because, as a group, in the 1930s they identified with three distinct communities: religious, ethnic, and social. Irish Americans are typically perceived as devoutly Catholic, proud of their Irishness, and as members of the working class. Yet even for them, the importance of these three identities fluctuated over time. This study will discuss the Catholic hierarchy's loss of influence over Irish Americans, specifically those in New York City, in terms of the relative importance of religious identity in the 1930s when compared to ethnic and social identity.

Religion was just one aspect, albeit an important one, of the identity of Irish-Catholic Americans. When millions of Irish Catholics began migrating to New York and other United States cities in the nineteenth century, they took their religion with them. For these early immigrants, as for the three-quarters of a million Irish who came to the U.S. between 1900 and 1930, the Church was both a connection to the past and a source of strength.<sup>8</sup> In America, Irish Catholics attended church together, joined the same church-sponsored organizations, and sent their children to Catholic schools. The Irish soon took over the American Catholic Church. They dominated the lower clergy and the hierarchy, providing an intimate bond between the Church and Irish Americans.

Ethnicity was another important aspect of identity for both newly arrived Irish immigrants and for Irish Americans whose families had been in the United States for generations. Throughout the nineteenth century, the connection with Ireland was constantly reinforced by the arrival of new immigrants. Even in 1930, when almost a million foreign-born Irish were living in the U.S., the bond with Ireland remained strong.<sup>9</sup> Irish Americans also remained tied to their native country through their devotion to Irish independence. Many of them were unhappy with their position in the United States and blamed their misfortune on British oppression that forced them into "exile." This sentiment transformed them into passionate Irish nationalists.<sup>10</sup>

Such devotion to Ireland's independence helped maintain Irish group identity, as did a strong Irish-American community. The Irish community in New York—and nationwide—cultivated a sense of ethnic pride through its press and Irish fraternal organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. The continuing importance of ethnicity in the Irish-American community is demonstrated in marriage statistics which reveal that in 1930, Irish in-marriage was seventy-four percent, almost the same as the 1900 level.<sup>11</sup>

A third source of identity—class identity—also was consistent among Irish Americans, the majority of whom were members of the working class from the 1800s through the mid-1900s. With the exception of a minority of skilled workers who came from Ireland's cities, upon their arrival in New York and other cities, most Irish immigrants were employed in unskilled, poorly paid industries such as trucking, construction, utilities, the docks, supermarkets, some city government jobs, and transit. By the second and third generations, many Irish Catholics had moved to skilled and semi-skilled jobs, yet they often advanced no farther. Most were still closer to the bottom than the top of the social and economic ladder.<sup>12</sup>

Given their position in the working class, Irish Americans were decisive pioneers in trade unionism. By the late nineteenth century, Irish immigrants and Irish Americans held leadership positions within local and national trade unions, including the Knights of Labor. The American Federation of Labor was largely Irish, both in membership and leadership. Until the Great Depression, Irish Americans dominated unionization. There were unions in the trades in which the Irish were entrenched and numerically important; where they were not an important factor, unionization was weak.<sup>13</sup> Because so many workers were hard hit by the Great Depression, however, unionization became widespread in all trades. The economic collapse had altered the psychology of the working class, including its Irish American members, making them much more aware of their identity as workers.

As I will argue in this paper, the New York Irish-Catholic reaction to the Spanish Civil War demonstrates the increasing importance of class identity in the 1930s. Despite almost unanimous support for Franco among Catholic leaders and equally strong support in the Irish-American press, which was the voice of the community, half of Irish Americans were either neutral or pro-Loyalist. Significantly, a movement founded in New York City in the 1930s which fully supported and aided labor unions, the Catholic Worker Movement, and the unions themselves, loudly advocated neutrality and pro-Loyalism, respectively.

