Protesting the “Condonation of Savagery”: American Catholics and Non-Involvement in the Spanish Civil War

By Michael Purello

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Torkild Rieber, a businessman who sympathized with fascism, chaired the Texas Company (Texaco). During both the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the beginning of World War II, Rieber supplied Francisco Franco’s Nationalists and Hitler’s Nazis with oil and was eventually forced to resign in 1940 due to his ties to fascism. However, Rieber’s sale of oil during the Spanish Civil War received much less denunciation than did the growing support for humanitarian shipments of food, clothing, and medical supplies for the Loyalists, the supporters of the left-leaning, republican Spanish Government. In particular, American Catholics opposed any proposed American involvement to aid the democratically-elected Spanish Government during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Why were Catholics more concerned with the war than other Americans and, consequently, how did their objections to involvement situate them at the heart of the conversation regarding America’s role in Spain? In what ways did they attempt to influence the retention of the non-involvement position across many sectors of society, including within the press, the chambers of government, and the general public? These issues are the focus of this paper. Analyzing Catholic actions across multiple sectors of society offers a novel and comprehensive perspective to the study of Catholic influence on the American relationship to the events in Spain and offers insights into the greater American hesitancy to become involved in Europe prior to Pearl Harbor.

The Spanish Civil War

The war began with a military uprising against the democratically elected Spanish government in July 1936 and ended with the victory of that military rebellion under General Francisco Franco in April 1939. The war emerged from years of tension following the creation of
the Second Spanish Republic in April 1931. Parliamentary elections founded the Republic following Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship in 1930 and the monarchy of King Alfonso XIII (r.1886-1931). The dictatorship and the Alfonsine monarchy aligned themselves with industrial capitalists and landed rural oligarchy; both governments, as a result, fell to the pressure of a growing block of liberal Republicans, Anarchists, Socialists, Communists, and Catalan and Basque nationalists. These groups opposed the centuries-old alliance between the monarchy, the military, the landed and industrial capitalist oligarchy, and the Catholic Church, all of which enjoyed great privilege at the expense of agricultural and industrial workers.

A profound shift in Spanish society occurred when the Republic was proclaimed through a democratic referendum in 1931. Under President Niceto Alcalá Zamora and Prime Minister Manuel Azaña, the new Spanish parliament created a constitution that established elections with universal suffrage, a secular state, and worker’s rights. Reforms targeted the army, removing generals from positions that threatened republicanism. Furthermore, the Republic enacted new laws from 1931 until 1933 that expropriated Church land to the state and expanded secular education to the distress of religious orders. While the government was not anti-religious, it did realize the threat the Church posed as the historical benefactor and ally of the landed aristocracy.

After two years of liberal government and a new constitution that dismantled many aspects of the generations of aristocratic rule, a coalition of representatives of the military, the Church, and the aristocracy formed the Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right (CEDA) and won the parliamentary election in a coalition with centrist republicans in 1933. The progressive reforms implemented over the past two years were rescinded. Anger grew among workers and a miner strike erupted in Asturias in 1934. As miners’ captured towns and local socialist governments formed, generals Francisco Franco and Manuel Goded were called in to violently
suppress the uprising. Many on both sides were killed. Finally, after the Bienio Negro of rightist
government, the Frente Popular coalition of liberal Republicans and Socialists was elected in
February 1936. The left, including empowered unions like the anarchist Confederación Nacional
del Trabajo and the socialist Union General de Trabajadores, had returned to power.

Following the left’s return to power, the right wished to end the democratic back-and-forth
between liberal and conservative leadership and the risk that the new Frente Popular government
posed. The military, the clerical hierarchy, the fascist Falange party, and the Carlist and
Alfonsine monarchists were threatened by a government that they inaccurately deemed
sympathetic to communism. They feared expropriation, challenges to the Church, and the
reduced role of the army. In response, a handful of military generals, namely José Sanjurjo,
Emilio Mola, and Francisco Franco, began to plan a military uprising. Each of these generals saw
their power diminish under the Republic’s military reforms. When a prominent monarchist
named José Calvo Sotelo was killed by socialist in reaction to the death of a fellow socialist at
the hand of fascists, military garrisons under Franco in Spanish Morocco rebelled on July 18,
1936. These were followed by garrisons across Spain, particularly in Sevilla, Zaragoza, and
Granada. The war had begun.

The Spanish Civil War lasted for three years, longer than the rebels ever imagined. One
reason for the war’s unforeseen length was that it quickly became an international conflict. Nazi
Germany leader Adolf Hitler supported Franco with military assistance and supplies, including
ferrying his men across the Strait of Gibraltar from Morocco and conducting bombing campaigns
in Guernica and Durango. Fascist Italy dictator Benito Mussolini also provided tens of thousands
of troops and military equipment. On the leftist side, the Loyalists received aid from the Soviet
Union, but were also forced to contend with an intrusive and aggressive Comintern. The Loyalist
financial advantage soon waned and they did not receive the aid they needed from the liberal democracies of Britain, France, or the United States. The Loyalists were always on unstable ground; the government under President Manuel Azaña saw three prime ministers throughout the duration of the war and the Loyalist militaries, including the Popular Front military coalition and various union militias, gradually succumbed to Franco’s forces. The Nationalists slowly captured areas surrounding Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona. When Barcelona fell to the Nationalists in January 1939, it was only a matter of time before Madrid was forced to surrender. The Spanish government surrendered on the first of April, with roughly 200,000 dead on the battlefield. Another roughly 200,000 Spaniards died in extrajudicial killings and executions, 150,000 at the hands of the Nationalists and their fascist allies while Franco’s regime killed another 20,000 after the war.¹

The Spanish Civil War enabled Germany and Italy to test their militaries over the course of three years, gain an ally in Franco, and try the resolve of the soon-to-be allied powers. Modern journalism and technologies developed throughout the course of the war, with men like Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, and George Steer sending first-hand reports by telegram and by radio. The war was and continues to be characterized as a war between democracy and totalitarianism, between communism and fascism, between Catholicism and atheism. Furthermore, there was in-fighting among these Loyalists and Nationalists: between socialists opposed to bourgeois liberals, Trotskyists fighting Stalinists, monarchists who renounced the Falange, between the handful of Spanish priests who refused to support Franco and the rest of

the Spanish clergy. Franco’s dictatorship until 1975 and the advance towards toward WWII directly resulted from the Nationalist victory.

The religious dimension of the war received particular attention in American society. Religious tension, particularly anti-clericalism, resulted from centuries of animosity between the working poor and institutions of the Church allied with the aristocracy and industrialists. Clericals feared the liberal reforms of the Second Spanish Republic, and this fear resulted in the torture and death of socialists and anarchists who participated in the Asturias uprising. Anti-clericals, in turn, reacted against the Church’s role in the repression of workers and democracy by killing dozens of priests and destroying churches. Nationalists in Spain and, subsequently, Catholics across the world often referred to the war as a “Holy War,” claiming that the Spanish hierarchy justifiably supported Franco’s fight against the perceived threats of atheism and communism. In some ways, they were justified. As will be shown, the Spanish government and most other Loyalists did not oppose the Church’s existence and respected religious freedoms. However, it is undeniable that clergy and other Catholics were victimized for their association with the right; anarchist and communist union militias were responsible for the death of roughly 4,000 clergy.

The Vatican, throughout the first half of war, neither supported the government, which it believed to be involved in the persecution of Catholics, nor recognized the Nationalists. It continued to defend the right of determination of the Basque Catholics who allied themselves with Republican Spain. Part of the reason that both the Vatican refused to recognize the Nationalists or give Spain significant attention was because it was more concerned with anti-religious activity in Germany and the Rome-Berlin Axis. Recognizing the Burgos government under Franco would mean supporting the involvement of Germany and Italy in Spain, which the
Vatican opposed. Thus, the Vatican aligned itself more with the policies of Britain, France, and the United States, including a position resembling non-involvement in Spain. However, by mid-1938, the Vatican had recognized Franco and gradually developed a relationship with the Burgos government culminating in the Papal support of the new Franco regime in April 1939.²

Similar to the Vatican position, the Catholic establishment in America, including large national and local organizations, Catholic members of government, and the clerical hierarchy, was not formally aligned with the Nationalists. American Catholics pressured against American involvement in the war to aid to the Loyalists. This placed them in accordance with the Vatican policy although the actions of Catholics in the United States were tied more closely to the position of the Spanish clerical hierarchy and the general sentiment of the United States non-interventionism. Non-interventionism swayed, however, as Americans grew concerned with the situation in Europe. When more and more American citizens called for Roosevelt and the State Department to aid the ailing Spanish government against the Nationalists, Catholics continued to pressure the American government to maintain non-involvement throughout the war.

**The Scholarly Context**

The historiography of the civil war predominately focuses on Spain and the involved European nations. The discourse on the American perception of and involvement in the conflict, in comparison, is slim. Most authors stress isolationism and British and French leadership in formulating policy regarding the war. As the war went on, the American government realized the need to assume a more dominant role in European affairs to address the German and Italian threat and to match Soviet involvement. Despite the scholarly attention that has been devoted to America’s foreign policy considerations, the international determinants of its policy have

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² For an discussion of the Vatican’s policy regarding the Spanish Civil War, see: Peter C. Kent, "The Vatican and the Spanish Civil War," *European History Quarterly* 16 (October 1, 1986).
received more attention than domestic ones. The International Brigades and the U.S. ties to the 
British and French policies have been well discussed to the neglect of the influence of domestic 
actors. This paper addresses the ways in which the Catholic press challenged the secular press, 
operated within Congress and directly lobbied to Roosevelt, and attempted to block the pro-
Loyalist North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy from organizing aid for the 
Loyalists.³

Scholars who have addressed the Catholic controversy surrounding the war have done so with 
mostly broad assertions. Some claim that Catholics either dictated Roosevelt’s policy while 
others dismiss any Catholic influence on its formation. For example, Leo V. Kanawada in 
*Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Diplomacy and American Catholics* asserted that Catholics aided Franco 
by supporting neutrality and that “it was obvious to Roosevelt that to lift the arms embargo he 
would have to be willing to lose the support of the Catholic-American community.”⁴ But 
Michael Chapman, in *Arguing Americanism: Franco Lobbyists, Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy and 
the Spanish Civil War*, situates Catholics within a broader anti-communist strain in which 
Catholics were only a marginal reason for the preservation of non-intervention.⁵ Taking a more 
moderate position than either Kanawada or Chapman, George Q. Flynn, author of *Roosevelt and 
Romanism: Catholics and American Diplomacy 1937-1935*, is correct when he states “that 
Catholic pressure played a role in the president’s evaluation of the embargo seems clear, but it

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does not prove that he ever wanted to lift it.”^{6} Flynn characterizes the White House policy, particularly the arms embargo, as a willingness to follow the precedent of France and Britain and to not escalate the Spanish conflict into a war against Nazism. According to Flynn, Roosevelt’s diplomacy first and foremost aimed to support Britain and France, giving no reason to involve the United States directly in a Spanish war. However, even Flynn acknowledges that no one can say for sure what Roosevelt’s motivations were. Dominic Tierney, in *FDR and the Spanish Civil War*, provides new evidence that Roosevelt did attempt to covertly provide aid to Spain. Roosevelt may have hidden such an attempt in order to avoid international and domestic attention, including from Catholics. F. Jay Taylor supports the importance of Catholic influence in *The United States and the Spanish Civil War*, arguing that “members of the Church sometimes acted as pressure groups to influence American official policy toward the Spanish Civil War” because Catholics “felt it was their religious duty to defend publicly General Franco and the ‘holy cause’ for which he was fighting.”^{7} From these works, a middle way is correct: one that does not exaggerate Catholic influence or dismiss it, but rather recognizes that it served as an additional hindrance to American support for the Loyalists. This paper argues that while it is undeniable that Catholics alone did not determine America’s foreign policy or the government and pro-Loyalist aid organizations’ ability to give aid during the war, they applied significant pressure towards non-involvement and noticeably affected the feasibility of providing pro-Loyalist aid.

**Catholic Opposition Throughout American Society**

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American Catholics, a large sector of the American population and an important voting constituency of Roosevelt Democrats, were worried that aid for Loyalist Spain would prop up a “communist” government that they accused of persecuting Catholics. The particular concern with religious persecution in Spain shaped the Catholic opposition to any form of American involvement in Spain as debate emerged between those who supported aiding the Spanish government and those who continued to support the original non-involvement policy throughout the war. The disproportionate Catholic concern with the situation in Spain, in comparison to the attention given by most other sectors of American society, engendered the centrality of the Catholic opinion to all discussion and consideration of any form of repeal or change in the non-involvement policy of the United States. As a result of their apprehension over American involvement, Catholics protested within all levels of society through challenges of the Catholic press against the secular press, by lobbying against aid efforts in government, and by protesting public fundraising and the Spanish government’s appeals to Americans for aid.

That Catholics were at the heart of the debate regarding the domestic consideration regarding the non-involvement policy through their protests on three different levels of society constitutes the structure of this paper. The first chapter of the thesis addresses why Catholics continued to pressure non-involvement in the late 1930s. It argues that they were not simply following a broader American historical precedent in support of the non-involvement policy, but were uniquely opposed to American involvement in the case of Spain. They believed the Spanish government to be communist and consequently encouraging the persecution of the clergy and other Catholics in Spain. This resulted in the Catholic press antagonism toward the secular press exemplified in the Open Letter Controversy. The second chapter considers Catholic actions within the chambers of government. Catholics opposed any U.S. aid to the Spanish government.
They protested the congressional consideration to permit the settlement of Basque refugees in the United States, congressional support for the Loyalists, and Roosevelt’s humanitarian aid plans, for example. The final section of the chapter expounds upon the government consideration of the arms embargo. The precedent for these actions was established with the Religious Controversy over Mexico in the years immediately prior. The last chapter of the thesis discusses Catholic protests and disruptions of public support for the Loyalists. The Catholic press, the clerical hierarchy, and various Catholic organizations objected to pro-Loyalist films, aid organizations, and the speeches given across the U.S. by Spanish supporters of the Republican government. Catholics were operating on multiple fronts to prevent both the government and the American public from aiding the Loyalists.
Chapter I: Catholic Justifications for Non-Involvement in the Spanish Civil War

Despite the efforts of both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Congressional members concerned with the state of affairs in Europe, and a number of decidedly pro-Loyalist figures within the State Department and the White House, the U.S. foreign policy remained one of official and legislated non-involvement. The government did not declare official neutrality because it meant recognizing the military uprising and its supporters as a legitimate belligerent. However, the policy of non-involvement de facto meant that the U.S. sent no aid to the internationally-recognized Spanish government. The precedent for American non-involvement is often traced to Washington’s inaugural address and refusal to aid the French in the French Revolutionary Wars. The disposition to avoid European conflicts continued until WWI, which was followed by the well-known isolationist reaction.

