From Civil Conflict to Crusade: Mobilisation and National Identity in the Spanish Civil War*

"Spain defends, as in Lepanto, its beloved Christian religion"[1] wrote Professor Isidro Beato Sala in September 1936. He was referring to the Spanish Civil War, which he saw not as an internal conflict but an international one in which Spain was fighting for its independence and to defend Western culture against Bolshevik aggression.[2] Sala was not alone in his observations. In the ensuing months, more and more people would refer to the conflict as a "crusade" against Communism and irreligion. Against this background, the appropriation of the term "crusade" came to play a key role both in the cultural mobilisation of the rebel forces and the political legitimation, at home and abroad, of the new regime that was to be established in Spain. Using "crusade" as a placeholder for *Reconquista*—a reference to the recapture of Muslim-occupied territories in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages—the rebel army and its supporters responded to three distinct developments: a logical and not unexpected reaction by the Church and large swaths of the Spanish population to Republican anticlericalism; the imposition of a national identity in which Catholicism was understood as an essential element of Spanishness and the basis for its greatness; and, finally, a very practical need for popular mobilisation both at home and abroad. More importantly, while ample research has been conducted in these areas, particularly in national histories of Spain,[3] the use and appropriation of the term "crusade" cannot be fully understood without reference to the international context, more specifically the Vatican's anti-Communist campaign and the "anti-Communist crusade" spearheaded by Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In this sense, the role of religion in constructing strong personal and national identities[4] and the usefulness of religious rhetoric in tackling the logistical challenges faced by the rebel army played a key role in the adoption of official discourse that equated the Civil War with a religious war – or crusade -, against Communism, thereby creating a "crusading rhetoric", so to speak.

Crusading as a Response to Existing Challenges and National Identities

The characterisation of the Spanish Civil War as a "crusade" was not the exclusive product of the post-war legitimation campaign or the need for international support. It was a very early development that served to quickly mobilise domestic support for the rebels. The use of the term "crusade" was not a direct consequence of the religious persecution unleashed by the Republican side in July and August of 1936. While it is true that around 42 per cent of all religious victims of

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[1] Isidro Beato Sala, *El Adelanto*, 4 September 1936. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[2] Tomás Pérez Delgado, and Antonio Fuentes Labrador, "De rebeldes a cruzados: Pioneros del discurso legitimador del Movimiento Nacional: Salamanca, julio–octubre de 1936", *Studia historica, Historia Contemporánea* 4 (1986): 249.

[3] Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *El mito de la cruzada de Franco* (Madrid, 2008); Javier Rodrigo, *Cruzada, paz, memoria: La Guerra Civil en sus relatos*, (Granada, 2013); Paloma Aguilar Fernández, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy* (Oxford, 2002).

[4] Jeffrey R. Seul, "'Ours Is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research* 36 (5) (1999): 558, 563–64.

the anticlerical persecution that characterised the conflict were killed during these two months,[5] the use of the term predated this development. It was a reaction to the secularising policies of the Second Republic, enshrined in the Constitution of 1931, and the development among many along the right-wing spectrum of a concept of Spain that identified the Spanish nation with Catholicism.

In an effort to create its own cultural framework characterised by strong secularism, the Republican elites aimed to challenge, limit, and even eliminate Catholic symbolic heritage, which in their eyes represented a key obstacle to legitimising the Republic. These policies took two forms: a more moderate approach aimed at counteracting this religious symbolism by pushing it into the private sphere and a more radical one aimed at destroying the physical existence of the Church and all its symbols.[6] Both religion and politics make use of myths and symbols in order to help individuals "transform religion and politics into the social justification of everyday reality".[7] As such, both operate with "the same emotional corpus",[8] often making them clash, as they did in Spain. It was in response to these policies that Aniceto de Castro Albarrán wrote *El derecho a la rebeldía* (The Right to Rebel) in 1934. A Catholic priest and rector of the Comillas Pontifical University, he characterised the Republic as an illegitimate, tyrannical, and atheist regime. Consequently, he argued, Catholics had a right to rebel, even if that involved the use of force. This radical stance against a government with which many Catholics still wanted to collaborate led to controversy inside the Spanish Church and his removal as rector.[9] A few years later, he became one of the first to categorise the civil conflict as a crusade in defence of the restoration of the eternal and Catholic Spain.

Similar statements and proclamations proliferated in August 1936. In Pamplona, bishop Marcelino de Olaechea, characterised it as a struggle between civilisation and barbarity, encouraging the faithful to donate to the rebel cause: "It is not a war that is being fought, it is a crusade, and the Church, as she prays to God for peace and to save the blood of all His children—those who love her and fight to defend her and those who insult her and wish for her ruin—cannot but give everything she has to her crusaders."[10] Other statements contained similar arguments: first, the war had its origins in the de-Christianisation of the country and represented an invitation for re-conversion; secondly, the barbarism that characterised the Republican zone was the culmination of religious persecution initiated by the victory of the Popular Front, fostered by the secularist and Communist propaganda put out by the Republic; and, thirdly, the war did not originate in social injustice and could not be interpreted as an extension of the class struggle because this struggle had its only origins in the de-Christianisation of the country.[11] Therefore, a large portion of the Church sided with the rebel Army well before 14 September 1936, when the pope finally took a stance in the conflict. In this context, the rebel army was seen as the liberator of the true Spain. Interestingly though, Francisco Franco's first proclamation made no mention of religious persecution or "crusaders". He called upon Spaniards to mobilise against separatism, disorder, the

[5] Alfonso Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil y universo religioso. Fenomenología de una implicación (1) Primer Semestre: 18 julio 1936–24 enero 1937", *Miscelánea Comillas* 44 (1986): 250.
[6] Pamela Radcliff, "La representación de la nación: el conflicto en torno a la identidad nacional y las prácticas simbólicas en la segunda república", in *Cultura y movilización en la España contemporánea*, eds. Manuel Pérez Ledesma and Rafael Cruz Martínez (Madrid, 1997), 320–321.
[7] Lucian N. Leustean, "Towards an Integrative Theory of Religion and Politics", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17 (4) (2005): 375–77.
[8] Ibid. 377.
[9] Francisco Cobo Romero, "Aniceto de Castro Albarrán: de la Rebeldía al Alzamiento", in *Soldados De Dios Y Apóstoles De La Patria*, eds. Alejandro Quiroga and Miguel Ángel del Arco (Granada, 2010), 284–287.
[10] Cited in Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil," 258.
[11] Ibid. 268–270. As the archbishop of Toledo put it, only Catholicism could guarantee social order, Delgado and Labrador, "De Rebeldes," 256.

infiltration of the Soviet Union in Spain, and the infringement of the Republican Constitution.[12] In this sense, what happened during the first months of the conflict—as a result of anticlericalism, religious persecution, and a notion of Spain's being tightly tied to confessionalism—was a process of superimposition of the religious cause over the initial aims of the rebels, in a way in which the unity of the Spanish people could only be guaranteed by Catholicism.[13] This eventually transformed a conflict with complex and diverse causes into a war of religion,[14] not without some assistance from Republican supporters.