### **THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: IDEOLOGIES IN CONFLICT**

The Spanish Civil War started on July 17, 1936 when General Francisco Franco, declaring that the time had come to restore

order and religion to Spain, led a right-wing military revolt against a popularly elected republican government. The country had been wracked by political and domestic turmoil since the 1936 February elections, when a Popular Front coalition of various left-wing groups came to power.<sup>14</sup> The military coup, which Franco expected to succeed within three days, led instead to a bloody civil war which ground on for three years, ending only with the victory of Franco and his Nationalist forces on March 28, 1939.

Gross atrocities were committed by both sides throughout the course of the war. By the end of August 1936, after just six weeks of fighting, almost a hundred thousand people had been killed. The Loyalists, fighting for the government, lashed out at representatives of the Catholic Church, which they regarded as the ally of the upper classes. In Asturias during the first months of the war, for example, several churches and convents were burned. The Loyalists destroyed the bishop's palace and shot several priests. Middle-class women were raped and killed.<sup>15</sup>

The Nationalists, fighting under Franco, were equally inhumane. Men were shot, and sometimes tortured, in front of their families. Wives, sisters, and daughters of these men often shared the same fate. Their heads were shaved and they were raped before the Nationalists killed them. In order to terrify citizens of newly conquered cities, Franco's army left bodies unburied and exposed to the public.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, neither side could rightfully claim the moral highground, although both did in their appeals for international aid.

It was apparent from the start that this war would have international repercussions. The Spanish Republican Government immediately sought aid from its allies. An isolationist Europe, however, feared involvement in a conflict which could escalate into another general European War. On July 19, 1936, French Prime Minister Leon Blum received an urgent telegram from the Spanish Republican Government asking for arms and equipment to help put down Franco's revolt. Since the Republic was Spain's legally recognized government, the appeal was legitimate under international law, and Blum initially replied in the affirmative. Within six days, however, he bowed to domestic pressure to stay out of foreign conflicts and announced that France would refuse the Spanish request. Two weeks later, the French government made known that it expected that France's initiative would serve to facilitate a general agreement regarding non-intervention in Spain. By the end of August, following France's lead, two dozen countries including Great Britain, the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy had pledged not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War. A Non-Intervention Committee which first met on September 9, 1936, was established in London to supervise the workings of the agreement. Delegates from all twenty-four countries were represented in the commission until it dissolved at the war's end.

The pledge not to intervene, however, meant different things to different countries; to some, apparently, it meant nothing at all. By the fall of 1936, Adolf Hitler had already sent 10,000 fully-equipped soldiers to aid Franco's Nationalists; about 16,000 Germans in total fought against the Republic throughout the war. Italian intervention was even more pronounced. At their maximum, in mid-1937, Italian forces in Spain numbered about 50,000. Benito Mussolini also sent aircraft, bombs, ammunition, cannon, and other war material to aid Franco. While the Salazar regime in Portugal could not send as much military aid to Franco, it did enable a great part of German aid to pass through to Spain, and a significant number of Portuguese soldiers (20,000) joined the Nationalists.<sup>17</sup>

TO ALL IRISHMEN AND WOMEN WHO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AGAINST FASCISM, THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY WILL ALWAYS BE HELD SACRED. IT WAS ON THE 12TH DAY OF THIS MONTH IN 1937 THAT A GROUP OF IRISHMEN PLAYED A HEROIC PART IN THE BATTLE OF JARAMA TO HOLD OPEN THE MADRID-VALENCIA ROAD.

The Fascist attack on Madrid's life-line was beaten back, and once again Franco's Fascists suffered defeat—just as they were driven from Teruel on January 7th this year.

In the battle at Jarama many Irishmen were killed, outstanding amongst them being "Kit" Conway, building worker, trade-unionist and soldier in our own fight for Independence. He, along with the other Irishmen who joined forces with the Democratic Government, saw in the Fascist Italian and German attack on Spain a threat to World Democracy which should not only be answered by Spaniards, but by all who stand for Liberty and Democracy.

