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Faithful Coverage:

The *Irish Independent*'s Catholic Transformation of the Spanish Civil War

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Abstract: In the summer of 1936, the Spanish Civil War erupted with a military *coup d'etat* against the current Republic, launching three years of chaos and casualty. Among the ranks of supporters for the imminent fascist regime were Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and shockingly, the majority of Ireland's citizens. However, their support was not unprompted. The *Irish Independent*, a popular newspaper, flooded its pages with gory depictions of anti-clerical violence committed by the Spanish Republicans and steered their audience into the kind of righteous sensationalism that would later inspire an Irish Brigade to form on behalf of the fascist regime. This paper aims to find out what financial and political motives the *Irish Independent* had to simplify, dramatize, and misrepresent the Spanish conflict to its audience. Particularly, the newspaper's Catholic-centric narrative points to a manipulation of events in order to gain favor from the Irish Catholic Church hierarchy.

August 6th, 1936. A Dublin-based newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, tallies the most egregious crimes: “slaughter [of] defenceless nuns and priests,” “loot and burn [of] convents and churches,” “desecrat[ion of] the tombs of the dead,” and destruction of “the property and peace of the living.”¹ The criminal being charged? The *Independent* pointed a quivering, vengeful finger at the “sacrosanct democratic Government of Spain.”² Earlier that summer, a group of Spanish army generals had staged a *coup d’etat* against the freely elected government of the Second Spanish Republic. The country launched into a brutal three-year war, often subsequently recognized as the “dress rehearsal” for World War II due not only to the incredible political, social, and religious implications it had for Spain but also to the international attention it drew. Countries across the globe plunged their stakes into the Spanish Civil War, picking sides both formally and informally. The people of Ireland, which had been recognized as the Irish Free State at that time, almost unequivocally backed the military insurgents, who also counted Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as supporters. Why would Ireland, itself leaning towards a republican government, stand— even if informally— with an imminent fascist regime in Spain? The answer had a lot to do with the 500-foot cross that still looms over the original grave site of *el Caudillo*, the fascist dictator who ruled over Spain for decades, Francisco Franco.

Both Ireland and Spain were, and are, deeply Catholic countries. The republican government of Spain in the mid-1930s had begun to draw away from the strict Catholic tradition the country had lived under for centuries. The anti-clerical crimes that the *Independent* drew attention to were very real, although not entirely orchestrated by the government.³ The Irish *Independent* maintained an intense focus on the most inflammatory aspects of the Spanish Civil

¹ “Follow the Fleet,” *Irish Independent*, August 8, 1936, pp. 8. <https://archive.irishnewsarchive.com>.

² Ibid.

³ Eugenia Relaño Pastor, “Spanish Catholic Church in Franco Regime: A Marriage of Convenience,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 20, no. 2 (2007): 277. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/43751790>.

War, painting the conflict as a war purely between Catholicism and communism. Through dramatized and sometimes inaccurate accounts of anticlerical violence and strong support for the Spanish Nationalist cause, the *Independent* intended above all to appeal to the public's united faith in Catholicism, gain the approval of clergy, and protect their status as the most highly circulated periodical in the Irish Free State.

Even when examined closely, the Irish political scene of the early 20th century can seem to be a writhing mass of shifting ideologies, alliances, and conflicts. Key events such as the Irish War of Independence or the Irish Civil War are riddled with ambitious leaders on the come-up, mass movements championing various forms of government, and divisions, divisions, divisions. The Irish War of Independence sprang from centuries of British occupation, growing Irish nationalist sentiment, and Gaelic cultural revival. In 1922, at the end of a three-year battle between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and British Crown forces, the controversial Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed. The Treaty formed the Irish Free State, a partially free-operating government under the dominion of the British Empire that would last until the end of 1937 (midway through the Spanish Civil War).⁴ The Free State did not include what is now known as Northern Ireland, which remained part of the Protestant United Kingdom. Immediately after the Treaty was signed, the Irish Civil War was fought between factions of the IRA from 1922-1923 and ended in a definitive establishment of the new government.⁵

The early 1930s Free State government was led by Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Éamon de Valera, a former republican revolutionary and founder of the political party Fianna Fáil. De Valera's role in Irish politics during the 1930s was characterized by his promotion of social

⁴ W.P.M. Kennedy, "Significance of the Irish Free State," *The North American Review* 218, no. 814 (1923): 316-317. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25113103>.