After outlining U.S. foreign policy during the war, this chapter discusses why Catholics continued to pressure non-involvement in the late 1930s; they were not simply following historical precedent in order to support the non-involvement policy, but were also uniquely opposed to American support for the Spanish government. They believed the government to be openly communist, and consequently, advocates for the persecution of the clergy and other Catholics in Spain.

Catholics staunchly favored the retention of non-involvement and, in comparison to those who advocated repealing the policy, had an advantage. Their interest in preserving the policy
was easier done than the burden of changing it in the face of the international justifications for non-involvement, namely the British and French precedents and the aim of deescalating European conflicts, and the domestic opposition, including a decade of isolationism and members of the Roosevelt administration against involvement. However, that their position favored the status quo makes it more difficult to discern their role in the policy’s preservation. However, it is undoubtable that their pressure at least contributed to the failure of repeal and of greater aid to the Republican government.

1.1 The American Foreign Policy

Shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, twenty-seven nations agreed to non-intervention. Likewise, America maintained non-intervention throughout the war for a number of reasons, most notably because the League of Nations adopted non-intervention, the U.S. State Department’s policy was “wedded to the policies emanating from British and French foreign offices,” and in response to domestic non-interventionist pressure. Non-intervention was viewed as a means of avoiding and sedating continental conflict, both in Spain and amongst the great European powers. In addition, Douglas Little described non-intervention as a “malevolent neutrality,” referring particularly to the American and British business interests and the personal positions of the U.S. Department of State and British Foreign Office that preferred non-intervention and “tipped the balance decisively against republican Spain.”

The U.S. government adopted non-intervention promptly after the Nationalist coup began. As

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early as the 27th of July, the United States Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, reported that the powerful figures in the French and British foreign offices were supporting “strict neutrality.” The U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, expressed American alignment with the non-intervention policy. The participating European powers sent representatives to the first meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC) which met in September in London, effectively committing to non-intervention. However, the governments of Germany and Italy despite officially neutral, provided extensive material aid in arms and men to the Nationalists (e.g. 840 aircraft and 14,000-16,000 troops and advisors from Germany and 70,000-80,000 troops and roughly 759 aircrafts from Italy). Likewise, the Soviet Union provided advisors and material support to the Spanish government as a Popular Front ally. The State Department, as well as the foreign offices of Britain and France, were well aware of Germany’s and Italy’s material support but decried that challenging that involvement would have deepened America’s role in Spain. The Spanish government protested the non-intervention agreement and the blind eye towards German and Italian involvement on the grounds that it was contrary to international law to not support a democratically and legitimately elected government.

To maintain non-involvement as tensions intensified in Western Europe, the United States moved to legislate the policy. Secretary of State Hull highlighted the need for legislation, explaining that U.S. neutrality laws only applied to two sovereign nations at war, thus not barring

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13 Memorandum by the Secretary of State, August 4, 1936, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/2434.
14 The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Bingham) to the Secretary of State, September 11, 1936, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/3119: Telegram.
15 Tierney, FDR and the Spanish, 20-1.
16 The Third Secretary of Embassy in Spain (Wendelin) to the Secretary of State, September 22, 1936, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/3247.
17 The Consul at Geneva (Gilbert) to the Secretary of State, September 25, 1936, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/3267.
U.S. involvement in a civil war. Under-Secretary of State William Phillips explained that “our Neutrality Law [the Neutrality Act of 1935] with respect to embargo of arms, ammunition, and implements of war has no application in the present situation,” but that “this Government will, of course, scrupulously refrain from any interference whatsoever in the unfortunate Spanish situation.”

Arms and aircraft companies in the United States had no legal restrictions from sending arms either directly to Spain or circuitously through Mexico and France. In response to, for example, the actions taken by businessmen such as Robert Cuse who loaded boats with aircraft parts in the New York harbor to send to the Loyalists, the State Department requested a resolution outlawing the sale of arms, ammunition, and implements of war “to Spain or to any foreign country for transshipment to Spain.”

Hoping to keep the United States far from involvement, the House of Representatives voted 406 to 1 and Senate voted 81 to 0 for Public Resolution 1, an arms embargo on Spain. Furthermore, in May, the Neutrality Act of 1937 updated the 1935 Neutrality Act which enacted arm, munition, and loan embargos on nations at war, to include civil wars as well.

For the remainder of war, the American government underwent significant pressure from a variety of concerned pro-Loyalist groups and individuals, including politicians, aid groups, Protestant ministers, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Ambassador to Spain, for example. These groups and individuals pressured the government to provide aid in various forms to the Spanish government and to the war-torn citizens of Spain. As Nazi imperialism intensified in combination with Franco’s gradual capture of Spain, the government began to sway from its general non-interventionism of the 1930s, as demonstrated by Roosevelt’s Quarantine Speech.

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18 The Acting Secretary of State to All Consulates in Spain, August 7, 1936, Department of State Records, File No. 852.000/2510a: Circular Telegram.
19 Flynn, Roosevelt and Romanism, 31.
Conversely, the American-Catholic establishment adamantly protested against modification or repeal of American neutrality legislation and any forms of aid to “Red Spain.”

Throughout the war, letters flowed into Washington warning that “the Catholics of America and a legion of their right-minded fellow citizens have been horrified at the savage extremes to which irreligion and inhumanity have been carried.” Catholic groups formed committees, hosted rallies, conducted boycotts, and pressured the government against aiding the Spanish government. These groups asserted that the “Madrid-Valencia-Barcelona government, whether by deliberate design or by mere sufferance, has tolerated an almost complete proscription of public religious worship throughout the area that it controls and has permitted a wave of brutish vandalism, torture, and murder to proceed unhindered.” While Catholics were not principally responsible for dictating the American foreign policy of non-involvement, they played a substantial role in advocating for its preservation.

1.2 Catholic Concerns Reflected in the Catholic Press: Communism and Persecution

By the 1930s, there were over 20 million Catholics in the United States, almost a sixth of the total population. Catholic-dense urban areas, parishes and cathedrals, as well as Catholic universities and hospitals, acquired significant public influence, as did their clerics and prominent Catholic laymen. The growing Catholic population and their institutions, unionization by many Catholics in urban areas, and pertinence of labor-concerned papal encyclicals such as *Renum Noverum* to New Deal policies contributed to the growing relevance

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of the Catholic Church in American politics. Catholics organizations were also featured prominently in the domestic political and public spheres. The main organ for creating and disseminating the Catholic position on political issues was the National Catholic Welfare Conference (N.C.W.C), which formulated the Church’s opinion on American affairs.

Throughout his three terms, Roosevelt catered to this growing constituency because he believed there to be a cohesive “Catholic vote.” He maintained correspondences, for instance, with Father John Burke--head of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, George Cardinal Mundelein, the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus (a Catholic fraternal organization), and Catholics in government, including Massachusetts congressman John McCormack and James Farley, his Postmaster General. Roosevelt received information from these Catholics concerning their positions, including their positions with regards to the Spanish Civil War.

Priests and bishops oversaw the Catholic press which consisted of an estimated 134 local Catholic and diocesan newspapers with almost 2.4 million subscribers and 197 periodicals and journals with over 4.6 million subscribers. While the importance of the Spanish Civil War to the average Catholic may be up for debate, these numbers demonstrate that a significant segment of the U.S. Catholic population was exposed to the opinions of the Catholic press. Even some non-Catholics consulted this press as a measuring stick of Catholic opinion. For example, Father Francis X. Talbot S.J., editor of America, sent copies of his paper to Secretary of State Hull for his consultation regarding the position of Catholics on the war. This thesis also employs the Catholic press as a measuring stick in order to understand why Catholics supported non-

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26 Norman McKenna, "Fortitude Preferred," Commonweal (New York, NY), August 20, 1937
28 Flynn, Roosevelt and Romanism, 2-4.
29 Valaik, "Catholics, Neutrality," 76.
involvement and how the Press defended this position against challenges within the secular press.

The Catholic press published various positions on America’s foreign policy that promoted neutrality or backed the Nationalists, but was consistently against any involvement in Spain that might aid the Loyalists. Whereas literary publication *Commonweal* joined the progressive *Catholic Worker* in taking a neutral position between the belligerents, publications such *America* often contained explicit benediction of a Franco victory in the “terrific battle for the body and soul of Spain.”30 For both American Catholics and non-Catholics, WWI and the domestic troubles of the Great Depression left Americans unwilling to consider involvement in a European war. However, the outbreak of war in Spain also provoked internationalist strains of neutrality that moved beyond strict isolationism or pacifism. American congressmen espoused notions of collective security and international responsibility to defend the United States and other European countries against communist and totalitarian threats. Likewise, Catholics, including the Catholic Association for International Peace (CAIP), encouraged addressing the tense relationship between Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and France, Britain, and the United States. In regard to Spain, however, Catholics refused to support any form of involvement in support that would support the Loyalists.

None of the positions of the Catholic press, whether neutral or sympathetic to the Nationalists, advocated American involvement in Spain. A *Commonweal* editorial suggested that rather than become involved, Americans should “learn from the Spanish war” to achieve a “personalist and Christian” America by addressing the same grievances of the Nationalists and Loyalists present in American society. The editorial insisted this was not “an attempt to achieve

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negative neutrality, which denies the existence of an absolute right, but a positive impartiality: a search for the right unblinded by that passionate partisanship” that results from the blind support of one side in the war.31 Demonstrating, however, that Catholics were not always as impartial as that *Commonweal* editorial, that same issue of *Commonweal* contained an article by foremost editor Michael Williams in which he explicitly disagreed with “positive impartiality.” Williams supported Franco’s uprising to save “Christian civilization” against a communist Spanish government dominated by “experts of Russia” that wished to “destroy the Catholic religion in Spain to wipe out its sacred ministry, its consecrated teachers, and its lay leaders, and in fact to liquidate, if possible, the entire body of believers.”32 Williams’s concerns epitomized the general Catholic concern with the persecution of Spanish Catholics before and during the war.

Catholics offered two main justifications for non-interventionism; they believed the government in Spain to be dominated by communists and consequently, persecuting Catholics. The concern with communism had grown during Roosevelt’s presidency due to the U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933 and the rise of progressive labor policies and unionization strengthened communist and socialist parties and organizations. Seventy to eighty percent of Catholics voted for Roosevelt in 1936,33 despite the fact that, for some, communism had become the “main issue” of the election. Influential diatribe, and anti-Semitic, radio priest Father Coughlin had “impressed upon millions of his followers his declared belief that President Roosevelt is ‘anti-God,’ and that his policy is molded for him by Communists.”34 The Spanish Civil War fell in the middle of the two American Red Scares, one following the Russian

Revolution in 1917 that lasted throughout the 1920s and the second following WWII and commonly referred to as the McCarthy era (1947-1956). The 1930s also witnessed its fair share of repression of Communist party members and communist-led unions by federal, state, and private agencies, including anti-communist labor organizers, the FBI, and the U.S. Congress. Cold War anti-communist policies originated in this period, and conservatives and liberals alike, including New Deal Democrats, agreed “that Communism was an immediate and massive threat to all free American institutions, including labor unions, and to the survival of the United States itself.”

Due to the growing American concern with the communism, the implication of communism in the persecution of religion in Spain incited the Catholic outrage in the United States. The Second Spanish Republic from 1931 until 1936 sored Spanish Catholics by enacting secular education policies and reducing the traditional privileges of the Church. Progressive labor and land laws, the Comintern’s involvement in European Popular Front policies, and the meager but symbolic membership of 17 Communist ministers of the 473 seats in the Popular Front Cortes invoked further fear among traditional Catholics, the military, and the landed aristocracy. The Second Republic attempted to address four areas of Spanish society: military reform, secularization, land reform, and demands for regional autonomy and “of these, it was the Religious Question that aggravated tension the most and led to the crisis of the regime and the Civil War.” Despite Vatican approval of the Spanish Republic, Church ecclesiastics in Spain decried the persecution of the Church throughout the period before the Spanish Civil War. In turn, the Spanish clergy often aligned themselves with the Spanish Confederation of

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Autonomous Right-wing Groups (CEDA), an explicitly Catholic and anti-Marxist political party that embraced monarchist and fascist organizations.\textsuperscript{37}

During the war, Catholics accepted as the truth the reports of persecution from Spain. The news that the “socialist” Second Spanish Republic persecuted the Church, in the eyes of the majority of the American-Catholic clergy and press, justified the military’s rebellion. There were a number of genuine reports of the persecution of clergy following the outbreak of war, but there were also many exaggerated and fabricated reports including of “ravening Marxist beasts, the execution of hostages in Madrid, the slaughtering of pregnant women, the spearing of babies, the violation of young children, the burning of families with gasoline.”\textsuperscript{38} The numbers provided by the Nationalists in Spain and reported by, for instance, American Catholics regarding persecution in Spain were later proven exaggerated. The most significant study on religious persecutions during the war found that of the more than 33,000 priests in Spain, roughly 12 bishops, 4,184 priests, 2,635 monks, and 283 were murdered. It is true that “in the entire history of the Universal Church there cannot be found a single precedent, not excluding the Roman persecutions, for such a bloody sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{39} However, some scholars argue that these killings were largely a result of the political alliance of much of the clergy and conservative, practicing Catholics within the military and the fascist Spanish Falange.

While religion was never the primary motive of Franco’s coup, it dominated the rhetoric of the Nationalist cause. The military and the coalition of Nationalist clerical and aristocratic supporters quickly asserted religious vindication and claimed to defend Catholicism, labeling the rebellion as a Holy Crusade against the “sovietization” of Spain.\textsuperscript{40} Catholics, particularly the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 22, 31.
\textsuperscript{39} Raguer Suñer and Howson, \textit{Gunpowder and Incense}, 126-7.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 44, 51.
Catholic press, followed suit. The press was riddled with the same anti-communist rhetoric, and defended the Nationalist “crusade” against the “Marxist Menace” in Spain. It condemned Republican Spain as a place where a “Masonic Premier, supported by a Socialist-Syndicalist-Communist alliance” ruled a country that “sway[ed] between dictatorship and anarchy.” At the beginning of August 1936, an article in Commonweal recognized that the Nationalist uprising with the support of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy might provoke a broader conflict outside of Spain. However, Catholics feared that upon a Loyalist victory, “the Spanish Left might establish Communism definitely in Europe, and presage its extension from Spain into France.” The fear of “the combined forces of Left Wing Republicans, official Socialists, Syndicalists, Communists, and Anarchists” had justified the “appeal to arms” as the “only recourse left” to the Catholics, militarists, monarchists, and fascists disaffected by the Second Republic in order to “check the Red advance toward a Soviet Spain.” For Catholics, preventing the spread of communism ultimately overshadowed the concern over the broader international consequences, such as a Franco-Hitler-Mussolini alignment, of a Nationalist victory.