Spanish anticlericalism was partly associated with revolutionary millenarianism, which saw the destruction of the Catholic Church as a necessary step to attaining its goals.[15] It cannot come as a surprise then that the religious persecution unleashed in some areas in 1936 came accompanied by the systematic destruction, looting, and profanation of religious buildings and places of worship.[16] The impact these actions had on the Catholic masses was only made stronger by certain actions, such as when Communist leader Andreu Nin boasted, "You know how the Church problem has been resolved: there is not a single church left standing in Spain."[17] In fact, one could argue that one of the most effective tools for popular mobilisation and the consolidation of the crusading narrative came from the Republican side. As Vicente Sánchez Biosca has studied, the Civil War saw a migration of images of religious profanation.[18] Two images were key in reinforcing the perception of the enemy as a "horde of sacrilegious" fanatics. One was an anarchist short film, which showed a group of anarchists pulling the preserved corpses out of the convent of Las Salesas in Barcelona and onto the street in front of cheering masses. The other, from August 1936, showed a group of Republicans simulating a firing squad at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ on the Cerro de los Ángeles, before blowing up the monument. This image was particularly important because, according to an 18th century prophecy, Spain was supposed to be the centre of Christ's kingdom on Earth. For that reason, king Alfonso XIII ordered the placement of this statue at the geographic centre of the peninsula. The monument symbolised the Catholic character of the nation.[19] The simulation was, therefore, particularly offensive and caused a very quick and impactful effect on the Catholic masses, in many cases justifying and aiding in their mobilisation in favour of the rebels.[20]

Moreover, these images were not only distributed by those involved, but soon re-appropriated by the rebel side, who skillfully repackaged them, equating the anarchist perpetrators with the Communist enemy, and disseminating them through international newsreels.[21] The images legitimised the rebel army's crusading rhetoric on the war and their constant reuse served to mobilise supporters across borders and ingrain the idea that the Civil War was a crusade in the minds of generations. In fact, similar scenes were described later in veteran memoirs.[22] In 1939, the act of restoration on the Cerro de los Ángeles served not only to symbolically repair the damage,

[12] Francisco Franco, Tetuán, 17 July 1936, https://www.alianzaeditorial.es/minisites/manual_web/3491170/CAPITULO4/DOCUMENTOS/11_ProclamaAlzamiento.pdf [Accessed 20/4/2020]
[13] Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil," 270.
[14] Mary Vincent, "La Guerra Civil española como Guerra de Religión", *Alcores: revista de historia contemporánea*, 4 (2007): 57–73.
[15] Juan Avilés Farré, "Catolicismo y derecha autoritaria: del maurismo a Falange Española", in *Religión y sociedad en España (siglos XIX y XX)*, ed. Paul Aubert (Madrid, 2002), 1–2.
[16] Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil," 250.
[17] Andreu Nin, *La revolución española: 1930–1937* (Barcelona, 2008), 234.
[18] Vicente Sánchez Biosca, "El lado oscuro del corazón: migración de imágenes de la profanación religiosa", *Archivos de la filmoteca* 60–61 (2008): 106–143.
[19] Ibid, 119–120.
[20] Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil," 252.
[21] Sánchez Biosca, "El lado," 106–143.
[22] José Llordés, *Al dejar el fusil. Memorias de un soldado raso en la guerra de España* (Barcelona, 1968), 91–92.

but to consolidate the image of the New Spain, with its messianic mission in the world, fusing, once more, religious and national identity.[23]

While the defence of religion was not the only reason that prompted the mobilisation of Franco's supporters, it would come to play an increasingly important role in justifying the war. Once the coup failed in July, popular mobilisation escalated rapidly. Immediately, the Falange and Carlism, the only organisations with proper militias on the rebel side before the outbreak of the conflict, mobilised to support the rebels. Their growth was unparalleled, constituting around the 90 per cent of all rebel militias.[24] The Falange mobilised just over 200,000 men, and the *requeté* some 60,000 to 65,000 men.[25] Soon enough, their contribution to the war effort propelled them to the forefront of the political struggle within the emergent state. Within the context of this struggle, these two organisations, alongside the rebel army, easily embraced crusading rhetoric.

However, if the memory of the Reconquista and the crusading ideal was so easy to reactivate, particularly among combatants, it was because it linked with a particular view of Spanish identity. As became clear in 1939, the Francoist regime, which began establishing itself during the conflict, saw the Civil War as a crusade against the anti-Spain, a term that brought together all evils: liberalism, atheism, freemasonry, regional separatism, international Jewry, Marxism, and democracy. The root of Spanish decadence could be, therefore, found here, in the introduction of foreign ideas into the body of the nation. Therefore, the true Spain was defined both by its rejection of these foreign, unnatural influences and the reaffirmation of its Catholic essence.[26] This narrative was officialised during the post-war period, negating the war as a civil conflict and, until the 1960s, officially referring to it as a crusade, one that integrated the salvation of the nation in a way that linked the view of the war as necessary penance with a mythologised national past with the palingenetic nature of fascism.[27] Catholicism and Spanishness came to be one and the same, and out of this identification a particular idea of *Hispanidad* was formed, one "firmly rooted in the traditions of Catholicism, patriotism, hierarchy, and defence of the race".[28] Nowhere was this idea clearer than in Ramiro de Maeztu's *Defensa de la Hispanidad*, published in 1934. Here he argued that the Spanish race "was linked historically by the great Spanish empire of the Catholic monarchs and religiously by Catholicism".[29] It had been the rejection of Spanishness that had opened the door to Spain's decadence; only by going back to it could Spain recover its rightful place among the nations. It comes as no surprise then that the appeal to the crusading spirit was linked to 16th century Spain and not necessarily to the Reconquista period. This was logical, as according to this national mythology, the Reconquista had been the starting point of the true Spain, which had developed into an empire under the Catholic monarchs. That was the true Spain the rebel Army and its supporters aimed to recover: an imperial and confessional Spain with a leading role in the international arena.

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[23] Giuliana di Febo, *La Santa de la Raza. Un culto barroco en la España franquista 1937–1962* (Barcelona, 1988), 57.
[24] Alberto Reig Tapia, "Falangistas y requetés en guerra", in *La guerra civil española*, ed. Manuel Tuñón de Lara (1996), 85.
[25] Milicias Nacionales. Falange y Requetés. Archivo General Militar de Ávila, Censo-Guía de Archivo de España e Iberoamérica. http://censoarchivos.mcu.es/CensoGuia/fondoDetail.htm?id=577090 [Accessed 1 June 2020]
[26] Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *¡Fuera el invasor!: Nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la guerra civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid, 2006), 57, 65; Zira Box, *España, año cero la construcción simbólica del franquismo* (Madrid, 2010).
[27] Rodrigo, *Cruzada, paz*, 17–22,77–79; Ferrán Gallego, *El evangelio fascista : la formación de la cultura política del franquismo (1930-1950)* (Barcelona 2014),467.
[28] Francisco Cobo Romero, Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, and Teresa María Ortega López, "The Stability and Consolidation of the Francoist Regime. The Case of Eastern Andalusia, 1936–1950", *Contemporary European History* 20 (1) (2011): 41.
[29] Sandie Holguin, *Creating Spaniards: Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain* (Madison, 2002), 44.