Irishmen are still in the ranks of Spain's Republican Army, and in this month of February we join with them in paying tribute to those brave men of our Nation who have fallen in the battle to save Republican Liberty.

Demonstrate your loyalty to the cause of Democracy by demanding that our Government establishes proper diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republican Government and declares its support for that Government's right to buy arms to defend Spain against foreign Fascism.

*With the Spanish People let  
our Answer to Fascism be:*

**NO PASARAN**

Help for the Spanish Republican Government, while not as decisive as aid to Franco, arrived from the Soviet Union and Mexico. In addition, an international coalition of volunteers called the International Brigades was formed to aid the Republic. The Soviets sent arms and financial aid to Spain, but no more than 2,000 Russian soldiers fought there during the course of the entire war. About two million dollars' worth of military aid was sent to the Spanish Government from Mexico, but no Mexican soldiers were sent to Spain. The International Brigades supplied a more substantial amount of manpower to the Republic. A total of about 40,000 foreigners from France, Germany, Austria, Italy, the United States, Britain, Canada, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Scandinavia, and fifty-three other nations fought with the Republican Army. The Brigades never numbered more than 18,000 at one time, however, and by November 1938, none remained in Spain. At the request of the Republic, the League of Nations supervised their withdrawal.<sup>18</sup>

That there was so much international involvement in the Spanish Civil War despite the existence of the Non-Intervention Agreement is an indication of the ideological passions it provoked. To the international Left, the coup was, in the words of a 1936 editorial, an illegal conspiracy of generals and Monarchists "aided by the conservative influence of the church and the landowners, and by the backwardness of the Spanish masses" against a duly elected government. They saw the war as part of an international struggle against fascism. As a British Battalion veteran explained in 1937, volunteers in the International Brigades were especially motivated by the belief "that there are things worth fighting for and things that must be fought against. . . [I]ssues of this struggle are of significance for ourselves and the whole world."<sup>19</sup>

Conservatives also viewed the Spanish War in international terms, as part of the struggle against communism. They dismissed the International Brigades as a group recruited, organized, and equipped by Communists to defend a "Red" government which was incapable of preserving order and which was in danger of becoming a Russian satellite.<sup>20</sup> The intensity of this debate gave the Spanish Civil War a mythic aura as a great struggle between fascism and communism. In retrospect it has often been called a prelude to the Second World War.

As it did in Europe, the Spanish Civil War would eventually force Americans to choose sides; yet, on the eve of the conflict, the United States was unified by an almost universal isolationist sentiment. Public opinion surveys conducted in 1936 and 1937 revealed that seventy percent of Americans thought that it had been a mistake for the United States to enter the First World War; ninety-five percent answered "no" when asked if America should take part in another such war should one develop in Europe. Reflecting this mood, Congress had passed neutrality acts even before the Spanish war started. The Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936 compelled the government to place an embargo on shipments of arms, ammunition, and other implements of war to all nations involved in war and banned loans to all belligerents. Neither act made provisions for civil war, but in January 1937, President Roosevelt requested a congressional amendment of the existing legislation which would make it unlawful to export any war material "from any place in the United States . . . to Spain or to any foreign country for transshipment to Spain." In an overwhelmingly affirmative vote, the amendment passed the Senate 81-0 and the House 406-1.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the Spanish war, almost all factions in American politics received the embargo well. Isolationists supported it because it kept the United States out of the conflict. Internationalists were pleased to cooperate with Great Britain and France, whose Non-Intervention Committee the U.S. supported but could not join because of its commitment to neutrality.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the majority of Americans were not very concerned about the war in Spain. A poll taken in February 1937, shortly after the arms embargo passed Congress, showed that fifty-four percent of those surveyed were neutral as to which side won the Spanish war.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, Americans were neither pro-Loyalist nor pro-Franco; rather, they were "pro-stay out of war."<sup>24</sup>