One key reason Catholics opposed Communism was because they considered it to be undemocratic, which allowed them to situate their distinct concern with non-involvement in a greater protection of American values. For Catholics like Francis Talbot S.J, apologist Arnold Lunn, radio polemic Father Charles Coughlin, and Edward Heffron, the Executive Secretary of the National Council of Catholic Men, communist “bloody revolution” threatened the traditional

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41 “The Eyes of Moscow Fasten on the West,” America (New York, NY), November 12, 1938.
42 “The Spanish Crisis,” America (New York, NY), June 6, 1936.
43 E. R. Pineda, “Chaos in Spain,” Commonweal (New York, NY), October 9, 1936
46 “Comment,” America, August 8, 1936.
47 Laurence K. Patterson, S.J., “Right and Left Battle for Spain,” America, August 8, 1936.
way of life not only in Spain but in America as well. To these concerned Catholics, who located their refusal to support the Spanish government in the greater anti-communist position prominent in the United States, communism threatened religious, political, and economic liberties. They were not only defending their religion, but also the ideals of their country, referred to as the protection of Americanism by one scholar. William F. Montavon, director of the Legal Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference the Church “stood for ‘sound, constitutional, representative democracy in Spain.” One report from an “escaped eyewitness,” arguably exaggerated and perhaps even fabricated, described repressive measures taken by the Popular Front government in Barcelona. Remaining unnamed because “those who rule Red Spain do not scruple at murder when their costly propaganda has been denied and they have their Comrades in New York,” he described that food stuffs and supply aid were “divided among the officials and their friends from the Left, the foreign Reds who predominate in the army, and the desperate class that will shake the clenched fist and shout Viva Rusia for a portion of bread.” The article, characteristic of the Catholic press on communism, went on to report espionage, Communist terror of people attempting to leave Loyalist Spain, torture, and prohibition of meetings or reunions. Concern with democratic principles was intimately tied to concern for religious liberty.

For the most part, Catholics, vehemently castigating socialism and communism for religious reasons, did not support fascism either. Most Catholics rejected both fascism and communism as infringements on religious liberty. They often criticized the religious persecution in Nazi Germany, albeit not as fervently as the Soviet Union or the Second Spanish Republic. Despite

48 “Week By Week,” Commonweal, August 14, 1936.
49 Chapman, Arguing Americanism, 34-5.
the general criticism, within the pages of some Catholics publications readers could also find authors sympathetic to fascist causes. One writer in America wrote that “the National-Movement was the expression of the common culture of the West with its emphasis on order, the sanctity of the family, and the supremacy of spiritual values as opposed to the materialistic heresies now generally imputed to Russia...and is as much opposed to the laissez-faire capitalism as it is to Marxism.” The Nationalists offered unified opposition to not only the reforms of the Spanish Republic, including separatist autonomy and land reform, but also to anarchist organizing and the “death-blow that had been triumphantly prepared by the Comintern.”52 In general, the Nationalists embodied traditional values of national and religious identity that American Catholics respected with regard to Spain despite fascist entanglements.

The preoccupation with communism and the persecution of Catholics justified Catholic denunciations of any aid efforts to the Spanish government. According to the Boston Pilot, the publication of the Boston diocese, the non-involvement position of the American-Catholic establishment was dictated by the “overwhelming concern for the persecuted Spanish Church, its repeated warnings about the evils of communism, and its constant attempt to defend General Franco.”53 The Spanish Civil War aggravated the politically-active American-Catholic establishment, such as American Bishops, the N.C.W.C, and the Knights of Columbus congenial relationship with the Roosevelt administration and the Seventy-Fifth Congress, controlled by Democrats. Any efforts, whether by Congress to repeal the arms embargo or by the Roosevelt administration to offer support to the Spanish government, were seen as defending a “national government openly professing its intention of completely annihilating all religion, subverting the

53 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s, 69.
Ten Commandments and substituting rank atheism and an abhorrent morality, and at the same time making a mockery of everything that mankind has always held sacred.”

Jesuit priest Edgar R. Smathers, S.J., writing to Under-Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, stated “the Catholic conscience would be wounded deeply by any modification of policy” that would have supported the cause of Spanish government. The press supported the rest of the Catholic establishment, including the clerical hierarchy and lay organizations, in the fight to retain non-involvement.

In conclusion, the Catholic perception of the religious persecution in Spain explained their refusal to support any aid to the perpetrators. The press voiced anti-communism and supported the retention of non-involvement throughout the war, illustrating the Catholic justifications for protests against the positions of the secular press, government plans for aid, and public support for the Loyalists.

1.3 The Catholic Press: Protesting the U.S. Foreign Policy and Secular Press

In addition to voicing the Catholic opinion and providing an important historical point of entry into the Catholic justifications for their support for non-involvement, the press itself was also an important organ of protest. It called upon the government to keep America away from Spain and challenged instances in which the secular press either voiced pro-Loyalist positions or published them.

The Catholic press attempted to pressure the U.S. government to maintain non-involvement. At the beginning of the war, an America editorial praised Roosevelt’s Chautauqua speech in which the president denounced war, imperialism, and armament. The article supported the Roosevelt’s refusal to allow the U.S. to be dragged into a distant war stating that the

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54 “To the Editor-Murder In Madrid,” Commonweal (Philadelphia, PA), September 18, 1936.
55 Edgar R. Smathers, S.J. to Sumner Welles, April 12, 1938, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/8685.
“Department of State are united with the American people in a policy of sane pacifism.”56

Conversely, after Roosevelt’s Quarantine speech calling for joint international action to
“quarantine” international aggressors like Japan and Germany, another America article criticized
the decline in U.S. neutrality. The article, entitled “Neutrality or Partiality: Our Foreign Policy
Wavers,” asserted that “[neutrality] guarantees peace, [partiality] may mean war” and that “the
state of unrest which is prevalent throughout the world has deeply affected the direction of
American foreign policy...there appears to be no direction at all.”57 The article encouraged more
strict non-involvement to prevent American entanglement in war. Partiality regarding foreign
issues was condemned as pulling the United States further into war.

Much of the Catholic press moved beyond admonishing American involvement to offer
moral and material support to the Nationalists. The Catholic-establishment, despite the efforts of
a handful of Spanish Catholics to convince the international community that the Spanish
government had reigned in the religious persecution by anarchist and communist militias and
permitted religious practice throughout Loyalist Spain,58 believed that “a Leftist victory will
bring not representative government but renewed strife.”59 Some Catholics advocated
“something more than the mere localization of the conflict” by the Non-Intervention Committee.
They encouraged “peace negotiations” by the active pressure of the “friends of Spain,” but only
“subsequent to a Franco victory” based on the “opinion that the victory of the Nationalist cause
is a prerequisite for peace in Spain.”60 The Catholic establishment widely shared the view that
Franco’s forces were fighting for the preservation of religious freedom, “Christian civilization”

56 “The President on Peace,” America (New York, NY), August 29, 1936
57 W. Gerald Downey, “Neutrality or Partiality: Our Foreign Policy Wavers,” America (New York, NY), 26
November 1938.
59 “N.C.W.C. Legal Department Director Analyzes Spanish Conflict in Radio Address,” Catholic Action, December
1936.
against “atheistic communism,” and that Franco was a dedicated Catholic and patriot. Joseph Thorning of Mount St. Mary College, in his address to the Brooklyn Knights of Columbus following a trip to Nationalist Spain, described Franco as “the highest type of Christian gentlemen and Spanish officer, who is leading his hosts to victory.” President Roosevelt and Cordell Hull, in contrast, were taken to task for failure “to offer diplomatic protest” to religious persecutions in Spain. This perspective was significant because it directed American Catholics to both advocate non-involvement regarding the U.S. foreign policy and support the victory of the Nationalists.

Catholics also raised funds for Franco’s forces, somewhat ironically transgressing their own objections to involvement when it concerned aid to the Loyalists. Many Americans were beginning to pay attention to the affairs of Europe and communist and fascist threats to democracy and proceeded to join aid organizations that often aligned themselves with either the insurgents or the Spanish Government. The majority of these organizations were pro-Loyalist. The North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy was the most prominent pro-Loyalist organization. The Catholic press staunchly denounced these pro-Loyalist organizations. Contrarily, the press, particularly the Brooklyn Tablet and Commonweal, initiated relief fund efforts for at the beginning of 1937 under the umbrella organization, the American Committee for Spanish Relief. Rallies and meetings were held by the relief committee, including one at Madison Square Garden attended by 15,000 people. These rallies fell short of their projected fundraising, but did spread criticism of attempts by the government

61 Chapman, Arguing Americanism, 217.
64 “American Committee For Spanish Relief,” Commonweal, May 14, 1937.
66 $17,562 Given For Spain, New York Times (New York, NY), May 21, 1937.
and pro-Loyalist aid groups to support the Loyalists. Catholic leaders of the committee claimed that they would impartially distribute funds, roughly $74,000, throughout both Nationalist and Loyalist Spain without “regarding religious beliefs or political allegiances.” However, Catholics across the United States reacted against distributing aid to Loyalist-held territory because it would be appropriated by the Spanish government. As a result, the committee gave their funds solely to the Spanish Cardinal Goma y Tomas, an ally of Franco, for distribution in Nationalist-held territory.

In addition to supporting and raising funds for the Nationalists, the Catholic press, throughout the war, criticized and even called for boycotts of the largely pro-Loyalist secular American press. It accused the secular press of falling prey to Communist propaganda and false notions of democracy in Spain. It derided news correspondents in Spain of favoring the Loyalists and failing to develop any relationship with Franco’s military or clerics. Catholics further denounced the secular press for neglecting to report on alleged persecution of Catholics by leftist groups in Spain. While true that most American correspondents and news agencies were liberals who sympathized with the Spanish government and leftist organizations fighting for democracy in Spain, it also is true that Francoist Spain was more suppressive of international journalists and of press releases from its territories which facilitated reporting from Loyalist-held territory.

In Philadelphia, Cardinal Dennis Joseph Dougherty directed, through the diocesan publication, the boycott of a pro-Loyalist secular publication. In Brooklyn, Catholics used their financial holdings in one secular paper to push the publication of material favorable to Franco. The Sign, a Catholic magazine, called for the boycott of pro-Loyalist publications like Time.

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68 “American Committee For Spanish Relief,” Commonweal, June 4, 1937.
69 Eric R. Smith, American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2013), 129.
70 Darrow 67.
while *New York Times* editors received pro-Nationalist letters from Catholics. The N.C.W.C.’s National Bureau of Information was created to promote Catholic interests amongst secular publications by engaging editors of national and local publications who misrepresented the Church position on any topic, including the situation in Spain. Likewise, a priest associated with *America* organized the United Catholic Organizations Press Relations Committee, which consisted of twenty-seven Catholic organizations that sent correspondences to secular publications and interviewed editors. These groups attempted to ensure that the Catholic position on Spain, that the Loyalists were either overwhelmingly or equally culpable of violence in Spain, was represented in the secular press and that pro-Loyalist articles were condemned. Clerical editors feared that the Spanish Civil War was being used as an attack on Catholics not only in Spain, but also in the United States. Combined with the already prevalent anti-Semitic notions that the secular press was a liberal Jewish conspiracy against Catholics, the Catholic press was notably worried about the secular press’s reporting on Spain due to concerns with communism and communistic persecution of Catholics.

In particular, the Catholic concern with communism and leftist persecution of the clergy in Spain were made apparent in a series of open letters published in the *New York Times*: a pastoral letter by the Bishops of Spain, a second by protestant leaders, and a third from 150 prominent American Catholics. The Spanish pastoral letter addressed the international Catholic press, lauding it for supporting the Nationalists and disavowing representations of the situation in Spain that would permit support for the government. It defined and appealed for a collective Catholic outlook that supported Franco, asserting that the social foundations of Spain and throughout the

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71 Ibid, 131-3.
world, including “religion, justice, authority, and the liberty of the citizen,” were threatened by “imminent Marxist revolution.”  

According to the majority of Spanish clergy, the military rebellion had been the only course of action left to a nation threatened by communism and the involvement of the Soviet Union. A “hatred of religion had come from Russia” that led the communists and anarchists to burn churches both before and after the onset of the war, to murder the clergy and religious laymen, to destroy religious artwork in order to threaten “Christian civilization.” Despite this narrative, the Soviet Union was uninterested in fomenting substantive revolution in Spain, favoring instead alliances with France and Britain due to the increasing belligerency of fascist Germany and Italy. In its May Day Manifesto of April 1936, the Comintern, in support of the Spanish Communist Party, explicitly opposed the destruction of churches. Finally, the Catholic letter clearly adopted the notion of the conflict as a “Holy War” and, importantly, a patriotic struggle against anarchism and communism. To save the nation of Spain, the Nationalists fought for Catholicism, essential to the Spanish national identity. It employed rhetoric of “Crusades against the enemies of faith” and of the “wonderful phenomenon of martyrdom,” and challenged the assertion that the Church remained a feudal institution.

The “controversy” in the Open Letter Controversy occurred when American Protestant clergymen, educators, and laymen responded with an open letter of their own. It condemned the Spanish Church and the American Church for their support of the Spanish Catholic hierarchy by accusing them of preferring autocracy to democracy and opposing secular education and land reform. The Protestant response demonstrated the contending position between the Catholic and Protestant church hierarchies in the United States with regard to the Spanish Civil War. The

73 Ibid.

Protestant clergymen of this letter and Protestant press organs, including *Christian Century*, *Christian Evangelist*, and *Christian Leader*, consistently supported the Republican government. While also concerned with the threat of international communism, Protestant publications tended to assert that military rebellion had already eroded democracy, including the principles of separation of church and state and freedom of religious worship, with the aid of Italy, Germany, and the fascist *Falange Española* movement in Spain. Borrowing the pastoral letter’s reference to an armed plebiscite that had replaced the supposedly illegitimate election process of February 1936, the Protestant letter damnedly questioned “if the war is simply a ‘plebiscite,’ are Franco’s Nazis, Moors, and Italians simply imported voters?”