For Falange founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the Reconquista and subsequent Europeanisation of Spain had bestowed upon this nation a mission: to be a beacon and protector of the Catholic faith. That mission was not only at the core of Spain's national identity but was a source of its power; it had made Spain into an empire. Since its founding in 1933, the small fascist party had been calling Spaniards to a "crusade…for the re-emergence of a big, free, just, and authentic Spain".[30] Falangists saw themselves as half monks, half warriors, an idea rooted in pre-war religious education, which had made the "warrior-monk" a manly ideal, easily recognised through its incorporation into the ideal of the crusader.[31] This image, however, was linked more to a glorious and distant heroic past than to the specific defence of the Catholic Church, an institution which, according to Falangist principles, should always be separate from and subordinate to the state. As the war approached, and during his imprisonment in 1936, José Antonio Primo de Rivera went further in tracing parallels with the Middle Ages. In "Germánicos contra bereberes", he characterised the Reconquista as a struggle between two dominant peoples, the Germanic peoples and the Berbers, for political and military power, but polarised around the religious question. The Reconquista, he argued, had finally germanised and Europeanised Spain.[32] Following this argument, he characterised the Republic as a second Berber invasion, an attempt by the remnants of the Berber peoples to Africanise Spain. Falangist writer Antonio Tovar would reinforce this idea in his book *The Spanish Empire*, arguing that even during the darkest times of rampant corruption at the heart of the Vatican in the early modern period, an unwavering Spain had become the only beacon of the true faith. Spain therefore had been a world power as long as it had remained a confessional state.[33]

For the Carlist movement, characterised by a very traditionalist view of Spain, its struggle against the liberal state, which had provoked three civil wars in the 19th century, was in itself considered a crusade. Moreover, Catholicism was essential to the Carlist cosmogony: for them the Catholic unity of Spain was the only guarantee of political unity.[34] In fact, many Carlist veterans later recalled their desire to defend religion as their main motivation to fight.[35] The centrality of religion to their communal life made anticlericalism a direct threat to their way of life. This helps explain how easy it was for them to interpret the Spanish Civil War as a repetition of the Reconquista, in which Navarre, the Carlist stronghold, "the shrine of tradition…untouched throughout the centuries"[36] played the part that the kingdom of Asturias had played in the eighth century. In words of a Carlist: "Many years have passed. Even centuries have passed. The wheel of the crusades keeps turning. There is now a heroic crusade against unbridled communism."[37] In fact, the troops' departure was seen as "a religious and rural celebration, a reconquest",[38] with their red berets coming to identify them as bearers of Good News, in the religious sense. They argued that this

[30] José Antonio Primo de Rivera, *Obras Completas. Edición del Centenario* (Madrid, 2007), 1:382.
[31] Vincent, Mary. "The Martyrs and the Saints: Masculinity and the Construction of the Francoist Crusade." *History Workshop Journal*, 47 (1999): 84; Pablo A. Baisotti, *Fiesta, política y religión, España (1936–1943)* (Madrid, 2017), 176.
[32] Primo de Rivera, *Obras Completas*, 2:1543–1549.
[33] Antonio Tovar, *El Imperio de España* (Valladolid, 1941). The original was published in 1937.
[34] Jeremy Macclancy, "Carlismo Rural" in *La montaña sagrada: Conferencias en torno a Montejurra* eds. Francisco Javier Caspistegui, Jeremy Macclancy, and Manuel Martorell (Pamplona, 2018), 89; Juan Vázquez de Mella y Fanjul, *Ideario de la Comunión Tradicionalista* (Pamplona, 1937); Francisco Javier Caspistegui Gorasurreta, and Gemma Pierola Narvarte, "Entre la ideología y lo cotidiano: la familia en el carlismo y el tradicionalismo (1940–1975)", *Vasconia: Cuadernos de historia-geografía* 28 (1999): 46.
[35] Macclancy, "Carlismo Rural," 67–70.
[36] Francisco Javier Caspistegui Gorasurreta, ""Spain's Vendée", Carlist Identity in Navarre as a Mobilising Model," in *The Splintering of Spain. Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, ed. Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (Cambridge, 2005), 180.
[37] Ibid., 180–181.
[38] Ibid., 186.

new Reconquista was the vanguard of a reconquest of the whole Christian universe. As Spain was the most Catholic country in the world, it had to lead the rest of Europe in this task of re-Christianisation.[39] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that it was Navarre where both the so-called "mobilisation of the Virgins" and the unilateral rollback of secularising policies began.[40]

While the official discourse equated Catholicism not just with Spanish identity (and subsequent international leadership) but with civilisation itself, bottom-up accounts of the war incorporated these core elements, interpreting the war as a fight against barbarism and in defence of religion.[41] They also equated the return of religious practice to the public fora with the return of normalcy, of civilization: "The next day the life that had been interrupted begun again, and the children started to get baptised".[42] A soldier's letter highlighted: "And the war will end. And God will be served. And we will begin to start again."[43] Others, like Falangist priest Salvador Torrijo, were more specific, identifying this return to normalcy with the old order: the fear of God, the sanctity of the family, the ban of the class struggle, patriotism and the return of the monarchy.[44] As noted by Miguel Ángel del Arco, religious celebrations also marked this return to "normalcy", while helping make sense of the violence of the war, and facilitating the integration of the population into the political project of the "New State".[45] While this shows clearly the instrumentalization of religious celebrations for political consolidation, it is also important to note that often it was the soldiers themselves who promoted the celebration of Masses upon entry in a new town, and while their testimonies have surely been exaggerated, they do convey the centrality of religion to their understanding of the war and the "New Spain".[46]

Combatants also mentioned the defence of their faith as motivation to fight. Soldier Mariano Clavero Juste, in a letter to his war godmother, displayed a conception of the Spanish nation clearly tied to Catholicism: "I am persuaded that as long as God is God and the world is the world, Spain will survive in the world despite the existence of bad Spaniards."[47] Even fascist volunteers mentioned religion as motivation: as one legionnaire wrote to his mother, volunteers did not go to Spain to "have a holiday [but instead] they brought us here to fight and defend…the cause of our Lord Jesus and…the Christian faith".[48] More importantly, religious rhetoric served to make sense of the violence of the war itself, as in the case of Luis de Armiñán who described Teruel under Republican siege as a martyr town.[49] Interestingly, when highlighting the penitent character of the

[39] Ibid., 180.
[40] Álvarez Bolado, "Guerra Civil," 256, 263–264.
[41] Italian general, Alessando Piazzoni, described the enemy as "the criminals and rejects of all countries" paid to fight for the Bolshevik cause against "the crusaders of the Christian and Latin civilization", Miguel Alonso Ibarra, "'Cruzados de la civilización cristiana". Algunas aproximaciones en torno a la relación entre fascismo y religión', *Rúbrica Contemporánea*, 3, 5 (2014): 144. In his memoirs, Luis de Armiñán, also equated Bolshevism with irreligion and barbarism, understanding the war as an act of self-defence in defence of religion, Luis de Armiñán, *Bajo el cielo de Levante. la ruta del cuerpo del ejército de* Galicia (Madrid 1939), particularly 362-3.
[42] Manuel de Ramón and Carmen Ortiz, *Madrina de Guerra: cartas desde el frente* (Madrid, 2003), 116.
[43] Armiñán, *Bajo*, 240.
[44] Alonso Ibarra, "Cruzados," 146-7.
[45] Miguel Ángel del Arco, "Before the Altar of the Fatherland: Catholicism, the Politics of Modernization, and Nationalization during the Spanish Civil War", *European History Quarterly*, 48, 2 (2018): 232-255.
[46] "I had not heard Mass since they made us abandon the convent on 22 July. At this field Mass, I prayed, I rejoiced, and I cried", Del Arco, "Before the Altar," 240. Describing a field Mass after entering Teruel: "My eyes water, my throat tightens and the vibrant hail to the Fatherland and the Caudillo crosses through that hole tore open by a cannon shot and ascends to heaven", Armiñán, *Bajo*, 151.
[47] Ramón and Ortiz, *Madrina*, 116.
[48] Nicolò Da Lio, "The Spanish Civil War through Italian Military Censorship", *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* 7 (15) (2017): 198.
[49] Armiñán, *Bajo*, 66.

war, some accounts referred directly to the need for re-Christianization after the war,[50] linking directly with the Church's discourse. Even José de Arteche's memoir, written in the 1950s but only allowed to be published in the 1970s, referred to the still much-needed re-Christianization of Spain, which in his view had clearly not been achieved through or after the war.[51] He also could not understand why the Republicans rejected Catholicism, highlighting the centrality of religion to his own identity.[52]

There was also the uneasy reality of seeing North African troops fighting in this so-called crusade. In fact, 62,000 Moroccans fought for Franco in the conflict.[53] Far from struggling to square the circle, Falangist journal *Fotos* used their presence to further highlight the crusading rhetoric: "How could white turbans, white or brown djellabas, and blue *jaiques* be missing in this crusade?".[54] In so doing, they portrayed their newfound alliance as one among chivalrous and religious peoples, led by the new Cid (Franco), against barbarian Communism. *ABC* (Seville) even called Morocco the "Covadonga of the current Reconquista".[55] More interestingly, several among the Moroccan troops seemed to have embraced the idea of a holy war or, at the very least, as Ali Al Tuma has studied, that the Republicans were on the wrong side of this fight. It seems that, for some, the war was an opportunity to perform jihad. Some Moroccan soldiers identified the reds, i.e. the Republicans, as people who "killed the monks and destroyed the churches so they believed only in the hammer and the sickle", or as "criminal[s] who abandoned [their] religion". Therefore, fighting alongside them would lead them to die as infidels.[56] This shows the effectiveness of the holy war rhetoric, at least among some, in encouraging military mobilisation and maintaining combatants' motivation.