⁵ Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press* (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2001), 7.

conservatism and engagement with neutral foreign policy. However, his goal was to transform the Free State into a republic, and many of his policies were unpopular with southern Catholics.⁶

Amid the tangle of divisions and conflicts, one connecting thread linked nearly all strands together: Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church held a privileged status in the Free State, and as author John Rodden notes, “official state policy was rarely contrary to the Church’s outlook—and in most spheres was effectively the Vatican’s policy.”⁷ According to the 1936 census, 93.4% of Ireland identified as Catholic.⁸ For many, Catholicism was an inextricable element of the Irish identity—it symbolized centuries of Gaelic culture and revolution against British Protestant suppression. Persecution of the Catholic Church was a sensitive topic that piqued interest and outrage among the Irish people. Furthermore, the Irish Catholic hierarchy enjoyed significant political influence and strong public support. Bishops and cardinals gave widely attended speeches, raised funds for political groups, and instructed the public on all matter of issues. The Archbishop of Armagh served (and serves) as the most influential Catholic authority: the head of the Church of Ireland and the Primate of All Ireland. In the 1930s, this role was held by Joseph Cardinal MacRory, who vocalized his personal opinions frequently and made suggestions to the government and political leaders. The Catholic Church’s privileged status controlled many aspects of society, including forbidding divorce and remarriage and running the majority of schools and hospitals. In Ireland at the time, the Catholic influence was inescapable.⁹

On July 18, 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out in another traditionally Catholic country, after only three years of the Second Republic’s regime. The Second Republic had

⁶ O’Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press*, 4.

⁷ John Rodden and John Rossi, “Ireland’s Quixotic Cruzada: the Irish and the Spanish Civil War,” *Society* 58 (2021): 96.

⁸ *Ireland Census of Population* Vol. 3 (1936), Department of Industry and Commerce (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1939), 3-6.

⁹ Michael Nolan, “The Influence of Catholic Nationalism On the Legislature of the Irish Free State,” *Irish Jurist* 10, no. 1 (1975):128-129, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44026219>.

focused on religious freedom, rights for workers, autonomy for all regions of Spain, and the separation of church and state. However, as Spanish researcher Eugenia Relaño Pastor points out, Republicans “failed to accept the incontrovertible fact that the Church had an enormous weight in Spain’s social structure,” resulting in rising tensions including anti-clerical violence.¹⁰ However, while the war did heavily involve Catholicism, it did not revolve around it. The Nationalist insurgents who rose against the government not only advocated a return to power for the Church but also a fascist dictatorship. Nationalists included members of the Catholic Church’s leadership, monarchists, the fascist group La Falange, and those belonging to the dominant higher social classes. The Nationalist forces soon submitted to the control of a young general named Francisco Franco. Franco would go on to lead the Nationalists to a victory as Generalissimo and assume the role of dictator of Spain, a position he held until his death in 1975.¹¹ While the Civil War was complicated in its social, political, and religious ramifications, the finite nuances of the war escaped the majority of Irish Catholics. However, as American historian J. Bowyer Bell asserted, “The fate of the Spanish Church concerned all. As so often in the past, religion not politics would largely determine the Irish response.”¹²

Among the swarm of secular and Catholic newspapers competing for the attention of the public, three secular Irish newspapers focused the most attention on the Spanish Civil War: the *Irish Press*, the *Irish Times*, and the *Irish Independent*. The *Press* was launched by Éamon de Valera and his party Fianna Fáil in the revolutionary late 1910s, but by the 30s, the newspaper had become a mouthpiece for de Valera’s government.¹³ During the Spanish Civil War, the *Press* remained neutral per Ireland’s official stance and warned of the disastrous consequences of either

¹⁰ Pastor, “Spanish Catholic Church in Franco Regime,” 277.

¹¹ Pastor, 283.

¹² J Bowyer Bell, “Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939,” *Studia Hibernica*, no. 9 (1969):139, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20495930/>

¹³ O’Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil, and the Irish Press*, 2.