As the war progressed, however, interest in the Spanish situation intensified, and more Americans began to sympathize with one side or the other. The percentage of Americans who were neutral shrunk from fifty-four in February 1937 to forty in December 1938. During that year and a half, due to the propaganda drives of pro-Loyalist organizations, the increasing intervention of Hitler and Mussolini for the Nationalists, and the bombing of civilians by Franco's forces, many previously neutral Americans began to favor the Loyalists.<sup>25</sup> In the December 1938 poll, forty-six percent of all respondents (seventy-six percent of those who expressed a decided preference) said they sympathized with the Loyalists. In the same time frame, Franco sympathizers actually lost supporters.<sup>26</sup>

Numerous Americans had begun to favor the Loyalists because they perceived the conflict in Spain as a war between democracy and fascism; as such, while they did not want the United States to intervene directly, they vehemently criticized the U.S. neutrality policy as unjust and urged Congress to lift the arms embargo. Because the Fascist governments were sending arms and troops to the rebels, they argued, the U.S. embargo, like the European Non-Intervention Agreement, was a "deliberately unfriendly act" toward "a legally constituted government duly elected by a majority of the people." In denying the Spanish government the very resources which the rebels were receiving, the U.S. was, in effect, taking Franco's side and "actively supporting fascism."<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt received these arguments favorably, as he himself was sympathetic to the Loyalist cause, and it was rumored that he would consider proposing to lift the arms embargo.<sup>28</sup>

Franco's supporters in the United States, led by the Roman Catholic Church, however, favored the embargo and were determined to block its removal. The Catholic hierarchy deplored the anticlericalism of the Spanish Republican Government, which it saw as a seedbed of communism.<sup>29</sup> Church officials argued that American Communists were leading the fight to repeal the embargo, that repeal would prolong the war, and that it would in effect ally the U.S. with the Soviet Union and thus provoke German and Italian attacks on American soil.<sup>30</sup>

Aware of the President's Loyalist sympathies, American Catholic leaders began to put direct pressure on the Roosevelt government. One Jesuit priest wrote to warn the administration that lifting the embargo would cause much discontent among Catholic voters: "The Catholic conscience would be wounded deeply by any modification of policy . . . that would spell official sympathy for the Barcelona [Republican] regime. We should realize that our government had associated itself in fact with the most menacing enemies of democracy in the world today." Other Catholics organized petitions and letter-writing drives to encourage the administration to maintain the embargo.<sup>31</sup>

In light of these activities, Roosevelt was legitimately concerned

about losing the Catholic vote. Catholics represented one-sixth of the American population in the 1930s and in 1936, eighty-two percent of all Catholics who voted said they cast ballots for Roosevelt. If all Catholics were alienated from the Democratic Party due to the lifting of the embargo, the Democrats' loss would be nearly a quarter of their popular vote.<sup>32</sup>

In the end, Roosevelt decided not to recommend lifting the embargo. While several factors entered into his final decision—among them reluctance to challenge Britain's desire to keep the war localized, Secretary of State Cordell Hull's support for the embargo, and persistent isolationist sentiment among voters—the impact of Catholic pressure was strong.<sup>33</sup> At the height of the depression, Roosevelt refused to engage in a violent political struggle with Catholic supporters over the embargo.<sup>34</sup>

Roosevelt's fear of alienating the Catholic electorate, however, was unfounded; while the Catholic establishment was clearly pro-Franco, the majority of the laity, it seems, was not. If the President was influenced by fears of losing Catholic support, and there is ample evidence that this was the case, then we can but conclude that he and his Democratic strategists misread the political landscape of American Catholicism.<sup>35</sup> In December 1938, after being barraged by pro-Franco propaganda through the Catholic press and clergy for over two years, only four out of ten Catholics were sympathetic to Franco.<sup>36</sup> This result was certainly not the fault of the Catholic hierarchy; throughout the duration of the war in Spain, the leaders of the American Catholic Church did all they could to present Franco in the best light possible and to convince American Catholics that a Nationalist victory would be a Catholic victory.