In October, 175 Catholic clergymen published a letter in support of the arguments made in the Spanish pastoral letter, employing anti-communism and the violence committed against Catholics in Spain by militias of radical anarchists and communists as justifications. This letter demonstrated that Catholics and their networks were the ones responding to pro-Loyalist sentiments in the secular press. Anti-communist businessmen were not the ones challenging the pro-Loyalist position; it was Catholics. It contended that communists had incited revolution, starting with the Asturian strike of 1934 and continuing until the military rebellion, “aspiring to the Sovietization of Spain.” In order to save themselves from eradication, Catholics had supported war, war without recourse, and those that would deny the Catholics in Spain this right would similarly have denied the American revolutionaries the right to revolt against the suppressive British. Blaming communist-controlled regions for the killing of 14,000 priests and

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75 See: Gause, John Maxie, *None Spoke Spanish: An Examination of the Catholic-Protestant Discourse on the Spanish Civil War in the United States* for an analysis of the American Protestant position towards the Spanish Civil War.
burning of churches and despairing the failure of Franco’s forces, the letter concludes in support of Spanish Bishops and the Nationalists: “Spain, should General Franco and the Nationalists be defeated, will be turned into a Soviet Russia.” The letter in response to the Protestant letter and in support of the Spanish clergy’s was a public declaration of the positions of the Catholic hierarchy in the U.S., namely support for the Nationalists, condemnation of the repressive Communist Loyalists, and the exploitation of American principles and history to justify the military rebellion.

The Catholic establishment, as demonstrated by publications like America and Commonweal, supported bipartisan non-involvement due to both general isolationism and a unique anti-Loyalist position in others. It refused to consider American involvement, particularly to aid the Spanish government, and asserted that such involvement would aid a Communist government that threatened Spanish democracy. It set a precedent for the worldwide threat of the communist persecution of Catholics and provided the intellectual voice behind the Catholic protests directed at the government and pro-Loyalist aid organizations.
Chapter II: American Catholics Protest Government Aid To Spain

From 1936 until 1939, prominent Catholic clergy, organizations, and politicians attempted to influence the American government to maintain complete non-involvement in the Spanish Civil War. As outlined in the previous chapter, these political actions were due to the concern with the “specter” of communism and the reported persecution of Catholics by Spanish leftists, particularly anarchists and communists. Catholics were inflamed by the “Red Terror,” in which leftists killed almost 50,000 Spaniards, many of them clergymen and devout Catholics, in the first months of war. However, this perspective ignored the greater extent of Franco’s “White Terror.” The Francoist repression of leftists and innocent civilians, including the aerial bombardment of towns and cities like Guernica, Madrid, and Barcelona, likely killed more than 150,000 Spaniards during the Second Spanish Republic. Despite persecution by both sides, or rather because of it, Catholics opposed any U.S. government aid to the Loyalists. Catholics protested the congressional consideration to permit the settlement of Basque refugees in the United States, congressional support for the Loyalists, Roosevelt’s humanitarian aid plans, and national consideration for repeal of the arms embargo.

2.1 The Religious Controversy in Mexico and The Beginning of Catholic Protests

Catholic attention to communism and the persecution of Catholics were not isolated to war in Spain. Catholics were also concerned, for example, with persecution in Russia, Mexico, and Germany. Thus, in order to better understand the origin of the Catholic pressure on the government regarding issues of foreign repression of Catholicism in Spain, this paper discusses

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77 Hennesey and Ellis, American Catholics, 269.
78 Raguer Suñer and Howson, Gunpowder and Incense, 126-8.
the “Religious Controversy” over Mexico. The Religious Controversy called for the removal of the U.S. ambassador to Mexico due to unease with the progressive reforms taken by the Mexican government in the 1930s. Catholics asserted these reforms targeted Catholicism. Throughout 1935 and 1936, Catholics lobbied the American government to address persecution in Mexico. They called for the recall of Josephus Daniels, a friend of Roosevelt and American ambassador to Mexico, and for Roosevelt to take diplomatic action to address the persecution.

Catholic congressmen often represented the interests of the clergy and press within the chambers of American government. In July 1934, Daniels gave a speech supporting the Mexican government’s efforts to expand secular education. Catholic congressmen believed that socialistic education under Mexican president Lazaro Cárdenas promoted atheism while closing Catholic schools and churches. According to a House Representative this education “compel[led] the children to greet their teachers with the morning salutation: ‘Good day, teacher; there is no God.’” Shortly after his speech, Daniels picked up a newspaper highlighting the efforts of two American congressmen pushing for his recall because he had supported the Mexican government’s persecution of Catholics. According to Daniels, there was a “tirade of denunciation from Catholic papers, priests, and bishops, bitter attacks in the press, and,” notably, “resolutions in Congress demanding [his] removal from office.” Catholic congressman William Connery introduced a resolution for Daniels’ recall, citing Daniels’ cooperation with the “tyrants of Mexico” and questioning whether Daniels favored “communism in Mexico.” Congressman John McCormack shared a letter with Roosevelt written by an American Cardinal condemning

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82 Ibid, 177-79.
83 Ibid, 184.
religious persecution in Mexico. McCormack expressed his hopes that the “unfortunate condition that exists in Mexico will be adjusted satisfactorily soon” while another congressman charged that “thousands upon thousands of crimes, from murder to mere overnight kidnappings, have been committed in the name of communism and atheism in Mexico. Our ambassador somehow never hears of them.”

Despite the predominant non-interventionism of the 1930s, Catholics and congressional members molded their foreign policy opinions toward Mexico and Spain to represent particular interests. In the latter case of Spain this meant uniformly calling for non-intervention and supporting the arms embargo. In regard to Mexico, Catholics were less monolithic and even called for the end of an arms embargos on Mexico, demonstrating that their rigid non-involvement pressure toward Spain was more specific to the situation than inherent to the late 1930s. A Catholic bishop told Daniels that “it is a shame that the American government put an embargo on arms so that no effective resistance can be made by the Catholics of Mexico.” The concern over Mexico led to Congressional action. Congressmen called for Roosevelt “to use his good offices to bring about religious liberation and freedom of worship in Mexico.” Two hundred and fifty Congressmen were concerned enough with the situation in Mexico to support the formation of the “Committee on Religious Rights.” Congress tasked the committee with the investigation of religious persecution, citing reports from Mexico that “no minister of religion, be he Christian or Jewish, is permitted to exercise his sacred functions.” The Committee found

85 Daniels, Shirt-sleeve Diplomat, 185.
86 Ibid, 188.
87 Ibid, 185.
that Daniels had been unfairly maligned and was not supporting the persecution of Catholics. However, it maintained that Catholic persecution was occurring in Mexico.

Catholics also bypassed Congress and directly lobbied Roosevelt to take action against religious persecution. Through letter campaigns, rallies, and boycotts, Catholics obtained Roosevelt’s attention towards their concerns and forced a response. For example, New York University and St. Joseph’s College adopted resolutions sent to Roosevelt against the “Mexican policy of crushing personal liberty.” A Catholic lawyer urged the President and the administration to oppose the religious persecution in Mexico in order appease the Coughlin-Catholics concerned with communism. In the midst of the attacks against Daniels, Father John Burke, general secretary of the N.C.W.C. and friend of Roosevelt, sent a letter signed by 20,000 Catholics protesting the “Mexican situation.” The Knights of Columbus condemned both the “educational system that compels the teaching of Atheism and Red Communism” and the Mexican government which attacked the “principles of civil and religious liberty” while spreading “Soviet philosophy.” Roosevelt was compelled to respond. In a letter to the Knights of Columbus, Roosevelt supported Hull’s policy: “it has been the policy of this Administration to

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89 There are numerous press articles and telegrams in the Roosevelt’s official file from the period that demonstrate the President and the State Department were well aware of the Catholic concern with the Religious controversy - FDR Library Folder: 76b - Church Matters – Catholic, 1935-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
refrain from intervening in such direct concerns of the Mexican Government. That policy of non-intervention I shall continue to pursue.”

With this response, Roosevelt defended his Good Neighbor Policy toward Mexico despite calls for intervention by the Knights of Columbus and the larger Catholic community.

Members of Roosevelt’s administration believed that Roosevelt and Democrats in Congress were concerned that they would lose Catholic votes if they shifted from non-involvement. In Mexico, Daniels hoped Church censure against his actions would not affect Roosevelt’s approval and expressed that “my chief regret was lest some politicians might seek to arouse church opposition to Roosevelt in the next presidential elections.”

While Roosevelt maintained the Catholic vote in 1936, three years of civil war in Spain would strain the relationship between the Catholic establishment and the government. The outcry over persecution in Spain not only mirrored the outcry over Mexico but also directly corresponded to growing concern about the repression of Catholicism under leftist governments. Thereby, the precedent of Catholic attention to the conditions in Spain and their methods of political pressure on the U.S. government were established by the Catholic lobby over the Mexican Religious Controversy. Catholic members of Congress, boycotts, rallies, and thousands of letters continued to represent the viewpoint of the Catholics during the Spanish Civil War.

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95 Sumner Welles to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, November 11, 1935; Folder: 28 - Knights of Columbus; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
96 Daniels, *Shirt-sleeve Diplomat*, 179.
2.2 Catholics Block Basque Refugee Aid

In contrast to the Religious Controversy, Catholics disapproved of any involvement in the Spanish Civil War in order to prevent the Roosevelt administration from indirectly supporting the Loyalists. As both war in Spain and Catholic opprobrium regarding the generally pro-Loyalist secular press coverage continued into 1937, Catholic political engagement intensified. The Catholic establishment of bishops, lay organizations, and the press mobilized the Catholic populace, including Congressmen such as Representative John McCormack and Senator David Walsh of Massachusetts, to pressure the Congress and the President against involvement in the civil conflict.97

German planes and Franco’s advancing troops advanced on the Basque country throughout 1937 while the Spanish ambassador to the United States, Alvarez del Vayo, implored the United States to aid the Basque evacuees that French Premier Leon Blum had permitted to cross the French border. By mid-May 1937, the American Board of Guardians for Basque Refugee Children was created under the auspices of Eleanor Roosevelt and Ambassador Bowers and headed by Gardner Jackson, a previous member of Agricultural Adjustment Administration under the Roosevelt administration and chairman of the American Friends of Spanish Democracy.98 On 22 May, Bohn wrote to Secretary Hull that the Board planned to issue temporary visas to refugees children through the Basque Delegation in Paris, regardless of their “race, creed, or politics” as part of an humanitarian effort to assist those suffering in Spain.99 Initially the State Department supported the efforts of the Board, which, as humanitarian aid,

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97 Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism*, 41.
99 Dr. Frank Bohn to Hon. Cordell Hull, May 22, 1937; Folder: Spanish Relief of Basque Children (1937); Gardner Jackson Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
were entirely within the confines of American neutrality. The Board wished to resettle only 500 refugees, a pale comparison to the 4,000 resettled by the French.

Despite the State Department’s and the Roosevelts’ support, Catholics quickly condemned the resettlement for containing no Catholics and contended that the refugees should stay in Europe where resettlement would be cheaper and in Catholic homes. Congressman McCormack asserted that the Board was pro-Loyalist and possessed ulterior motives for involving the United States in a Spanish issue, particularly one that supported the Basque people fighting against Franco.\(^\text{100}\) Roosevelt, Jackson, and the State Department addressed the Catholic backlash in different ways. Roosevelt simply told McCormack that he would inform him if any changes were made regarding the resettlement issue.\(^\text{101}\) Jackson, however, believed that “the Catholic drive from Massachusetts [was] undoubtedly going to spread and increase,”\(^\text{102}\) referring to McCormack’s lobbying to Roosevelt and to Boston Cardinal William O’Connell’s insistence that the Basque refugee crisis was being manipulated for communist ends.\(^\text{103}\) This drive would prevent any chance of the implementation of Basque resettlement. Jackson accused McCormack of hindering humanitarian resettlement and stated that “it is incredible that anyone should ascribe such low motives to this humanitarian effort as are ascribed by Congressman McCormack and his associates [senators David Walsh and Henry Cabot Lodge]. If anyone has political paranoia it is John McCormack and his crowd.”\(^\text{104}\) Under Jackson, the Board of Guardians attempted to

\(^{100}\) Edith de Heller to Mr. Gardner Jackson, May 23, 1937; Folder: Spanish Relief of Basque Children (1937); Gardner Jackson Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
\(^{102}\) Gardner Jackson to Louis Gibarti, May 26, 1937; Folder: Spanish Relief of Basque Children (1937); Gardner Jackson Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
\(^{103}\) Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism*, 40.
\(^{104}\) Gardner Jackson to Louis Gibarti, May 26, 1937; Folder: Spanish Relief of Basque Children (1937); Gardner Jackson Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
appease the Catholic establishment. They incorporated a provision into the agreement with the Basque government that a “sufficient number of Basque Catholic priests shall accompany the children for their religious education.” However, these efforts to placate Catholic opposition failed within government.

Catholics such as Katherine F. Lenroot, Chief of the Department of Labor's Children's Bureau, took a hard stand against the Basque plan and Board. Lenroot expressed apprehension over resettlement in a letter to Secretary of State Hull, demonstrating that Catholics in government, as during the Mexican Religious Controversy, were using their political positions to represent staunch Catholic establishment positions. The Department of Labor’s authorization was necessary for the resettlement procedures to begin, rendering the plan even more vulnerable to failure. Despite the fact that Ambassador Bowers informed the American Consul at Bilbao to begin vetting Basque children for resettlement, the Department of State refused to pressure the Department of Labor to approve the plan. Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, argued that “the children should not be brought to the United States but should be permitted to live in France or some other country in Europe.” Secretary Hull chastised the American Consul for discussing the Basque resettlement in America with the President of the Provisional

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106 Miss Lenroot to Cordell Hull, May 24, 1937; Folder: Spanish Relief of Basque Children (1937); Gardner Jackson Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
107 Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), June 15, 1937, Department of State Records, File 852.48/123.
108 The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Spain (Bowers), June 14, 1937, Department of State Records, File 852.48/122a: Telegram.
109 Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Welles), June 15, 1937, Department of State Records, File 852.48/123.
Government of the Basque Country, José Antonio Aguirre. It was clear that neither the Department of Labor nor the Department of State wanted to involve the United States in the issue. Gardner Jackson, among others, believed that this was due to political pressure from Catholics in Congress and the Catholic figures like Bishop O’Connell against the plan.