As many other testimonies prove, religion's strong role in building personal identities and the conception of Spain made for an easy appeal in times of crisis. What made religion so central to the rebels' rhetoric was, on the one hand, that many saw an attack on religion as an attack on their own identity and worldview; and on the other, this being a civil war between two opposing national identities, religion appeared as the most obvious fault line due to the "powerful ability of religion to serve individuals' identity-related needs" and the importance of identity to the escalation of intergroup conflict.[57] As Jeffrey Seul explains, when crisis looms and identities become vulnerable, religious norms and institutions can provide an alternative framework or justify the emergence of new, non-clerical leaders and institutions, as long as these serve the religious group's main aspirations.[58] Civil wars are not only total war conflicts, but also multi-layered ones,[59] as such, the Spanish Civil War was not just a war of religion. However, due to its importance in identity development, a factor reinforced by right-wing notions of national identity, religion became the most obvious rallying point. In this context, the idea that the conflict was a crusade acted as a melting pot, which connected a very real reaction against anticlericalism with a glorious national past about to be reactivated, and the necessary heroism and sense of sacrifice that could encourage popular mobilisation. In this sense, portraying the conflict as a crusade also served as a reaction to

[50] Ramón and Ortiz, *Madrina*, 116.
[51] José de Arteche, *El abrazo de los muertos: Diario de la guerra civil 1936-1939* (Madrid 1970).
[52] Ibid., 187.
[53] Gervase Clarence-Smith, "The Impact of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War on Portuguese and Spanish Africa", *The Journal of African History* 26 (4) (1985): 323.
[54] "Turbantes blancos en España", 9 July 1938, *Fotos*.
[55] Ali Al Tuma, "Moros y Cristianos: Religious Aspects of the Participation of Moroccan Soldiers in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)", in *Muslims in Interwar Europe*, ed. Umar Ryad Bekim Agai, Mehdi Sajid (2016), 156.
[56] Ibid., 162–163.
[57] Seul, "'Ours Is," 563.
[58] Ibid., 562.
[59] Stahis N. Kalyvas, *The logic of violence in civil war* (Cambridge, 2006), 366; Javier Rodrigo, *Una historia de violencia. Historiografías del terror en la Europa del siglo XX* (Barcelona, 2017), 71.

the challenges of modernity, a longing for a better and safer past. This, in turn, facilitated not only popular mobilisation, but the allying of groups that up until then had refused to collaborate with each other: the rebel army, the Falange, the Carlists, and the Church.

The Cultural Mobilisation of the Church

On 14 September 1936, Pope Pius XI took a public stance in the civil conflict raging in Spain. He lamented the atrocities and persecution suffered by Catholics in Spain and criticised the dangerous influence of Communism, which had made Catholicism its main enemy. He tied the religious persecution in Spain to a global Bolshevik anti-Catholic campaign, warning Catholics not to be fooled into collaborating with the agents of hatred. He saw Spain as a warning for Europe and tapped into ideas already present in the writings of some Spanish bishops one month earlier, particularly the interpretation of the war as a struggle between civilisation and barbarity and the need to re-Christianise society. More importantly, Pius XI's speech had a strong defensive character, blessing those who fought to defend God and religion, while asking forgiveness and compassion for those who were attacking the Church and her faithful.[60] This reference to forgiveness would not be emphasised in the rebel zone as much as the other elements of the speech, particularly those relating to the right to defend religion and anti-Communism. The Pope used the term "civil war" and made no reference to the rebel government, but his speech was received by many in Spain as a justification of war and a confirmation of its crusade-like character. It is, therefore, not surprising that his speech came to be followed by two key pastoral letters, one by Enrique Plá y Deniel and another one by Cardinal Isidro Gomá, archbishop of Toledo, which came to officialise the stance of the Spanish Catholic Church in the conflict.

Plá y Deniel used the word "crusade" several times to refer to the war. For him, the civil conflict was a religious war between two opposing worldviews. It was, furthermore, a reaction against tyranny and an international fight between the faithful and the godless, which was seeing in Spain its first battleground. He characterised anarchists and Communists as "sons of Cain", because "a secular Spain is not Spain".[61] Gomá, much more moderate, did not hesitate either to present the conflict as a clash of civilisations pitting Christ and the Antichrist—and, deep down, Spain and the Anti-Spain—against each other. For the archbishop, "even if the present war appears as a civil conflict, because it takes place on Spanish soil and among Spaniards, we must recognise in it the spirit of a true Crusade in defence of the Catholic faith, whose vitality has for centuries brought to life the history of Spain and has become the backbone of its organisation and everyday life".[62]

Interestingly though, the most important letter signed by the Spanish hierarchy did not mention the word "crusade" at all. In July 1937, with Franco's backing and the aim to show the world what was at stake in Spain, and to counteract the anti-Francoist position of many Catholics abroad, most bishops signed a collective letter, siding with the rebels against the Republic. The Spanish Civil War, they stated, was a religious war against Communism, as the religious persecution and the martyrdom of so many corroborated.[63] More importantly, the letter pointed to the *Komintern* as the funder of the Communist revolution initiated with the victory of the Popular Front.[64] The

[60] Pius XI, Allocuzione di sua Santità Pio Xi ai vescovi, sacerdoti, religiosi e fedeli profughi dalla Spagna. «La Vostra Presenza», 14 September 1936, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/speeches/documents/hf_p-xi_spe_19360914_vostra-presenza.html [Accessed 20 April 2020].
[61] Enrique Plá y Deniel, *Escritos pastorales. Las dos ciudades: Carta pastoral a los diocesanos de Sala- Manca (30-9-1936)* II (Madrid, 1949), 95–142.
[62] Javier Rodrigo, "Guerreros y teólogos. Guerra santa y martirio fascista en la literatura de la cruzada del 36", *Hispania: Revista española de Historia* 74 (247) (2014): 561.
[63] Southworth, *El Mito*, 292; Gonzalo Redondo, *Historia de la Iglesia en España, 1931-1939. Tomo II La guerra civil, 1936–1939* (Madrid, 1993), 310–319.
[64] Fernando Díaz-Plaja, *La historia de España en sus documentos: nueva serie. El siglo XX, La guerra* (Madrid, 1963), 333.

intended audience was the international community. While the letter included a warning against "foreign models" in a clear reference to the Nazi-Fascist intervention, it sided unequivocally with the rebel army. The publication of the letter, as noted by the historiography, facilitated the consolidation of an official rebel discourse in which Catholicism became an inherent part of the national essence. It also made it easier to present Franco as providential saviour, guided into battle by James the Apostle himself,[65] which very conveniently consolidated his authority over the rebel side. *El Adelanto* equated the war and the *Reconquista*: "St James and seal Spain! The Spanish people have forgotten the meaning of this war cry of the traditional militias."[66] Falangist newspaper, *Arriba España*, made similar statements: "By decision of providence, we must be Catholics.…Spain – says the Caudillo – will be more Spain the more Christian she becomes."[67] This identification was symbolically powerful, as the traditional offering to St James had been suspended by the republican government.[68] Franco appeared then as the man who came to restore religion to its rightful public space. More importantly, the connection between the Reconquista and the war, seen as the Reconquista of the 20th century,[69] and equated with the term crusade, gained international relevance and connected the official rebel rhetoric with the imperialistic ethos of the Falange: "Spain was chosen by Providence to save the world from the abyss of evil."[70] The war became a way for Spain to regain its leading international role.