### **CATHOLICISM VS. COMMUNISM: THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE**

On June 3, 1933, Pope Pius XI wrote *Dilectissima Nobis*, an encyclical in which he accused the two-year old Spanish Republican government of animosity toward the Catholic Church and warned that the Republic's separation of Church and State was a "serious error."<sup>37</sup> The Vatican's sentiments were echoed by Catholics in America, who at first had been tolerant of the Republic but were increasingly upset by its anti-clerical actions in the early 1930s.<sup>38</sup> With the adoption of the democratic Constitution of 1931, the Spanish government closed Catholic schools, confiscated Church property, legalized divorce by mutual consent, and called for the expulsion of the Jesuits. These measures reminded many Catholics of similar actions in the Soviet Union and Mexico, two countries whose anti-Catholic policies had caused much concern among Catholics world-wide.

The Republic discovered just how disturbed Catholics were by its actions when Franco's July 1936 military revolt received the full support of the international Catholic Church. The official Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, had declared neutrality very early in the war, but after a majority of the Spanish hierarchy sided with Franco, the Pope quickly gave his blessing to the Nationalists. Discussing this support in September 1936, Pius XI explained that the Nationalists had "assumed the difficult and dangerous task of defending and restoring the rights and honor of God and of religion."<sup>39</sup> The Vatican saw Franco's revolt as a means of restoring Christianity to Spain, and it made this message clear to Catholics around the world.

The Pope's announcement of his hopes for a Nationalist victory added fuel to the already strong pro-Franco sentiment within the American Catholic Church. During the fall of 1936, almost the entire Church establishment in the United States—the hierarchy and the majority of the clergy, Catholic lay organizations,

and the Catholic press—endorsed Franco's rebels. In November at an annual meeting, Patrick Cardinal Hayes of New York, Denis Cardinal Dougherty of Philadelphia, George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, eleven archbishops, and 75 bishops issued a joint statement on Spain which reads in part:

*The Catholics of America. . . have been horrified at the savage extremes to which irreligion and inhumanity have been carried. They deplore the horrible carnage the more deeply because of the conviction that the sufferings of the Spanish Church are but the agony of civilization, battling for its spiritual and cultural heritage over the prostrate body of Spain. They know full well that the Spanish Catholics are the victims of studied oppression; and that men like-minded with their oppressors have constantly misrepresented here their struggle.*

*. . . Already in answer to the appeal of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI. . . our bishops have led their flocks in prayer for that afflicted nation. Again we exhort our people to turn to God in persevering prayer for the liberty of His Church and the deliverance of the Spanish people from the thralldom of forces that are the foes of God as well as of all religion.*<sup>40</sup>

The hierarchy did more than just announce its support. William Cardinal O'Connell and Cardinal Dougherty, for example, headed the Spanish Nationalist Relief Committee, one of several organizations established to raise funds for Franco's cause.<sup>41</sup> Reverend Thomas E. Molloy, bishop of the diocese of Brooklyn, authorized collection of money to aid "persecuted" Catholics in Spain.<sup>42</sup> In addition to these actions on the part of the hierarchy, members of the clergy preached their support of the Nationalists in church on Sundays, and lay organizations announced their pro-Franco sympathies. The National Council of Catholic Women, the Knights of Columbus, and the Catholic Press Association all lined up behind the hierarchy.<sup>43</sup>