2.3 In Congress: Catholics Challenge Congressional Aid to the Loyalists

As previously mentioned, the Catholic press conducted pro-Franco fundraising under the direction of Bishop Thomas E. Molloy of Brooklyn, the Tablet, and editor Michael Williams of Commonweal. However, the funds raised by the America Spanish Relief Fund and the National Spanish Relief Committee, as exemplified by the failed Madison Square Garden rally of 19 May, 1937, were notably less than those raised by pro-Loyalist groups. Where Catholic aid organizations failed to raise money they made up for in their hostility toward pro-Loyalist groups. In addition, they were effective in lobbying the U.S. congress against offering rhetorical or material support to the Spanish government and Loyalist forces.

In January and February, Catholics mailed letters to and even showed up at congressional offices to challenge the circulation of a statement by two pro-Loyalist journalists in Congress. The statement, which some members of Congress thought was simply an innocuous letter from the American congress to the Spanish Cortez, stated that “We, who cherish freedom and democracy, above all else. Realize the significance of your heroic and determined fight to save

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111 The Secretary of State to the Consul at Bilbao (Chapman), July 9, 1937, Department of State Records, File 352.1115/3744: Telegram.
112 Robert Morton Darrow, "Catholic Political Power: a study of the activities of the American Catholic Church on behalf of Franco during the Spanish Civil War" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1953), 88-90.
113 See Eric R. Smith, American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2013), 129., for an appendix of all Spanish Civil War aid organizations and funds raids.
the democratic institutions of your young Republic from its enemies both within and without Spain.” 60 members of Congress signed the petition to be sent to Spain.

Msgr. Michael J. Ready, the General Secretary of the NCWC, condemned the petition the next day as an attack on the Church. He proclaimed that “one finds it difficult to believe that the duly elected representatives of our American democracy, sworn to uphold the right of religious liberty, could place themselves on record as sympathetic with a government which has absolutely proscribed the exercise of religion in the territory which it governs.” He then charged the Spanish government with the “torture and murder of thousands of bishops and priests and nuns, the desecration and destruction of hundreds of churches and shrines, and the complete denial of religious freedom” that was hypocritically sanctioned by the 60 congressional signatures that “profess to hold dear” democracy. Burke Walsh, a correspondent for the N.C.W.C., visited the Congressmen who had signed the petition and read Msgr. Ready’s statement. The actions of Walsh and public outcry from Catholics compelled Congressmen to repudiate their stated support for the Spanish government. Over the course of February and March, roughly half of the members of Congress who had signed, vetted as pro-Loyalist sympathetic to the Loyalist cause, retracted or disavowed their statements of Loyalist support. Representatives argued that they had not understood the petition, had signed it without much thought, and had meant no offense to the Church. One representative stated that “I have signed nothing in Congress or out of it that has stirred up the ill-feeling the petition caused” and another that “we were apt to start a religious controversy in this country, and, in fact, that was the result that did follow.”

116 Darrow, "Catholic Political," 114.
pressure even forced Senator Nye, who would later lead the push for embargo repeal to “repudiate” his signature because he did not mean to “express sympathy for the cause of communism or against a religious faith.”118 This incident demonstrated that Catholics were willing to challenge members of Congress and were successful in forcing some of them to retract support for the Spanish government.

The Catholic pressure on Congress to disavow any form of support for the Loyalists continued in September through November, this time on fundraising by pro-Loyalist aid groups. Circular petitions were distributed to members of Congress by the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (NAC) in the fall of 1938. The petitions were attempts to raise money and supplies by intentionally targeting pro-Loyalist members of Congress. The circulars were distributed by federal department committees, including representatives in the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Labor Department Relief Ship Committee. These circulars pressured federal employees to “REMEMBER YOUR FELLOW WORKERS IN LOYALIST SPAIN”119 and that “success in filling this ship depends on you!”120 The circulars made clear that volunteers and representatives for the NAC were fellow federal employees and that Committee volunteers were prepared to pick up all donations of food, clothes, and medical supplies from the federal offices or from the homes of the department workers. Not only would the Committee members wait anxiously to be contacted by the government employees, they also explicitly

118 NCWC News Service Release, May 9, 1938 in Darrow, "Catholic Political," 119.
119 Circular attached to Office Memorandum of Eugene J. Butler, September 26, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
120 Labor Department Relief Ship Committee Circular; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
stated that they would reach out personally to employees for contributions.\textsuperscript{121} A number of concerned federal employees\textsuperscript{122} notified the N.C.W.C. board that petitions for the aid of the Spanish government were circulating the White House departments with polarized declarations such as “the imperative need for aiding Republican Spain is obvious” and “their need is our concern.”\textsuperscript{123} By reaching out to the N.C.W.C, these government officials that supported non-involvement demonstrated that they turned to Catholics to return pressure on the pro-Loyalist government officials.

To members of the Catholic hierarchy and press, these circulars were un-American and supported Spanish communists. The N.C.W.C. News Service denounced the circulars as a “bald attempt to coerce Federal employees to contribute to relief for Leftist Spain being collected by the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.”\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, it excoriated the circulars as “tantamount to coercing Federal employees to contribute to the support of the Spanish Leftist Regime, backed by Soviet Russia and waging war on democracy,” while the Knights of Columbus called for Roosevelt to “take appropriate measures to stop such solicitation in Federal Departments for an alien and Communistic regime.”\textsuperscript{125} The Catholic denunciation of the (NAC) as communist organization was not entirely fallacious. Many American Communist

\textsuperscript{121} Please Help Fill the Relief Ship For Spain Circular; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
\textsuperscript{122} Eugene J. Butler to John McCormack, September 26, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
\textsuperscript{123} Circular attached to Office Memorandum of Eugene J. Butler, September 26, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
\textsuperscript{124} N.C.W.C. News Service, Press Release, September 3, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
\textsuperscript{125} N.C.W.C. News Service, Press Release, September 17, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
Party members organized and spearheaded the NAC. It also, however, contained many non-Communist organizers and was supported by mostly non-Communist donors.

These circulars also sparked a web of correspondence that included President Roosevelt, Congressman McCormack, the head of the Department of Labor Francis Perkins, and employees of the federal departments angered by the dissemination of pro-Loyalist material in their government buildings. Telegraphs inundated the desks of Perkins and Roosevelt.¹²⁶ The Detroit Council of Catholic Organizations made direct protests to Roosevelt to investigate the incident in order to halt “solicitation in Federal Departments for an alien and communistic regime.”¹²⁷ A statement issued by the Department of State clarified that the government would not organize or dispense relief abroad, but would instead leave that in the hands of the American Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker service organization. However, this did little to stem the NAC actions in Washington. The Director of the N.C.W.C. Legal Department, Eugene J. Butler, forwarded a copy of the circular distributed in the Labor Department to John McCormack and Arthur D. Healy.¹²⁸ McCormack than wrote to Roosevelt, attaching a copy of the distributed circular. Roosevelt, whose Catholic secretaries, Missy Lehand and Grace Tully, sifted through the number of letters to him, read the letter sent from Eugene J. Butler. The President, however, simply acknowledged that he received Butler’s letter “enclosing a circular alleged to have been distributed among employees of the Department of Labor and other

¹²⁶ N.C.W.C. News Service, Press Release, September 17, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.

¹²⁷ N.C.W.C. News Service, Press Release, September 17, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.

¹²⁸ Eugene J. Butler to John McCormack, September 26, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.
governmental bureaus and agencies.” Roosevelt expressed no concern and offered no indication of an intention to discuss the matter with the bureaus and their employees. Certainly, though, he knew that many Catholics were upset. The continuous Catholic backlash forced the Roosevelt administration to conduct aid activities covertly and, as will be seen in the third chapter of this thesis, hindered pro-Loyalist aid organizations’ ability to raise funds.

2.4 A Final Push: Roosevelt Organizes Material Aid for Spain

As the Loyalist situation became dire throughout 1938, the State Department and Roosevelt began to investigate ways to aid the Spanish government and provide humanitarian aid to starving Spanish citizens and military aid to a desperate Spanish government. Historian Dominic Tierney’s recent research has illuminated that by June 1938, Roosevelt had engaged in a covert aid plan that would defy the arms embargo on Spain and permit the shipment of U.S. airplanes across the French border into Loyalist territory. These revelations challenge the historical narrative that Roosevelt cared little about aiding the Loyalists. Roosevelt was willing to risk his reputation among Americans who wished to remain uninvolved, particularly as Germany demonstrated its belligerent intentions during the Munich Crisis. Roosevelt dropped the aid plan, though it was kept clandestine, when members of the State Department, particularly Ambassador to France William Bullitt, expressed their disapproval. The French had closed

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129 Franklin Delano Roosevelt to John McCormack in Memo from Eugene F, Kinnaly, Secretary of John McCormack, to Eugene J. Butler, October 22, 1938; Folder: Spain: Solicitation of Funds for Loyalist Spain in Government Offices [1938-1939]; Legal Department/General Counsel; Manuscript Collections: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.

130 Tierney, “Franklin D. Roosevelt,” 300.

131 The Ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, August 9, 1938, Department of State Records, File No. 852.00/8376.
their border with Spain and any attempt to reopen it to send planes through would disrupt any chance for an armistice between the Loyalists and Nationalists.\footnote{Tierney, "Franklin D. Roosevelt," 311.} 

In December, Roosevelt would again try to organize impartial aid to alleviate the suffering of Spanish citizens, this time publicly. Roosevelt was “genuinely concerned at the plight of the civilian refugees in Spain” and wanted “the United States to make just as large a contribution as is possible.”\footnote{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.} However, relief was contingent upon the abilities of the Red Cross and the Friends Committee to raise money and buy government commodity surpluses.\footnote{Triana, \textit{American Diplomacy}, 198-99.} Throughout the summer of 1938, the State Department, particularly Jay Pierrepont Moffat, Chief of the Western European Division, and Sumner Welles, cooperated with the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation to organize sending surplus barrels of flour with the Red Cross’ and other material aid, including coffee from Brazil to Spain.\footnote{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.} The Government was “ready to give the Red Cross 500,000 bushels of wheat” in addition to 250,000 barrels of flour to be distributed by the American Friends Service Committee to the “starving refugees in Spain.”\footnote{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.} The Maritime Commission would permit the Red Cross to utilize unused cargo space free of charge to transport the wheat and any other lack of space would be “overcome by Spain sending chartered ships under foreign flags to our ports to get the wheat.”\footnote{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.} The aid would likely be distributed on Loyalist territory, due to the ties between the aid organizations and the Loyalists.

\footnotetext{132}{Tierney, "Franklin D. Roosevelt," 311.}
\footnotetext{133}{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.}
\footnotetext{134}{Triana, \textit{American Diplomacy}, 198-99.}
\footnotetext{135}{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.}
\footnotetext{136}{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.}
\footnotetext{137}{Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ambassador Claude Bowers, December 6, 1938; Folder: OF 422 - Government of Spain 1933-1939; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Official File, Part 1: OF 1-500, 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.}
Roosevelt became personally involved because both the State Department and Roosevelt realized that without government assistance the Red Cross did not have the money to purchase the surplus from the Surplus Commodities Corporation. In addition, the White House had little desire to support the fundraising of Ernst Toller, a German exile who had traveled to across Europe attempting to form a joint international aid commission. Toller attempted to meet with Roosevelt on numerous occasions to provide him with confidential letters from the British, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish governments, from trade unions, and from writers and painters such as H.G. Wells and Pablo Picasso expressing their support for a relief commission. Toller pleaded with Roosevelt to aid the civilian population by describing to the President the “misery” he saw in Spain: “the mortality rate of children is growing rapidly...the situation of women, especially of expectant and nursing mothers, is appalling, not to speak of the situation of sick and old people who lack the most simple medical supplies.” Roosevelt, however personally affected by Toller’s pleas and descriptions of the situation in Spain, deferred Toller to the State Department. The Department believed Toller possessed blatant political motives for supporting the Spanish government that would be unacceptable to the American public, particularly Catholics. Despite Eleanor’s Roosevelt’s sympathy to Toller’s cause, the State Department dismissed Toller on the grounds that he had been an active communist in Germany and exiled by the Nazi party for his politics and modernist plays. However, there were emerging U.S. relief

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plans that did not involve Toller. As for the passionate German exile, he was heartbroken after Franco’s capture of Spain and bankrupt from donating to help Spanish refugees. He committed suicide after laying out pictures on his desk of Spanish children who had been killed by Nationalist bombings.

To meet the needs of the starving Spanish population, Roosevelt personally created the Committee for Impartial Civilian Relief, which attempted to raise money from concerned and prominent citizens in order to support the processing and shipment of 600,000 barrels of flour by the Red Cross. Roosevelt attempted to preemptively appease Catholic protest by appointing a Catholic, George MacDonald, to head the ten-person committee. George MacDonald, a papal Marquis and a “leading Catholic layman” responded to a public letter from Roosevelt, crafted for favorable public reception. He stated, “you have given me an opportunity to perform a service in behalf of those in Spain whose intense suffering has stirred the sympathies of people everywhere. I accept wholeheartedly this humanitarian task.” Despite the appointment of a Catholic, the committee would not survive Catholic protests.

The aid plans met swift Catholic condemnation. The New York Times reported that Reverend Francis X. Talbot contacted Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull in protest against the shipment of foodstuff, clothing, and medical supplies to Spain aboard the Erica Reed. He then claimed that, for “propaganda purposes,” the “Erica Reed may be sunk by its masters or by the Loyalists with the guilt falsely placed on Franco and the Nationalists.” A Protestant reverend and writer accused Talbot of attempting to provide an alibi to Franco to sink the ship

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and that the “Catholic hierarchy is perhaps carrying its partisanship of General Franco, and ipso-facto of the Roman-berlin axis, a little too far when it asks the American government to abandon the right of freedom of seas in favor of its friends.”\textsuperscript{146} In the eyes of Catholics, the relief aid was not humanitarian but rather, a scheme to maintain the defense of the Spanish government whose mostly urban territories were ravaged by famine. On the last day of December, \textit{America} published a commentary that denounced the relief plan and claimed that the commodities would be “distributed wholly on the Loyalist side” in a “shrouded attempt to strengthen the Loyalist position.” It called on its readers to demand answers from the State Department on the extent of distribution to Loyalist territory or Franco-held territory in previous circumstances.\textsuperscript{147} The Catholic press condemned this aid and Catholic pressure ultimately forced Roosevelt and his aid organization to abandon their fundraising activities.