In this sense, Franco's embrace of this rhetoric became clear in an interview with *L'Echo de Paris*, in November 1937:

> I want for you to convince those in France, Europe, America, countries of religious people, that our war is not a civil war, a partisan war, an insurrectionary war, but a crusade of men who believe in God.…Yes, our war is a religious war. We, all of us who are fighting, Christians or Muslims, are God's soldiers and we do not fight other men, but atheism and materialism.[71]

Eventually, Franco became so taken with such rhetoric, and probably with how it helped consolidate his leadership, that in August 1936, Vice-Consul Wegener wrote to the German Foreign Affairs Ministry that Franco "would like to be looked upon not only as the saviour of Spain but also as the saviour of Europe from the spread of Communism".[72] This crusading rhetoric helped mobilise the masses. It was a very useful leitmotif because it combined the mobilising power of both nationalism and religion. And it worked because it connected with a familiar and heroic past, as well as with a shared notion of the Spanish national identity.

An Intra-State Conflict of International Dimensions

The transformation of the war into what contemporaries called a crusade became official in 1937, when the Spanish Church publicly sided with the rebels. To ensure victory, mobilisation was

[65] Zira Box, "Pasión, muerte y glorificación de José Antonio Primo de Rivera", *Historia del presente* 6 (2005): 191-218; Baisotti, *Fiesta, política,* 60, 156.
[66] *El Adelanto*, 25 July 1937.
[67] *Arriba España*, 31 December 1941.
[68] Baisotti, *Fiesta, política,* 150–151.
[69] El Caudillo, peregrino a Santiago, *Signo*, 18 December 1938. This rhetoric was particularly prominent in the journal *Ejército*, which became the only journal addressed to the Army during Franco's regime. Pilar Martínez-Vasseur, "Historia y transmisión de la memoria de los vencedores de la Guerra Civil en la revista militar *Ejército* (1940–1975)", *Amnis [en ligne]* 2 (2011).
[70] Por Dios y por España, *Signo*, 25 July 1938.
[71] Franco Bahamonde, Francisco. *Palabras del Caudillo: 19 abril 1937-7 diciembre 1942.* (Madrid, 1943), 454.
[72] Document no. 27, Das Konsulat in Tetuan an das Auswärtige Amt, 3 August 1936, *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen politik, 1918–1945. Serie D: 1937–1941, Band III*, (Baden-Baden, 1970).

needed inside and outside Spain, something that became even clearer following intervention by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union, which confirmed the international relevance of an otherwise intrastate conflict. The crusading rhetoric had, therefore, a prominent international dimension. Moreover, this rhetoric was revealed amid propaganda campaigns that had already been framing the clash against Communism as a crusade. The most prominent of such campaigns were led by the Vatican and Nazi Germany, both heavily anti-Bolshevik but with different aims and dissemination channels. The links between these campaigns and the Spanish campaign were stronger than has been assumed.

In 1937, the Spanish Church established the Catholic Offices for International Information in Zaragoza and Salamanca. Its aim became clear when Gomá appointed priest Albert Bonet i Marrugán to travel to Belgium, Switzerland, France, Italy, and the Netherlands to garner support for the Francoist cause.[73] The publication of *¿Qué pasa en España? A los católicos del mundo* had the same objective: to make Catholics across the world aware of the religious persecution in Spain. It is also no coincidence that this work was signed by Constantino Bayle, later appointed head of the Salamanca office.[74] Owing to the dissemination of the collective letter abroad, the Church received several responses condemning the religious persecution. Some even expressed their direct support for Franco.[75] Not everyone agreed, however. In Spain, Republican priests like José Manuel Gallegos-Rocafull and Leocadio Lobo criticised the hierarchy for siding with Franco.[76] Abroad, many Catholics looked upon the Church's decision with worry, because it potentially implied the negation of freedom of religion and risked the separation between Church and State. This was why Luigi Sturzo criticised the decision; in his view, social conservation could not justify the allegiance between the Church and an authoritarian state.[77] Obviously, the allegiance between Franco and the Axis worried many, including cardinal Gomá.[78] The fact that Spanish fascists were also Catholic calmed some, but not others. The Spanish Church's decision to side with Franco was fiercely criticised in France, where intellectuals like Jacques Maritain were vocal in criticising the Spanish Catholic Church for calling the conflict a holy war.[79] As a response, two works appeared in French, a manifesto by French intellectuals in support of Franco and a book denouncing the anarchist violence in Catalonia.[80]

However, if we want to understand why events in Spain caused such heated debate among the international Catholic community, we must place them in a broader context. Religious persecution in Spain gained more prominence because it related to events in Mexico and the Vatican's ongoing anti-Bolshevik campaign. The Christero war in Mexico and the Spanish Republic's anticlericalism coincided, as studied by Giuliana Chamedes, with the still-noticeable effects of the Great Depression and the ascension to power of a cadre of solidly anti-Communist Vatican functionaries. This marked the beginning of an ever-increasing tension between the Vatican and the Soviet Union and led to the launch of a large-scale anti-Bolshevik foreign policy campaign in the early 1930s.[81] Both the tactics of the Third International and the Christero War convinced Pius XI and others, particularly in Central America and the United States, that Bolshevism was targeting Catholicism

[73] Antonio César Moreno Cantano, *Cruzados de Franco: Propaganda y diplomacia en tiempos de guerra (1936–1945)*, (Gijón, 2013), 47–48.
[74] Ibid., 49.
[75] Redondo, *Historia de*, 310–319.
[76] Ibid., 368.
[77] Ibid., 367-68.
[78] María Luisa Rodríguez Aisa, *El Cardenal Gomá y la guerra de España: aspectos de la gestión pública del Primado: 1936–1939*, (Madrid, 1981), 457.
[79] Southworth, *El Mito*, 290, 297–305.
[80] Moreno Cantano, *Cruzados De*, 51.
[81] Giuliana Chamedes, "The Vatican and the Making of the Atlantic Order, 1920-1960" Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2013, 132–139.

around the world.[82] The introduction of the Popular Front strategy and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War would confirm these fears.