The unanimous position of the Catholic establishment was most clearly conveyed to the laity through the Catholic press. Rather than use the Associated Press or the United Press, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) News Service, controlled by the hierarchy, provided the 134 Catholic newspapers and 198 magazines nationwide with daily news, editorial information, a Washington newsletter, and other services. Through this news service, the hierarchy was in a position to influence the political convictions of the almost seven million Catholic households who subscribed to the Catholic press.<sup>44</sup> As a result, nearly every literate American Catholic adult was exposed to pro-Franco material at some time during the Spanish Civil War, and many were constantly exposed.<sup>45</sup> Any practicing Catholic, one scholar of the subject has written, will pay considerable attention to the opinions of clerical leaders. When a member of the hierarchy "makes a public statement on a controversial political issue the Catholic layman will be aware of it." Members of the laity may not then take this position as official doctrine, but they will "grant it a reverence traditionally due the position and character of its author."<sup>46</sup> The Spanish Civil War certainly qualified as a "controversial political issue" and was constantly discussed in the Catholic press between 1936 and 1939.

Catholic coverage of the Spanish Civil War followed a distinguishable pattern. During the first two months of the war, while most Catholic journals leaned toward supporting Franco, they generally discussed the merits and demerits of both sides



Headlines from The New York Times, April & May 1937

in the conflict. They did not want to fully endorse the "Communists" or the "Fascists" in Spain. In September 1936, after the Pope had blessed Franco's cause, the American Catholic hierarchy quickly lined up behind him; the Catholic press shifted to a full endorsement of Franco's forces with almost no objective reporting whatsoever. They developed a pro-Franco argument based mainly on the portrayal of Franco as a Christian leader and revolutionary hero. During this period, they also tried to reveal the "communistic" tendencies of the Republic and its American supporters. This tactic did not dominate the Catholic press coverage of the war, however, until mid-1937 when pro-Loyalist opinion in the U.S. was growing stronger. For the last two years of the war, rather than laud Franco, article after article denounced the Republic as communist and anti-Catholic. Catholic editors increased their attacks on pro-Loyalists in America and on the "biased" secular press, which they accused of disseminating propaganda in favor of the Republic.

In the first days directly following the revolt of July 1936, the Catholic hierarchy was not certain if it should fully endorse Franco's cause. As in any civil war, atrocities were committed on both sides. Furthermore, most Americans were well aware that in the previous year, Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia and Hitler had broken the Locarno Pact with France by remilitarizing the Rhineland. A victory by Spanish Nationalist forces supported by two expansionist Fascist powers, therefore, was far from ideal for Catholics or any other group of Americans. On the other hand, while Soviet aid to the Republic was not as apparent in the first months of the war as was fascist aid to Franco, Moscow's sympathy for the Loyalists was well known from the start of the con-

flict. The spread of communism was something few Americans desired, least of all Catholics.

Even some of the more conservative Catholic periodicals and newspapers initially recognized the dilemma involved in choosing sides. Two weeks after war broke out, an article appeared in *America*, a conservative Catholic journal, bemoaning the inevitable fact that either "the triumphant Right will establish a military dictatorship along the lines of Italian Fascism, or the victorious Left will turn Spain into a Soviet Republic, like the Russian." Despite the undesirability of a dictatorship led by people characterized by "narrowness and greed," *America* leaned toward supporting the Right because it represented "ardent Faith." A Nationalist victory was desirable to save Spain from communism, but *America* still feared that such a victory would not necessarily be a victory for democracy. "[M]ay the Right use its triumph wisely and with justice," it pleaded: "Reforms must succeed repression."<sup>47</sup> An editorial in the same issue also supported Franco but inserted a disclaimer that "opposition to the present Communist Government in Spain does not mean a wholehearted approval of a future Fascist Government."<sup>48</sup> This initial reaction was not uncommon in the Catholic press in the weeks immediately following the coup of July 1936.<sup>49</sup>

By the end of September, the Catholic hierarchy had united behind the Pope in support of Franco. Under the leadership of the NCWC News Service, *America* and all other Catholic periodicals controlled by the hierarchy abandoned any pretense of factual reporting about Franco's connection to fascism and embarked upon an all-out pro-Nationalist campaign. Catholic papers

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