As in the case of the Basque resettlement and the fundraising activities of the NAC in Congress, the Catholic pressure was a steadfast obstacle that prevented government aid to Spain, particularly any that would have aided the Spanish government’s fight against the rebellion. With the war ending and Franco threatening to take Madrid, the Committee for Impartial Civilian Relief dissolved in February 1939, raised only $50,000 despite the desired $120,000 per month.\textsuperscript{148} Catholic schools had refused to support the Junior Red Cross for its connection with the Committee. In addition, criticism had continued that the plan was devised to support the Loyalists, especially since MacDonald admitted that the “committee will divide its supplies geographically, according to need, and reports show the most suffering at present in the Loyalist

\textsuperscript{146} “Dr. Shipler Defends Shipment to Spain,” \textit{New York Times} (New York, NY), November 13, 1938.
\textsuperscript{147} “Comment,” \textit{America} (New York, NY), December 31, 1938.
\textsuperscript{148} Traina, \textit{American Diplomacy}, 200-1.
Eventually Catholic pressure forced MacDonald to neglect his duties of fundraising and organizing the destinations of the money and resign. The head of the Red Cross, Norman Davis, wrote that “apparently pressure from radical Catholics has about driven MacDonald crazy, and he, in turn, is about to make the Friends crazy.” MacDonald himself refused to contribute personally to the fundraising, possibly because he realized the futility of the organization, and, upon resigning in February, did not appoint a replacement. The Committee represented a failure for both the humanitarian aid efforts of the Red Cross and Friends Committee and of the personal concern of Roosevelt.

As will be seen, this battle over the extent of American involvement in Spain culminated in the debate over whether or not to repeal the arms embargo on Spain. Catholics, throughout 1938 and in the early months of 1939, were “increasingly concerned about the American Government’s desire to immerse itself in the Spanish Civil War, to aid the Communist-controlled Loyalist Government, with wheat through the Committee for Impartial Civilian Relief or with munitions and airplanes through lifting the Spanish embargo.” In regard to these issues, Catholic political lobbying pressured the United States against providing aid to both the suffering civilians throughout Spain and to the Loyalists fighting against the military and fascist forces of Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini.

2.5 Catholics Against Embargo Repeal

The greatest issue of the war was the arms embargo on Spain. For Catholics, it served as the issue that represented America’s relationship to Spain: repeal would signal intended support for

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the Spanish government while preservation of the embargo would signal non-intervention in a war that Franco was clearly winning. After the embargo’s creation in January 1937, pressure against it grew until fever pitch in 1938, when it was clear that the Loyalists desperately needed international aid against the German and Italian backed Nationalist forces. In the case of the embargo, Catholics adamantly pressured the government against involvement.

The State Department considered the repeal of the arms embargo in May 1938. Hull opposed any consideration of changing the American policy on Spain but there were those in the department, including former ambassador to Germany William E. Dodd and even isolationist senator Gerald P. Nye, that supported congressional repeal. In a move of extreme connivance, Hull likely leaked the State Department’s discussion of repeal to the New York Times, anticipating a neutrality backlash, especially from Catholics, that would challenge the repeal. Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, also supported the “planned leak” hypothesis. Ickes reported that on May 9th, roughly a week after the Nye Resolution and the inundation of Congress with letters from Americans concerned with repeal, Roosevelt met with members of Congress and expressed concern that “the embargo would mean the loss of every Catholic vote next fall and that the Democratic members of Congress were jittery about it and didn’t want it done.” Ickes went on to say that “this proves what so many people have been saying, namely that the Catholic minorities in Great Britain and America have been dictating the international policy with respect to Spain.” In addition, an article in The Nation speculated that Cardinal

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151 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s, 50.
153 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s, 64.
155 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s, 67.
Mundelein and Catholic congressmen James Farley were behind Roosevelt’s refusal to consider repeal. The government knew well, and in the case of the State Department used the knowledge to its advantage, that repeal of the arms embargo would cause an uproar from Catholics.

Catholics were not entirely to blame for the Roosevelt administration and Congress’ failure to repeal the embargo. The logistics of such a move also worried the State Department because tension grew on the European continent and Franco already controlled most of Spain. Furthermore, there were non-Catholic Americans who denounced the Spanish government for its perceived communism or who supported Franco’s military and fascism. However, these Americans often operated through Catholic networks and events to express their opposition to lifting the embargo.

Catholics, then, were the most vocal opposition to any change in the non-involvement policy. The May embargo repeal movement lost steam as Catholics denounced the effort as an alignment with communism. A professor of History at Catholic University of America, Joseph Code, gave an address against the embargo. He accused Americans of misguided Loyalist support. “If the American people knew the real facts of the Spanish leftist propaganda set up in this country,” Dr. Code asserted, “they would demand of Congress and the State Department not the repeal of the Neutrality Act, allegedly to help the Spanish Leftists, but the recall to Madrid of Professor Fernando de los Rios, Spanish Leftist Ambassador and his whole crew of propagandists.” These targeted “propagandists” included Juan Negrín, Spanish prime minister, who gave a radio speech to an enormous gathering at Madison Square Garden asking specifically for American

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aid. While pro-Loyalist speeches like Negrin’s attempted to convince America’s populace to support the Spanish government, men like Francis X. Talbot, S.J. ensured that the State Department continued to receive letters against embargo repeal. Roosevelt received a petition signed by sixty-five concerned Americans, Catholics, businessmen, and Spanish ex-patriots who opposed lifting the embargo. Despite that much of the government personally supported repeal, the pressure against repeal caused deadlock on the issue.

Following the failure of the repeal effort among pro-Loyalists in May 1938, the issue was again raised in Congress in January 1939. By this time, it had become clear that a Franco victory was almost guaranteed if the Loyalists did not receive support from the international community. Catholic organizations were uncompromising on the embargo. The National Council of Catholic Men formed the Keep the Spanish Embargo Committee. The Committee was a response to the “Lift the Embargo” movement led by NAC. The NAC’s concern with fighting fascism was used against them by the Committee in that they argued that such blatant support of the Spanish government clearly was not neutral. The Committee referred to itself as a “counter-pressure group” reacting against other pro-Loyalist pressure groups. At a Committee rally in Washington D.C. on January 10, the secretary of the Committee and leader of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Edward J. Heffron, stated “had our people and their elected representatives in Congress not been exposed to a campaign of pressure to repeal the arms embargo against Spain, there would have been no reason for forming this committee.”

According to the Catholic speakers at the rally, the aid organizations were either aligned with communism or the direct

159 Negrin Plea Heard At Big Rally Here, New York Times (New York, NY), June 10, 1938
agencies of Stalin. Communism itself was related to a cancer that destroys nations domestically. Loyalist aid agents were compared to boxers that tell their opponents that their shoe is untied and then punch them as they look down.

Msgr. Martin J Sheen, a well-respected Catholic radio voice, argued in his Committee speech that supporters of the Loyalists only spoke of the threat of Hitler and Mussolini to the exclusion of Stalin and that they disregard the aid of the Soviet Union to the government when discussing German and Italian aid. While this accusation was true, Sheen also made terribly false predictions of the consequences of a Nationalist victory. He failed, like many Americans, to realize the true threat of Germany and Italy and believed that embargo would prevent dictatorship in Spain, not enable decades of Francoist rule.\(^{163}\) Despite the fact that Sheen opened his speech denying that he would use it in defense of the Nationalists, he spent considerable time justifying the military uprising as a necessary and understandable reaction against religious persecution akin to U.S. revolution against Britain and Jewish protests to Nazism. He argued that denouncing the Nationalists was allegorical to a home owner resisting a robber, calling the police, and being arrested himself for impeding the liberty of the robber. However, the opposite was true: the Nationalists were robbing government from the elected government that desperately required support, only to be denied that aid by men like Sheen who helped prevent America’s involvement.

The Committee took direct aim at Congress. Committee petitions called for Congress to preserve the Neutrality Act of May 1937 that identified civil conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War, as threats to the United States. In order to maintain “an attitude of genuine neutrality” the government “must continue not to take sides” and “withhold munitions from both parties to the

\(^{163}\) Ibid, 45-7.
conflict.” If Congress allowed the sale of arms it would amount to the “condonation of savagery” of the “vilest kind of oppression and persecution” of Catholics.164 The Committee told Congress that they opposed lifting the embargo “(1) because to do so by executive act would be against the present laws of the United States; (2) because it would be an unneutral act; and (3) because it would be dangerous to the peace and security of the United States.” Throughout the country, worried Catholics sent petitions to Congress. According to telegraph company estimates, in a single day in January, over 100,000 petitions were sent to the White House urging Congress to retain the arms embargo.165

Facing various Catholic and non-Catholic opponents, supporters in Congress dropped discussion of repeal once again. Issues other than Catholic “counter-pressure” also prevented the appeal including that, by this time, Nationalist victory seemed inevitable. However, reflecting on his father’s Spanish Civil War policy, James Roosevelt, speculated during an interview that “although in their hearts and emotionally I am sure both my parents’ sympathy was with the Republican government in Spain...the President most certainly was concerned with the Catholic-American community and tendency to vote en bloc.”166 Whether influenced more by domestic or international pressure, Roosevelt acknowledged that his administration had made a “grave mistake” in maintaining the arms embargo. Roosevelt reflected on the Spanish Civil War, stating “the policy we should have adopted was to forbid the transportation of munitions of war in American bottoms. This could have been done and Loyalist Spain would still have been able to come to us for what she needed to fight for her life against Franco – to fight for her life and for

164 Charge Loyalists Persecute Church, New York Times (New York, NY), December 31, 1938.
166 Kanawada, Franklin D. Roosevelt's, 69.
the lives of some of the rest of us as well, as events will very likely prove."\(^{167}\) Catholic pressure paralyzed the Roosevelt and the American government from repeal the arms embargo.

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Chapter III: American Catholics and Public Controversies Over Loyalist Support

In addition to pressuring the U.S. government against involvement, American Catholics also protested and disrupted forms of American public support for the Loyalists. The Catholic press, the clerical hierarchy, and various Catholic organizations objected to pro-Loyalist films, aid organizations, and the speeches given across the U.S. by Spanish supporters of the Republican government. Catholics operated on multiple fronts to prevent both the government and the American public from aiding the Loyalists. This final chapter discusses the Spanish Catholic delegates hosted by the North American Committee To Aid Spanish Democracy (NAC). The NAC publicized the ideas of the Spanish government-supported delegates in America as a way of addressing concerns over the persecution of Catholics. However, the delegates faced significant backlash from stalwart American Catholics, who declared the delegates apostates and disrupted their speaking tours.

3.1 The NAC and Pro-Loyalist Films

Catholics were outraged by the public fundraising and cultural awareness initiatives of the NAC, which merged with the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy in January 1938 to form a joint coalition. The NAC alone raised four times as much ($805,799) than the Catholic press-led American Committee for Spanish Relief.\(^{168}\) The NAC insisted that neither itself, due to its associations with American socialist groups, nor the Spanish government, were anti-Catholic. It also spearheaded efforts to repeal the arms embargo. The NAC appealed directly to Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and the chairmen of the Senate and House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committees regarding the need to support the Spanish government. Its efforts were supported by

\(^{168}\) Smith, *American Relief*, 129.
the likes of Eleanor Roosevelt, John Dewey, and Frank P. Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.\textsuperscript{169}

When the NAC was not raising money at rallies or petitioning the government to repeal the embargo, it attempted to convince the American populace of the dangers of allowing Spain to fall to fascism. According to Eric R. Smith, author of \textit{American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War}, the organization engaged in “cultural efforts.” The purpose of these efforts, according to one NAC volunteer, was “to distribute literature about Spain, stimulate the collection of funds, arouse public sentiment for Loyalist Spain, and to show those who had already contributed how their money was being utilized.”\textsuperscript{170} This pursuit included distributing pamphlets geared towards changing American Catholic opinion, showcasing ambulances to be donated to the Loyalists, organizing music and film exhibitions, and hosting Loyalist Spaniards on speaking tours.

The NAC also supported and even distributed films that depicted the threat of fascism in Spain. Four films were released in 1937 that were considered pro-Loyalist: “Spain in Flames, “The Spanish Earth,” “Heart of Spain,” and “Defense of Madrid.” “Heart of Spain” was directed by Hebert Kline and was used as Popular Front propaganda. In the film, medics provide aid on the front line of Spain, offering care to those wounded by Nationalists and describe the International Brigades as fighters “for the idea of democracy, to make Madrid the tomb of fascism.” At NAC screenings, Congressmen introduced the “Heart of Spain.” In a similar vein, “The Spanish Earth,” narrated by both Orson Welles and written by Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, depicted land redistribution and the construction of an irrigation system to provide water to besieged Madrid. Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and the first lady reportedly

\textsuperscript{170} Smith, \textit{American Relief}, 51-52.
commented on the consolidation of land by a small percentage of landholders and the Church—
“that should be brought out more explicitly.”  

Throughout 1937 and 1938, Catholics coordinated local boycotts against the films and the theatres presenting the films. Local Catholic committees across New England banned or protested the showing of the films on the grounds that they were “reeking with communistic propaganda” and would “incite riot and class hatred.”  

Although “Heart of Spain” and “The Spanish Earth,” were successful when screened at pro-Loyalist fundraising rallies, neither achieved mass acclaim or distribution. The films often met opposition from local governments and theatres for their political provocation, preventing both from reaching a widespread audience. Only those already engaged with the NAC cause were likely to see these films, rendering futile attempts to gain public support or sway Catholic opinion through cinema.

When the subtly pro-Loyalist film “Blockade,” a spy story set in Spain, was released in July 1938, Catholics and Francoists in both Spain and in the United States immediately “denounced the film as ‘Marxist propaganda’” and warned that it would “‘stir up prejudice, bad feeling and contention among many groups of people.’”  

After Catholic groups, including the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic War veterans, failed to prevent the film’s screening at the Radio City Music Hall in New York, they interrupted screenings by picketing the theater.  