As a response, in 1932, Eugenio Pacelli encouraged the launch of an anti-Communist campaign to reveal to the world the scale of the Bolshevik threat to Europe. He saw in the events in Mexico and Spain evidence of the Bolshevik assault on Catholicism and described the new propaganda campaign as an "anti-Bolshevik crusade". In addition to using mass media, Pacelli encouraged the celebration of acts of redress, prayers, and pilgrimages, as well as the use of Catholic Action to build and spread the campaign. Additionally, he encouraged the use of diplomacy to protect the concordat agreements in several countries and foster anti-Bolshevik policies.[83] This would lead, following the proposal of Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, to the creation in 1935 of the Secretariat of Atheism, led by Joseph Ledit, a young Jesuit who had travelled to the Soviet Union a few years earlier. Their main aim was to make Rome the centre of anti-Bolshevik propaganda and halt the spread of Moscow's atheism.[84] The secretariat published *Lettres de Rome*, a journal in different languages, including English and Spanish. It also coordinated the distribution of propaganda and the gathering of information through Catholic Action while supporting the Vatican's anti-Communist diplomatic efforts. Not everyone agreed, with some highlighting the campaign could provide an air of respectability to National Socialism.[85] By 1936, *Lettres de Rome* had more than one thousand subscribers, and by 1937, Pacelli ordered for it to be available in every Catholic Action centre.[86]

In regard to Spain, once more, these campaigns had a pre-war origin. Some of those involved in the anti-Bolshevik campaign believed that the elections of 1931, which brought about the Second Republic, were no more than a covert Russian operation on Spanish soil, and that key ministers in the new government received direct funding from the Soviet Union.[87] While this thinking had been promoted by some among the Spanish clergy in communication with the Holy See, it gained traction because it related to recent developments in Mexico and seemed to be confirmed by the church burnings of May 1931. It is unsurprising that by 1936 the men in charge of the Vatican anti-Bolshevik campaign saw the war as evidence of the Bolshevik attack on Europe. The Spanish hierarchy had called it a product of the de-Christianisation of peoples, who, particularly in Mexico and Spain, had abandoned their Catholicism, to which they owed "their greatest glories".[88] Once again, identifying religious identity with national identity gave traction to the idea of an anti-Bolshevik crusade.

It is no coincidence that those who did the bulk of the work for *Divini Redemptoris*, the 1937 encyclical condemning atheist Communism, belonged to the team in charge of *Lettres de Rome*. Ledóchowski himself had approached the pope with the idea of publishing the encyclical, highlighting the importance of telling the world about Communist atrocities in Mexico and Spain.[89] *Divini Redemptoris* was the second of three encyclicals published in March. The first was *Mit brennender Sorge*, which warned of the dangers of National Socialism and which Franco himself conveniently censored in Spain in order to protect his relationship with the Reich.[90] This

[82] Philippe Chenaux, "Father Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (1866–1942): Driving Force Behind Papal Anti-Communism During the Interwar Period", *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 5 (2018): 61. Chamedes, "The Vatican," 145–150.
[83] Chamedes, "The Vatican," 143–145.
[84] Chenaux, "Father Włodzimierz," 63; Chamedes, "The Vatican," 157–158.
[85] Chamedes, "The Vatican," 157–159.
[86] Chenaux, "Father Włodzimierz," p. 63; Chamedes, "The Vatican," 164.
[87] Chamedes, "The Vatican," 132–135.
[88] Ibid., 206.
[89] Chenaux, "Father Włodzimierz," 64, 66–67.
[90] Miguel Ángel Dionisio Vivas, "'Condenarla y tener miedo': El cardenal Gomá frente a la ideología nazi-fascista", *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* 7 (13) (2018): 279–296.

was not the case with *Firmissimam Constantiam*, which, far from endangering the tactics and legitimisation of the rebel army in Spain, could help them in the process. This encyclical was devoted to events in Mexico, referencing legitimate defence in the face of "de-Christianising propaganda" and the attack on "the most elementary religious and civil liberties". While condemning any "unjust insurrection or violence against constituted powers", the encyclical also highlighted how "whenever these powers arise against justice and truth, even destroying the very foundations of authority, it is not to be seen how those citizens are to be condemned who united to defend themselves and the nation, by licit and appropriate means".[91] Interestingly, Ledóchowski dissuaded the pope from adding an explicit recommendation for Catholics in Mexico to avoid abuses of armed defence. In so doing, the Vatican engaged with the just war theory and made it easier for Catholics in Spain to embrace a crusading rhetoric. In this sense, Franco fed off the Vatican's ongoing campaign and fed back into it. In the process, after constant petitioning to the pope, he gained diplomatic recognition by the Vatican in May 1938,[92] and in turn powerful backing in the international arena. The crusading rhetoric had very practical benefits to the rebels, which went above and beyond domestic mobilisation.

Although it is clear that religious identity is not fixed, and instead is shaped by context, personal circumstances, and intersectionality,[93] it is also true that "religious rhetoric helps solve resource and recruitment problems, [therefore,] it follows that violent political organisations may have strategic incentives to adopt religion as a basis for mobilisation".[94] This helps explain the implications of Franco's embrace of crusading rhetoric, despite not having made any mention of religion in his early statements. In embracing this rhetoric, the rebel army reaped domestic and international benefits in terms of recruitment, combatant motivation, resources, social networks, and international standing. The value of this rhetoric to domestic mobilisation has already been studied.[95] Internationally, this rhetoric was linked not only to the Church's international clout, but, as we will see, to the Nazi anti-Bolshevik campaign. In terms of financial backing, the international support drawn by this rhetoric in conjunction with the Vatican anti-Bolshevik campaign does not seem to have been particularly significant.[96] However, it was significant in terms of international standing and the eventual legitimation of the Franco regime. As Javier Tusell observes, the immediate reaction to the Spanish bishops' collective letter from most Catholic media around the globe was one of support for the rebels, Jacques Maritain and other intellectuals being the most salient exception.[97] This backing sometimes took the form of material support, but more interestingly, consolidated beyond Spain the idea that the Spanish Civil War was a new crusade. In France, some right-wing circles rapidly adopted the term "crusade" to refer to the Spanish conflict. In the United Kingdom, the weekly *The Universe* made a call to support Spanish

[91] *Firmissimam Constantiam*, 28 March 1937, http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370328_firmissimam-constantiam.html [Accessed 26 May 2020].
[92] Chamedes, "The Vatican," 211–212, 217.
[93] On the complexity of religious identity, see Curtis Hutt, "Pierre Bourdieu on the 'Verstehende Soziologie' of Max Weber", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 3/4 (2007): 232–254.
[94] Matthew Isaacs, "Sacred Violence or Strategic Faith? Disentangling the Relationship between Religion and Violence in Armed Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research* 53 (2) (2016): 213.
[95] See Mary Vincent, *Catholicism in the Second Spanish Republic: Religion and Politics in Salamanca, 1930–1936* (Oxford, 1996); Hilari M. Raguer, *Gunpowder and Incens: The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2007); Michael Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution: The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War* (Madison, 2011).
[96] José Fermín Garralda Arizcún, "Los católicos del mundo y la cruzada española de 1936-1939", *Verbo* 367–368 (1998): 579–621.
[97] Javier Tusell Gómez, and Genoveva García Queipo de Llano, *El catolicismo mundial y la guerra de España* (Madrid, 1993), 378; Arizcún, "Los católicos," 579–621. Interestingly, it was in France where the editors of *Lettres de Rome* encountered more resistance, particularly from French Jesuits (Chenaux, "Father Włodzimierz," 69).

"Christian soldiers". In the United States, the Jesuit journal *America* interpreted the Spanish Civil War as a masonic conspiracy to destroy the Catholic Church.[98] Moreover, in Argentina, the Galician Patronage of St. James, established in 1934 as a reaction to the founding of the Republic, joined forces with the Galician Action of the Crusaders of St. James, established in July 1936, to become the Galician Crusaders of Apostle St. James. These organisations offered financial and material support to the rebels and served as representatives of the Spanish anti-Bolshevik crusade.[99] The crusading rhetoric had a clear impact outside of Spain. The Vatican anti-Bolshevik campaign was not its main driver, however. There were several contributing factors, from the reality of the religious persecution to the distribution of images of atrocities, from the Spanish bishops' collective letter to intense and widespread fears of Communism.

Nazi Germany would make constant use of the fear of Communism in the run-up to the Second World War. Ostensibly a "well-deserved" reaction to the Communist threat, the Third Reich tried to hide its long-term objectives of expansion as it strove to mobilise the international community against the Bolshevik threat. In words of Eberhardt Taubert, "Germany not only hoped to win friends abroad, but, in time, to 'assume leadership of a powerful [*gewaltig*] global force' dedicated to the extirpation of international Bolshevism."[100] In this framework, the Nazi regime saw the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as a propaganda opportunity. The Spanish conflict came to prove what Hitler had been saying all along, the Communist International was unfurling its tentacles and threatening European civilisation. In fact, Hitler had already decided that anti-Bolshevism would be the theme for the 1936 Party Congress in Nuremberg, and in May 1936, the regime deployed a Gestapo mission to Spain to keep an eye on the Communist threat.[101] With the Popular Front strategy spreading, Spain served as a warning: democracy was just a gateway to Communist expansion.

In order to make the Spanish Civil War serve the Nazi propaganda machine, Germany made a substantial investment of men and resources in a year that would see a considerable increase in anti-Communist propaganda in- and outside Germany.[102] The Nazis presented the Spanish conflict as a Bolshevik operation aimed at establishing a Communist state in Spain and transforming a national conflict into an international war. The bulk of this work was carried out by the *Antikomintern*.

The Antikomintern, led by Adolf Ehrt,[103] was an agency of the Propaganda Ministry created in 1933 to lead the international propaganda fight against Bolshevism. The Third Reich supported Antikomintern organisations in as many countries as possible. Closely linked to German foreign policy, these organisations remained ostensibly independent, but received their information from Germany. While not always prominent, there was an undercurrent of crusading rhetoric in many of their materials. Indeed, even Ehrt himself wrote: "the destruction of the Communist International is a task for all the nations of the Christian and civilised world".[104]

The events of 1936 drew the organisation's attentions to Spain. Receiving financial assistance from the *Nazi Auslandsorganisation*, it organised exhibitions, publications, and radio broadcasts; supported nationalist propaganda in Republican-held areas; and advised Franco's director of

[98] Arizcún, "Los católicos", 595, 601, 610. Chamedes, "The Vatican," 216.
[99] Nadia Andrea De Cristóforis, "La Guerra Civil española y el apoyo al bando sublevado desde Buenos Aires: el caso de la 'Acción Gallega de Cruzados de Santiago'", *Cuadernos de Marte* 9 (14) (2018): 73–104.
[100] Lorna Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade: Bolshevism, the Jews, and the Myth of Conspiracy* (London, 2012), 99.
[101] Ibid., 29, 85.
[102] Ibid., 103–110.
[103] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 99–100.
[104] Ibid., 100.

Propaganda at the front.[105] The organisation supplied the rebel army with anti-Communist materials and gathered materials on the fight against Bolshevism in order to strengthen the anti-Communist campaign abroad. The Antikomintern focused on using the Spanish Civil War in service of the international campaign against the Communist International.[106] In 1938, the Antikomintern office, originally led by Armas,[107] was absorbed by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior but maintained its cooperation with the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (RMVP) through the press and propaganda delegation of Franco's single party.[108]

The Antikomintern's activities were intense, creating an archive of materials on the conflict and sending envoys to document the war and write reports, like Maria de Smeth, [109] whose experiences were documented in a book published in late 1937 entitled *Arriba España! Viva España! Eine Frau erlebt den spanischen Bürgerkrieg*. The book blamed the Spanish Civil War on a Bolshevik conspiracy.[110] The idea that the aim of the Third International was to annihilate all religion ran through several publications.[111] However, the most important publication was *Das Rotbuch über Spanien*. Released in June 1937, the book provided evidence of the Bolshevik conspiracy in Spain, explaining how the Popular Front was merely a tactic. The book was a warning to Western democracies. In four months, it sold 100,000 copies,[112] which would also serve as basis for other publications.[113]

Das Rotbuch is important because it could prove the intersection of the three anti-Bolshevik campaigns, the domestic Spanish campaign, the Vatican's, and the Nazi campaign. As studied by Herbert Southworth, four documents, appearing in different places between 1936 and 1937, were key to laying out the idea of a Soviet-funded revolution in the works, scheduled for May-June 1936. Documents I and II, which outlined the alleged revolutionary plans and ties to the Third International, appeared in *Claridad* on 30 May 1936. Southworth believed the documents were produced to stoke the fear of Communism amongst the Spanish middle class and prepare the climate for the coup d'état. He also stated that document III was only partially Spanish and aimed to compromise the French position, while document IV would not be Spanish at all.[114] The impact of these documents was almost immediate outside of Spain. Document I and part of document IV appeared on French media between October 1936 and January 1937. A pamphlet entitled *Exposure of the Secret Plan to Establish a Soviet in Spain*, published in London in 1938, reproduced photocopies of documents I and II. The Portuguese government based a statement on the existence of a Bolshevik conspiracy in Spain on newspapers that made use of these documents and, from France, Jacques Bardoux argued that this pointed to a conspiracy against Western Europe as a whole.[115] The documents as published in *Das Rotbuch* were probably the basis of Joseph Goebbels' speech at Nuremberg in 1937, and the authors of *Spanish Arena*, Cecil Geharty and William Foss, followed exactly the same argument as Goebbels.[116] Moreover, the Spanish bishops' collective letter based its discussion of the Republic's secret Soviet funding on these documents.[117] Yet, the first time documents I, II, and III were properly published and reproduced was in *Das Rotbuch*

[105] Lorna Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern and Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda in the 1930s", *Journal of Contemporary History,* 42, 4 (2007): 574–594.
[106] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 130–132
[107] Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ), MA 70 Tätigkeiten und anderen.
[108] Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern," 574–594.
[109] IfZ MA 70 Tätigkeiten.
[110] Maria de Smeth, *Viva España! Arriba España: Eine Frau erlebt den spanischen Krieg* (Berlin, 1937).
[111] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 104.
[112] IfZ MA 70 Tätigkeiten.
[113] Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern," 585.
[114] Southworth, *El Mito*, 343–344, 367–370.
[115] Ibid., 344, 349, 365–366.
[116] Ibid., 345, 490–91.
[117] Ibid., 354.

über Spanien,[118] which we know was the product of Antikomintern activities in Spain. Southworth was probably right in pointing to Spanish authorship for the first three documents, but given the tight collaboration between Nazi and Spanish propagandists, it is plausible that the documents, at the very least their distribution, were a product of said collaboration. Additionally, I would argue that this collaboration explains why the propaganda around these documents was more intense outside than inside Spain, as Southworth states.[119] This, however, was not the only occasion in which the three anti-Bolshevik campaigns explored here intersected.

The Antikomintern provided material for exhibitions, like *Bolschewismus ohne Maske* or "Bolshevism unmasked", which was shown throughout Germany and Austria between 1937 and 1938, and made Spain into an example of the dangers of Bolshevism,[120] drawing heavily on materials collected in the Peninsula.[121] Presenting Bolshevism as an octopus about to take over the world, the exhibition showed the anti-Christian character of Communism,[122] usually referred to as the Godless International.[123]

Additionally, the Berlin Antikomintern established links with other anti-Communist organisations, such as the Switzerland-based Pro Deo organisation. According to Southworth, this commission was a subsidiary of the *Entente Internationale Anticommuniste*, founded in Geneva in 1924, an organisation that would at times work closely with the German Antikomintern.[124] Yet, a more recent work by Lorna Waddington, citing German documentation, states clearly that the Pro Deo organisation in Geneva was effectively managed by the Antikomintern in Berlin. This is significant, as Pro Deo organised anti-Bolshevik exhibitions across several countries in the mid-1930s as well as a public lecture by Russian émigré Georges Lodygensky in Spain, where he referred to the Third International's plans to destroy Christianism in the country.[125] Moreover, the Antikomintern also published a 500-volume on Comintern activities around the world, which the German minister in Rome sought to distribute among Vatican circles through none other than Joseph Ledit, head of the Secretariat of Atheism.[126] While in 1936 the Vatican tried to highlight the distinctiveness of Catholic Anti-Bolshevism in an attempt to clearly distance themselves from the Axis, there is also evidence that, in July 1932, Pius XI had helped fund an organisation which, in tandem with Pro Deo, lobbied the League of Nations to adopt an anti-Communist stance.[127] Interestingly, this organisation received direct assistance from the German Antikomintern.[128] In fact, it seems the Vatican cooperated with Germany and Italy to jam Radio Moscow's signals in Europe.[129]