Outside a theater in Queens, one hundred picketers stood “attempting to persuade persons from entering the house on the grounds that the anti-war film [was] ‘communistic propaganda.’” This protest reached a tipping point when Spanish-Americans from Queens drove an ambulance, which they had purchased to send to the Loyalists in Spain, to the theater to counter anti-Loyalist picketers

171 Ibid, 55.
and denounce “fascist bombings.” Catholics attempted to deflate the ambulance tires, and protesters on both sides began to physically engage each other before being separated by police. Despite the film’s box office success, protests successfully reduced the dissemination of the film in some areas and among theaters that capitulated to Catholic outrage. The Boston City Council, for example, unanimously voted to ban “Blockade” for its “communistic” nature at the behest of the Massachusetts State Council of the Knights of Columbus and a coalition of fifty Catholic organizations.

The disruption of the films distribution paralleled the opposition shown towards issues like the Basque resettlement plan and the arms embargo. Like the government, popular media was not safe from Catholic condemnation. Unlike the Roosevelt administration, however, the NAC attempted to address the concerns of Catholics.

3.2 Exceptions to the Rule: The Viewpoints of the NAC Catholic Delegates

The majority of American Catholics opposed these films and delegates because of the greater concern with communistic persecution in Spain. In turn, the NAC attempted to inform the American public of the Spanish government’s liberal position on public worship. The NAC’s narrative was based on the reforms carried out by the Spanish government. The persecution that erupted in the early months of war, which killed thousands of clergy and lay Catholics, under both religious and political pretexts, had largely ceased. By October 1936, delegates of the Spanish Government to the United States “asserted that the Spanish Government maintained absolute respect toward the Catholic Church” and “admitted that priests had been shot by the Loyalists, but said that many of these had fought with the Rebels” in an attempt to convince the

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American public of the respect for religious liberty and right to hold religious services in Loyalist territory.\textsuperscript{176} By May 1937, the openly Catholic Basque Minister of Justice, Manuel de Irujo y Ollo, initiated a program in the Spanish Government under Prime Minister Juan Negrín to reestablish the constitutional protection of all religious worship; this program also released hundreds of religious prisoners from captivity that had been accused, but not proven, to have committed acts of rebellion against the Second Republic.\textsuperscript{177} A government pamphlet issued by the Subsecretaria de Propaganda established the Republican government’s position on a number of issues, from land reform to regional autonomy to religious freedom. The inclusion of the stipulation that “the Spanish state will guarantee the fulfillment of the rights of citizens in civil and social life, the freedom of conscience and will ensure the free exercise of religious beliefs and practices.”\textsuperscript{178} Through such publications, Negrín and Irujo attempted to rectify not only the actual political and religious situation in Spain, but also the international perspective, including in America, of religious persecution in order to garner international support for the Loyalists.

Roosevelt and eventually the American public were aware of the religious situation in Spain, that persecution had ended and that the government wished to re-establish religious services and festivals. Claude Bowers, American ambassador to Loyalist Spain, wrote Roosevelt that “the Vatican has been invited to send a Nuncio to Barcelona to preside over the reopening of churches. Mass is said in Barcelona today. No priest has been killed in Government Spain for two years.” Ironically, Bowers explained to Roosevelt, Franco was more responsible for the

\textsuperscript{176} “3 Leftists Arrive to Aid Madrid Case,” \textit{New York Times} (New York, NY), October 20, 1936.
\textsuperscript{177} Manuel de Irujo, \textit{Un vasco en el ministerio de Justicia} (Memorias 2), \textit{La cuestión religiosa, primera parte} (Ekin, Buenos Aires, 1978), pp. 136-137, doc. núm. 12.
\textsuperscript{178} España Ministerio de Estado Subsecretaría de Propaganda Delegación de Madrid, \textit{El Gobierno de la República declara cuales son sus fines de guerra para conocimiento de sus compatriotas y noticia del mundo} (la Subsecretaría, 1938). - in Biblioteca Nacional de España.
\textsuperscript{178} Leocadio Lobo, \textit{Primate and Priest} (n.p.: Spanish Embassy, 1937), 2 in Biblioteca Nacional de España Translated by the Author.
persecution of Catholics. “In Franco Spain sixteen Basque priests have been shot on orders. And near Valladolid there is a concentration camp with more than one hundred Basque priests. These are facts,” Bowers wrote, urging Roosevelt to prevent a fascist victory in Spain.\textsuperscript{179}

Although the persecution of public worship effectively ended, the Commissariat for Worship, Irujo’s program for reform, was unsuccessful in changing the situation in Spain or the international perception of the Loyalist religious persecution. It was challenged by both those who feared that opening churches and holding masses would only intensify violence towards the Church and radicals who opposed religious opening.\textsuperscript{180} By the time the Republican clergy and government moved to open the churches in Loyalist territory, Franco was at Barcelona’s doorstep—he captured it on 26 January 1939.

In order to appeal to Americans, both non-Catholic and Catholic, and inform them of the reality of the situation in Spain, the NAC conducted its fundraising activities through Spanish Catholic representatives from Spain to dispel the myths that all Spanish Catholics supported Franco and that religious persecution had lasted beyond the first months of war. The delegates included priests Luis Sarasola and Leocadio Lobo, as well as Catholic writer Jose Bergamin. These Spanish Catholic NAC delegates challenged the Catholic hierarchy in Spain through their explicitly pro-Loyalist opinions and support of the NAC’s activities. But these representatives had not lost their faith—they simply did not believe that the Spanish Civil War was a crusade or “Holy War” in which Catholics were compelled to side with the Nationalists. In their eyes, the acts of the Second Spanish Republic had never been religiously unjust. In fact, the real religious injustice, as informed by the racial prejudice of many contemporary Spaniards, was the infamous

\textsuperscript{179} Ambassador Claude Bowers to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, November 21, 1938; Box 50 – Spain, 1938; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President’s Secretary's File (PSF), 1933-1945; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

\textsuperscript{180} Raguer Suñer and Howson, \textit{Gunpowder and Incense}, 280-2.
persecution of Spaniards by the “invading” Muslim Moroccans in Franco’s army. To these delegates, the Spanish Civil War was a class war between the rich and the poor and a conflict between democracy and totalitarianism. It had been started “by men who call themselves Catholics and who are of doubtful public morality; men who in their shady businesses and capitalist exploitations have always forgotten the social teachings of the Church.”

The Catholic dissenters, whether working with the Loyalists in Spain or on speaking tours with the NAC campaigns, denounced the Nationalists. They rejected the notion that Nationalists had “taken up the sword...in the name of the whole Church of Spain.” Instead, these Republican priests condemned the Nationalists for rebelling against a legitimately elected government, allying with Hitler and Mussolini, falsely accusing the Soviet Union of orchestrating atheism in Spain, and denying the atrocities committed by Franco’s forces. They also criticized the friendly relationship between the military rebellion and the fascist Falange movement. When the delegates spoke in the U.S., they asserted that the government permitted religious liberty and detailed the repression of religious Loyalists by the Nationalists. José Bergamin, editor of the Spanish, Catholic publication *Cruz y Raya*, claimed that not only had persecution of Catholics by any Loyalists, including the anarchists, been abrogated, but that “14,000 Catholic priests and nuns were holding or attending regular masses in Loyalist territory, openly and with full protection of the government.” Bergamin detailed Francoist repression of the religious Basques, who had sided with the Republican government, while Lobo denounced the victims of the Nationalist army and German bombing campaigns, including “women and

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183 Ibid.
children, militiamen, sons of Spain.” Each of the representatives also questioned the ecclesiastical authority of the Church. For example, Lobo recognized the authority of his superior, the Bishop of Toledo. However, Lobo implored the Bishop and all Spanish Catholics against creating and waging war since, in Lobo’s words, “I believe that as Disciples of the God on Calvary we cannot take part in this struggle, nor speak of as ‘our war’ this terrible scourge on Spain, which is ravaging our cities and piling up mounds of victims.” According to Lobo, the Bishop was not “infallible” and “had let fall the pastoral staff to take up the warrior’s sword.” The Bishop had sided with the Nationalists, making religion subservient to totalitarianism. The source of the Spanish people’s animosity toward the Church, including even the Loyalist persecution of clergy in the first months of war, was the result of the failure of the Church for centuries to protect the meekest of society. The Church had cooperated with the large landholders “which drew millions in rents from their country estates” and industrialists who dominated cities like Madrid, Sevilla, and Barcelona. Catholics then were justified by the political failures of the Church, forgetting the people and siding with an illegitimate military rebellion and “Capitalism”, to support the Spanish Government and Loyalist factions.

In addition to hosting these delegates, the NAC publicized their views by distributing pamphlets containing their positions, including “Catholics Speak for Spain,” and “Catholics and the Civil War in Spain.” The pamphlets denounced fascism and persuaded Americans to support the Spanish government. For example, “Catholics Speak for Spain” was published in July 1937, only months after the bombing of civilians by the German Condor Legion in the towns of Guernica and Durango in the Spanish Basque country. The booklet attempted to rouse sentiment

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185 Ibid.
186 Leocadio Lobo, Primate and Priest (n.p.: Spanish Embassy, 1937), 8-10 - in Biblioteca Nacional de España
187 Ibid.
against Nazi and Nationalist cooperation. It also hoped to capitalize on the international pro-
Loyalism that ensued after a number of American and British journalists reported on Guernica.
The NAC quoted a number of Basque priests, including a parish priest of the Church of Santa
Maria in Guernica, who accused German airplanes of destroying churches and convents while
killing not only innocent civilians, but specifically Catholic parishioners who were hearing mass
as bombs began to rain down.\textsuperscript{188} The booklet also included an essay by Bergamín and a radio
broadcast from Lobo. Both explained that they, as all Catholics in Spain and across the world
should, sided with the Loyalists because the “true Catholic is on the side of the people.” Despite
that the clergy of Spain was viewed as the friend of “money, power, domination, inhumanity,
capitalism, fascism,” true Catholics were opposed to the Fascism as “essentially anti-Christian.”
Lobo explicitly denounced the Nationalists, albeit with an anti-Islamic bias, when he wrote that
the Nationalist “shall not pass, for neither reason nor justice is with them, for they have
cofounded things utterly opposed: Christ and Mahomet, violence and religion, fascism and
Spain.”\textsuperscript{189} According to the NAC, the Spanish government enthusiastically embraced these “true
Catholics,” who realized that that the Nationalists were the ones opposed to true Christian
principles.

The NAC realized that these Catholics and their Loyalist sympathies, including those of
Sarasola, Bergamín, O’Flanagan, and Lobo, could be used as part of concerted effort to reach out
to American Catholics and change their notion of Spanish persecution. The NAC, like many of
the pro-Loyalist members of Congress and Roosevelt’s friends and family, believed that the
Catholic establishment was preventing the United States from aiding the Loyalists. The NAC
needed to persuade Catholics that not only did the Spanish government protect religious freedom

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{“Catholics Speak for Spain,” North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy,” 1937.}
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid. 16-17.
of conscience and practice, but also hoped to depict a Spain in which devout Catholics supported
the Loyalists against the fascism of the soon to be axis powers, against the feudal capitalism of
the large agricultural landholders reacting to the threat of land reform, and against illegitimate
military usurpation of power.

3.3 No Exceptions: Catholics Boycott and Block the Delegates

Despite the NAC’s hope to capitalize on the international pro-Loyalist sentiment galvanized
by, for example, Guernica and use of these Catholic delegates, Catholics remained stalwartly
against any form of governmental or public aid for the Loyalists. Catholics paid little attention to
Negrín’s and Irujo’s reform efforts to promote religious freedom. Despite the shifting opinion of
the American populace toward the Loyalist side as the war progressed, Catholics protested not
only the NAC’s support of the Republican government but also its use of Spanish priests,
prominent European Catholics, and the publication of material aimed specifically at Catholics in
attempt to address reduce their opposition to any support for the Loyalists. There were four NAC
fundraising tours that included four Spanish Catholic representatives, who spoke to the American
public from a distinctly Catholic yet pro-Loyalist position: that of Friar Luis Sarasola in October-
November 1936, the spring 1937 tour of radical Irish priest Michael O’Flanagan of the Sinn Fein
party, the tour of Catholic writer José Bergamin in Spring 1938, and a tour in the final months of
war that included Madrileño diocesan priest Leocadio Lobo. Like the Catholic protests directed
toward the government regarding the retention of the embargo, the Catholic animosity shown the
delegates demonstrated the concern Catholic’s had for pro-Loyalist activities within the
American public. The Catholic establishment refused to alter their position calling for non-

involvement. In the case of each of the delegates, Catholics disrupted speeches proscribed auditoriums from use, and denounced delegated as apostates who transgressed the authority of their Bishops in Spain and the Pope in Rome.

Luis Sarasola arrived on October 19, 1936 in the first delegation of speakers to be hosted by the NAC. The delegation included the wife of the Spanish ambassador to Sweden, a minister of government, and Sarasola, “a Catholic historian and theologian...said to be an outstanding authority on the life of St. Francis of Assisi.”191 This delegation planned to tour the country after headlining mass rallies at Madison Square Garden and in Washington D.C. They discussed the persecution of Catholics under both the Loyalists and Nationalists, but stressed that “the Spanish Republic ‘was born without any prejudice against the Church’ and in fact, had fostered greater tolerance.”192 Sarasola’s tour was the first of the delegate speaking tours and the NAC was optimistic both about its reception and the eventual victory of the Loyalists.

Trouble started for the delegation, however, after arriving in Canada for a short tour. Catholic condemnation was not limited to the United States. In addition to French-Canadian students protesting the delegation and the Canadian Broadcasting Committee outright refusing to air their speeches, the Canadian archbishop sent “a warning to Roman Catholics to stay away from the meeting” in Montreal. The Archbishop accused Sarasola of defying the Vatican’s position on the civil war by supporting the Loyalists. The delegation was thus forced to return to New York ahead of schedule for their Madison Square Garden rally.193

Upon returning to the United States, Sarasola experienced pressure from the American Catholic establishment similar to the reaction in Canada. His delegation spoke at the Garden in

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192 Ibid.
front of 19,000 people. Sarasola offered solidarity to the Basque Catholics and stated: “we are struggling to maintain the legal government of the nation because this is the duty of all citizens and all Catholics.” The Friar’s statement demonstrated that the NAC was targeting American Catholics in order to reduce Catholic opposition to their activities and to Loyalist aid in general. Outside the arena, however, Catholics distributed handbills attacking Sarasola for being a suspended priest while police stood on duty to prevent disorder.\(^{194}\) Indeed due to his pro-Loyalist activities in Spain, a letter from Rome had decreed that “Sarasola is an apostate from the order and church. He is incapable of exercising any function.” Catholics in America in turn delegitimized Sarasola’s authority and speeches. Peter Duffy, a Franciscan friar of New York who was familiar with the events surrounding Sarasola in Madrid, declared that he was a Communist agent of the Spanish government. Sarasola had reportedly been arrested by the Loyalist government and then released, escaping execution, on the condition that he propagandize for the Spanish government. The Catholic establishment’s proof was that Sarasola had failed to contact diocesan authorities in the United States to request permission to discuss religious matters. They also cited Sarasola’s refusal to give private interviews, which they asserted was evidence that he was effectively prisoner to the delegation. American Catholics could not support either an apostate or communist. Despite that Sarasola adamantly denied being an apostate, Catholics did not stop from vehemently denouncing his involvement in NAC events. Catholic radio stations denounced Sarasola, while a professor in Pittsburgh, B.J. Hovde, was attacked for being a member of the NAC local committee that sponsored Sarasola.\(^{195}\) A local pastor asked Pittsburgh’s mayor to no longer consider Hovde for the Director of Public welfare position because Catholics should not “be left to the mercy of men who...lend the support of their


name and their influence to those who have blotted out their church." Hovde apologized for his involvement and denounced the NAC delegation.\(^{196}\) The Hovde incident demonstrates the extent to which Catholics were willing to challenge pro-Loyalist public fundraising.