Nazi Germany used these campaigns to try to draw a line between the alleged Jewish-Bolshevik

[118] Ibid., 345.
[119] Ibid., 353.
[120] Antonio César Moreno Cantano, "Propaganda del odio: las exposiciones anticomunistas en el Tercer Reich", *Historia y Comunicación Social* 19 (2014): 177–182.
[121] Ifz MA 70 Tätigkeiten.
[122] Moreno Cantano, "Propaganda," 177–179.
[123] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 104.
[124] Southworth, Herbert. *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War: The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco* (London, 2002), 143, 156, 163–164.
[125] Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern," 573–594; Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 101; Antonio César Moreno Cantano, "Literatura de propaganda religiosa en España en tiempos de guerra," in *Cruzados De Franco: propaganda y diplomacia en tiempos de guerra (1936-1945)*, ed. Antonio César Moreno Cantano (Gijón, 2013), 50.
[126] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 104.
[127] Chamedes, "The Vatican," 130, 175.
[128] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 101.
[129] Chamedes, Giuliana. "The Vatican, Nazi-Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-Communism in the 1930s", *Journal of Contemporary History* 51 (2) (2016): 281.

conspiracy and Western civilisation,[130] "to create an anti-Communist psychosis in Europe".[131] With anti-Communism as the core argument, both the Führer and the Propaganda minister made use of the Spanish Civil War as the epitome of this conspiracy.[132] Hitler warned: "What we preached for years about the greatest world danger of the end of this second thousand years of our Christian era is becoming a terrible reality."[133] By 1939, the Antikomintern thought it had succeeded in blaming the Spanish Civil War on the Soviet Union in placing the conflict at the centre of international debates on Communism.[134] But the huge investment in propaganda did not yield the results the Nazis were looking for. As Zeman notes, "the insinuation that the Soviet Union had somehow invaded Spain…did not sound very convincing to the supporters of the legal Spanish government".[135] It did, however, help consolidate the idea that Western civilisation and Christianity were under attack, and that the events in Spain were a warning to the rest of Europe. The appropriation of a mythologised crusading past gained more relevance and usefulness in the context of the 1930s anti-Communist fears and portrayed very clearly the international projection of an otherwise intra-state conflict—in origin—in the run-up to the Second World War.

Conclusions

The rebel army and its supporters came to understand the Civil War as a new *Reconquista*, that is, a religious conflict in which they were fighting against a new barbarian invader, identified as being the supporters of Bolshevism, in defence of the true essence of Spain—inevitably bound to a Catholic, imperial past—and the whole of Western Christian civilisation. In this context, and to better convey the message in Spain and abroad, the rebels quickly replaced the term "Reconquista" with "crusade", appropriating a shared and easily identifiable medieval past to portray the idea that Spain was the first battle in an otherwise global fight against Communism in defence of Christian civilisation. This appropriation served multiple purposes. Domestically, the highly religious character of the crusading rhetoric served to make sense of the violence that characterised the conflict and to externalise and dehumanise the enemy. This was only confirmed in the post-war years, when the official narrative of the conflict, which came to negate its civil character and equate it everywhere with a crusade, depicted this violence as necessary and the conflict as a transformative and cathartic experience that kick-started a process of much-needed regeneration and rebirth for a nation long ago plunged into decadence.[136] This rhetoric sought not only to make sense of the sacrifice, but to securely establish the legitimacy of origin of the so-called "new state", transforming the rebel coalition's power into authority.[137] The victory discourse "identified Francoism as the starting point of a glorious resurgence of the Fatherland" and "became a powerful instrument…to instil trust and support among an extensive and mixed range of individuals and social groups".[138] In this context, Franco became the bearer of peace and order who brought relief from war. A conflict that symbolised the endpoint of a mythologised interpretation of Spanish history, marked by a narrative of decadence and redemption around the idea that Catholicism,

[130] David Welch. *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945*, (London, 2001), 211.
[131] Zbyněk Zeman. *Nazi Propaganda* (London, 1965), 102.
[132] Peter Monteath, *The Spanish Civil War in Literature, Film, and Art: An International Bibliography of Secondary Literature*, (Westport, 1994), 131.
[133] Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade*, 108.
[134] Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern," 584.
[135] Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda*, 95.
[136] Rodrigo, *Cruzada, paz*, 3; Zira Box, "Secularizando el apocalipsis. Manufactura mítica y discurso nacional franquista: la narración de la victoria", *Historia y política: Ideas, procesos y movimientos sociales* 12 (2004):133-160; Cobo Romero, Arco Blanco, and Ortega López, "The Stability," 45.
[137] Box, *España, Año*.
[138] Cobo Romero, Arco Blanco, and Ortega López, "The Stability," 40.

national identity, and a glorious imperial past went hand in hand, framed the Civil War as a second Reconquista.[139]

More broadly, it helped Franco to manage the logistical challenges of mobilising people and resources, but also to achieve political legitimisation in Spain and abroad. This confirms what experts in the study of the sociology of religion have highlighted: the success of using religious rhetoric in justifying violence and overcoming logistical challenges associated with conflict.[140] In this sense, it is important to note that religion has played an important role in other civil conflicts in the 20th century,[141] and it is often presented as a master cleavage, which helps streamline the complexity of these conflicts to present a more compelling and simplified master narrative to foreign observers.[142] On this, Stahis Kalyvas has noted that ethnic and religious cleavages are easily identified by outsider observes, who often fail to understand that combatants themselves did not always separate religious grievances from others, which also motivated them to fight.[143] In the case of the Spanish Civil War, it was around Catholicism and its symbols that the rebels more easily united. We have seen how combatants often identified the defence of religion with the return of "order" and other key socio-political values. This made the religious cleavage the easiest one to explain abroad, helping to build a master narrative of the "Spanish Crusade" which could be easily packaged and disseminated abroad, overlooking the more nuanced and complex layers of the conflict.

Interestingly though, adopting crusading rhetoric and medieval mythology was also a transnational development in which three distinct anti-Bolshevik campaigns with origins in Rome, Spain, and Germany fed off each other and intersected, sometimes in intricate and hidden ways. This international context, from the Christero War in Mexico to the hallways of the Vatican and the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin, encouraged, no doubt, the emergence of rhetoric around a second Reconquista in Spain, which was already latent on the Spanish right. This, in turn, propped up the Vatican and the Nazi campaigns, and increased the reach of anti-Bolshevism. Did this provide definite international support for Franco? Probably not, as the result of the Spanish Civil War was first and foremost decided at the front, but it might have eroded international support for the Second Republic.

[139] Sevillano Calero, Francisco. "La propaganda y la construcción de la cultura de guerra en España durante la Guerra Civil", *Studia historica. Historia contemporánea* 32 (2014): 230–231; Zenobi, Laura. *La construcción del mito de Franco.* (Madrid, 2011); Box, *España, año,* 95–101.
[140] Isaacs, "Sacred Violence," 211–225.
[141] Julio de la Cueva Merino, 'El asalto de los cielos: una perspectiva comparada para la violencia anticlerical española de 1936', *Ayer*, 88, 4 (2012): 51-74; Kalyvas, *The Logic*.
[142] Kalyvas, *The Logic*, 406.
[143] Ibid., 404-406.

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