The Hovde incident demonstrates the extent to which Catholics were willing to challenge pro-Loyalist public fundraising. The same censure that had greeted Sarasola at Madison Square Garden greeted Catholic writer Bergamín in April 1938. Arriving in New York, a group of priests and Catholic editors hosted him for dinner out of curiosity for his intellectual reputation and his justifications for supporting the Spanish government. This dinner sparked both controversy surrounding his presence in the United States and backlash against his position. When Bergamín gave a talk to high school and college teachers, “the meeting was enlivened by verbal clashes between Loyalist and rebel sympathizers."\(^{197}\) Catholics at the meeting denounced it as “another phase of Red propaganda” and questioned why Bergamín had been hosted for dinner by Catholic priests in New York. Not even the American clergy was safe from its own brethren and Catholic groups.

The host of that dinner, Father George Ford, was forced to defend his actions, explaining that he had not known Bergamín would tour the country. Under pressure from the Catholic establishment, yet another NAC delegate was rebuked by American Catholics, including those that had hosted him for dinner just days earlier. The NAC, a respected Catholic intellectual, and even an American priest had all faced Catholic backlash due to their involvement with efforts to materially and vocally support the Loyalists.

The final example of protests against the NAC’s Catholic outreach efforts concerns other Loyalist priests. Michael O’Flanagan, an Irish priest, and Leocadio Lobo, a Spanish priest, could not escape the same denunciations of apostasy and captive propagandists faced by Luis Sarasola.


O’Flanagan visited the United States twice, in spring 1937 and summer 1938, while Leocadio Lobo arrived in February 1939 and stayed in exile from Spain for the remainder of his life. Although the priests had indeed been declared apostates, they were not captive propagandists by any means. O’Flanagan was a dedicated radical republican who had served as the president of the left-wing Irish nationalist party Sinn Féin. He had been suspended from his priestly duties for his political involvement in Ireland, but continued to give speeches in hopes of “reach[ing] people [in the U.S.] who have heard but one side of the Spanish war—that of the Insurgent forces.” In a speech for a NAC event at Madison Square Garden that assuredly angered the Catholic hierarchy in the U.S. and beyond, O’Flanagan declared that, as a Catholic, he could say to other “Catholics who have come to listen to me tonight, you are not bound to follow the leadership of your pastor in political affairs.” He rejected pastors who attempted to dictate the politics of their congregation, clerical hierarchies who attempted to determine the politics of their nations, and the supposed infallibility of the Pope. Catholic protest was equally vehement. Due to the apostate status, groups like the Women’s Auxiliary of the International Catholic Truth Society distributed handbills against O’Flanagen and the NAC delegation during its event. Catholic groups also forced town facilities (i.e., in Youngstown and St. Louis) to deny O’Flanagan access to venues to deliver speeches. Finally, and as in the case of the NAC and Hovde, the Archbishop of St. Louis forced the resignation of a professor of St. Louis University for his sponsorship of the NAC.

While O’Flanagan never admitted to being an apostate, Leocadio Lobo did. Despite the secular policies of the Second Spanish Republic that limited the influence of the Church after its

proclamation in 1931, Lobo had always supported the liberal ideas of the Republican government.\textsuperscript{201} When civil war erupted, followed by the subsequent months of religious persecution, Lobo maintained his loyalty to the government under his own volition. As early as September 20, 1936, he gave a speech by radio in which he stated that “I am a Catholic and a Spaniard. I maintain relations with the Holy See, and my Bishop” but that he also supported the people and government of Spain who “cry out that the rebels shall not pass.”\textsuperscript{202} Lobo defended the people who had died for Republican Spain as martyrs—those who had preferred to fight than live as slaves.\textsuperscript{203} Due to Lobo’s loyalty, the Spanish government asked him to go on tour across Europe to promote its cause, affirm its support for religious liberty, and accept a position under Manuel de Irujo in an attempt to promote the reopening of religious society in Loyalist territory. He consistently held mass throughout Loyalist territory, including a mass in August 1937 in Madrid that marked the first public mass given in Loyalist territory since the start of the war.\textsuperscript{204} Lobo’s presiding Bishop, who had fled to Nationalist Spain, eventually declared him an apostate for his Loyalist leanings.

As with Sarasola and O’Flanagan, the charges of “apostate” haunted Leocadio Lobo when arriving to the United States in the final days of war in 1939. Appealing for aid and understanding from Americans, including Catholics, he spoke at labor conferences in NYC in early March. The N.C.W.C., after being informed by the Spanish Archbishop and fervent Nationalist supporter Isidro Gomá y Tomas, sent a letter of warning to dioceses across the United States alerting them to Lobo’s planned speaking tour. The diocesan letter proclaimed Lobo

\textsuperscript{202} "Catholics Speak for Spain,” North American Committee To Aid Spanish Democracy, 1937.
\textsuperscript{203} “España Leal-Boletín Num. Ocho Del Comite Pro España Republicana-3 grandes católicos españoles os hablan: Ossorio y Gallardo, Leocadio Lobo, José Manuel Gallegos,” El Comité Internacional De Coordinación Y De Información Por La Ayuda A La España Republicana, October 1936. 13. in Biblioteca Nacional de España
“another Father O’Flanagan: a kindly misguided priest who is being exploited for propaganda purposes by the Medical Bureau of the North American Committee.” Lobo defended himself in a personal letter to the head of the N.C.W.C., Michael J. Ready, in which he said: “I am a Spaniard and...while international fascism continues to spill torrents of Spanish blood and is devastating Spain, no human force can impose silence upon me.”\footnote{José L. González Gullón, "Leocadio Lobo: The spanish civil war as viewed by a priest exiled in the united states of america," \textit{The Catholic Historical Review} 98, no. 4 (2012): 742.} The N.C.W.C. attempted to silence Lobo and, while his tour did go on until the end of the war, the Nationalist victory in Spain and the Catholic pressure in the United States ultimately rendered his and the NAC’s effort futile. Following pressure from the N.C.W.C. on the diocesan and secular press in Lobo’s tour spots, and exacerbated by a now apparently inevitable victory for Franco, the local media rarely covered Lobo’s tour. While Lobo originally denied his status as an apostate, he was finally convinced when Michael J. Ready sent him a confirmation from Archbishop Gomá. Lobo, as the Spanish government was preparing for surrender, succumbed to the pressure and gave up his priestly duties; he lived in the United States for the remainder of his life. His suspension was removed in 1946 when he retracted all pro-Loyalist declarations from the war, returning his authority to administer the seven sacraments. He served the Hispanic community of New York City as a chaplain and active community member until he died in 1958.\footnote{Ibid, 742-8.}

In a way, the NAC was a personal blessing for Lobo, who otherwise would have been persecuted under Franco if he had stayed in Spain. Hosting the Catholic delegates from Spain, in contrast, offered little blessing to the NAC. There had been twenty-six active Loyalist aid groups in the United States—the NAC was the largest. While it did raise more aid than any other organization and provided Spain with just under a million dollars in medical and monetary aid.
for foodstuffs, it also failed, along with the Soviet Union, Mexico and other allies of Spain, to stave off widespread starvation in Loyalist territory. The NAC also failed in its ultimate goal of placing enough pressure on Congress to repeal the arms embargo. Catholics targeting the NAC, preoccupied with its pro-Loyalist activities, relationship with communism, and the auspices of the Spanish Catholic delegates, greatly contributed to—if not guaranteed—the failure of NAC efforts.

The effects of Catholic pressure were not confined to the time period of the Spanish Civil War. After the war, members of the then disbanded NAC faced scrutiny from the Special House Committee on Un-American Activities, which investigated and indicted some NAC members for communist ties. During a HUAC committee meeting, a member of the Knights of Columbus exhibited the ties between Catholic pressure and anti-communism when he stated “as a secretary of the Detroit Council 305, of the Knights of Columbus, it has been part of my work to investigate un-American activity.” Overall, the NAC was subject to extensive Catholic organizing during the war and after—communist and non-communist NAC members were harassed, blacklisted, and even imprisoned due in part to their activities during the Spanish Civil War. The Catholic pressure on NAC Spanish-Catholic delegates evinces the Catholic concern with more than just legislation passed by Congress and the Roosevelt. Catholics also protested forms of popular support for the Loyalists, ensuring that aid efforts, even those attempting to appease Catholic concerns, met continued opposition.

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207 Smith, American Relief, 116.
Concluding Remarks

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, the Western allies were forced to confront how to address the conflict. Britain and France, along with most other European countries, decided to abstain from involvement and allow the civil conflict in Spain to take its course. Likewise, the United States adopted non-intervention in alignment with its European allies. It legislated non-involvement through the Spanish arms embargo and the Neutrality Act of 1937.

In addition to these international policy considerations, however, the Roosevelt administration also faced a large domestic constituency that favored non-involvement. While the majority of Americans gradually shifted towards a more engaged internationalism due to the growing tensions in Europe and the Pacific, Catholics remained hostile to any assistance to the Spanish government. Due to the concern with the Spanish government, the Catholic outcry became the resounding challenge to involvement efforts that would aid the Loyalists.

This thesis posits a number of fundamental arguments: that Catholics in particular were aware of and disturbed by the events in Spain because of their shared identity with Spanish Catholics; that, as a result, Catholics assumed a pivotal role in the domestic discussion regarding whether to aid the Spanish government; and that Catholics supported non-involvement through the press, government, and public spheres of American society. While Catholics alone did not dictate the U.S. foreign policy, they contributed to the constant pressure on the Roosevelt administration and public to stay out of the war. In addition, this thesis further argues that Catholic concerns with involvement did not insinuate sympathy with fascism but instead was the result of a misguided perception of Loyalist-driven Catholic persecution in Spain. American Catholics perceived the war as a defense of Catholicism. As this thesis asserts, however, the
persecution of Catholics was neither sanctioned by the Spanish government nor continued after the first months of war, when it indeed took place to an alarming extent.

The Catholic press, including Commonweal and America, evinced strong opposition to any alteration of the relationship between the United States and Spain. It assailed the generally pro-Loyalist secular press and even raised money for the Nationalists, demonstrating that Catholics were not inherently opposed to non-involvement but had specific concerns regarding the Loyalists that determined their position. The Open Letter Controversy, which pitted American clergymen in debate with Protestant ministers, epitomized the Catholic defense of non-involvement and support of the pro-National clergy in Spain. The controversy illustrates that Catholics led the battle against involvement in the public eye by challenging a variety of pro-Loyalist sectors of society, including Protestant ministers and the Roosevelt administration. The Mexican Religious Controversy set the precedent for the concern with the American government’s relationships with foreign governments accused of antagonizing Catholicism. Consequently, during the Spanish Civil War, organizations like the N.C.W.C. and politicians such as Congressman John McCormack led challenges to the Basque Resettlement Plan, the NAC’s fundraising activities within government administrations, and Roosevelt’s humanitarian aid plans. When the Spanish embargo became the center of heated debate, Catholic lawyers published legal defenses of the embargo and the National Council of Catholic Men established the Keep the Spanish Embargo Committee that organized rallies for thousands in Washington D.C. against repeal. Beyond the press and the government, Catholics also challenged NAC endeavors among the public. They were worried that public involvement would deepen connections between the United States and the Loyalists. Thus, the efforts of the NAC to host
Spanish Catholic delegates to address the religious situation and promote the Loyalist cause met fierce reaction.

Catholic actions were significant to the war and U.S. relations because they influenced the ability of the United States, including the government and public, to give aid to Spain. While it is impossible to isolate Catholic pressure from other sources of opposition as a leading determinant of non-involvement, Catholic actions certainly had an effect on a number of key issues. Congressman McCormack and other Catholic senators, for example, denounced Congressional approval of the Basque Resettlement Plan. The N.C.W.C. also elicited apologies from Congressmen for their support of NAC petitions of approbation to the Loyalists and involvement in fundraising for Spain. Likewise, Catholics reportedly drove George MacDonald, the head of the Roosevelt-created Impartial Committee for Civilian Relief, to resign without even appointing a successor and convincing him the aid effort was futile. Regarding the divisive debate over the arms embargo, Catholic pressure provided additional justification to the State Department’s hesitancy to back congressional repeal of the legislation. Finally, clergymen disrupted the NAC speaking tours of Luis Sarasola, Michael O’Flanagan, José Bergamin, and Leocadio Lobo by denouncing the delegate priests as apostates. That the NAC only marginally contributed to the improvement of conditions in Spain and that it failed to incite the arm embargo’s repeal can in large part be attributed to Catholic opposition.

In addition to influencing the American ability to give aid, the Catholic position is also noteworthy because it illuminates why a large portion of the population opposed involvement in Spain that otherwise would have challenged the advance of Germany and Italy. Without the foresight that Germany and Italy would not only benefit from Franco’s victory but also declare war shortly after, the Roosevelt administration refused to involve the United States in the war in
support of the Spanish government. This thesis highlights the close ties between non-interventionism, early concerns with communism and the influence of the Soviet Union, and the failure to act toward fascism and authoritarianism prior to Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt not only had to weigh America’s foreign policy in accordance with the French and British, but he also had to acknowledge domestic concerns with war. Even when he and his department swayed toward involvement, they had to contend with the opposition of American Catholics. In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that American Catholic protests contributed to the retention of non-involvement policy and notable hindrances to increased involvement in the Spanish Civil War throughout American society.
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