Spanish Republicans or Nationalists seizing power.¹⁴ The *Irish Times*, in contrast, took a stand in favor of the Spanish Republic, defending the democratic government, and published factual articles as well as editorials arguing against the religious simplification of the conflict.¹⁵ The third, and most widely circulated newspaper, was the *Irish Independent*. The *Independent* was the revamped effort of the bankrupt paper the *Irish Daily Independent*, and was bought and renamed by William Martin Murphy in 1905. It consistently opposed republicanism of any kind, and as author Mark O'Brien notes, "Most republicans harbored a severe loathing for the Irish Independent."¹⁶ The *Independent* strongly opposed de Valera's republican Fianna Fáil. And on the subject of the Spanish Civil War, the *Independent* began and ended with anti-clerical violence.

The *Irish Independent* relentlessly gorged the Irish public on a stream of Spanish Republican anti-clerical violence to secure the approval of the high-status clergy. The *Independent*'s first report on the Spanish conflict immediately identified the issue as religion-centered. On July 22nd, 1936, the newspaper wrote: "All who stand for the ancient Faith and tradition of Spain are behind the present revolt against the Marxist regime in Madrid."¹⁷ The newspaper's writers not only placed the righteous hand of God on the shoulders of the Nationalists, but definitively identified the Republic of Spain as Marxist, and thus, entirely godless. In the same report, the *Independent* lamented the suffering of the Spanish church by describing Spain as "a Communist State raised upon the ruins of one of Western Europe's oldest Catholic States."¹⁸ Here, the *Independent* drew a parallel between Spain and Ireland. After all, hadn't the treasured tradition of another one of "Western Europe's oldest Catholic States,"

¹⁴ O'Brien, 2.

¹⁵ Fearghal McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 129 (2002):72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30006956>.

¹⁶ O'Brien, 2.

¹⁷ "The Struggle in Spain," *Irish Independent*, July 7, 1936, pp 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

(Ireland) been pushed nearly to the brink of ruin by the oppressive rule of the British Empire? Playing upon the Irish public's sympathy for the idea of Catholicism in peril, the *Independent* firmly established that the Spanish Civil War was simply a story of the Church's brutal repression.

As the conflict continued, the *Independent*, unlike other publications, remained committed to its strict interpretation of the conflict with an obvious lack of nuance. While the *Irish Press* expressed sympathy for Spanish Catholics, "in contrast with the *Independent*, the cause of Catholicism was not depicted as synonymous with that of Franco."¹⁹ The *Irish Times* espoused their support for the Republican side but also stated that "either alternative is equally detestable to people of a liberal tradition," when describing the possible victors of the war.²⁰ In contrast, the *Irish Independent*, true to their stance, plainly stated: "It is, in fact, a struggle to the death between Christianity and Communism," boldly adding that "we believe we speak for the overwhelming majority of the Irish people."²¹

The *Independent* purported to represent the majority opinion in the end, even if it needed to take liberties in shaping that opinion. From its first report on the war, the publication released a stream of daily stories describing atrocities. Between July and September of 1936 alone, the *Independent* published twenty-two leaders on the Spanish conflict, more than that of the *Times* and *Press* combined.²² On August 6th, an article entitled PRIEST-HUNTING IN SPAIN lamented that priests "solemnly offered themselves as sacrifices in the cause of religion," and "were beheaded, not by the dozen, but by the score."²³ The newspaper habitually described atrocities using unspecific numerical language that was rarely backed by confirmed data, instead relying

¹⁹ McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 73.

²⁰ *Irish Times*, July 29, 1936, quoted in McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War," 72.

²¹ *Irish Independent*, August 6, 1936, pp.8.

²² McGarry, 69.

²³ "PRIEST-HUNTING IN SPAIN," *Irish Independent*, August 6, 1936, pp. 11.

on colorful language and imagery to draw public outrage. Only a few days later on August 11th, the *Independent* wrote: “The story of Red butchery and barbarism in Spain grows more hideous and revolting.”²⁴ The August 18th edition of the paper included headlines such as “400 PRIESTS MASSACRED,” and testimonials from Spanish and Italian priests who had witnessed the atrocities: “They nailed the corpses to the wall to make room,” “There was going to be a plot...in which every priest was to be killed and every church burned down,” and “Red militiamen emerged from one church wearing priests’ vestments and dancing around with their rifles and pistols.”²⁵ With the nonstop bombardment of these atrocity stories, the *Irish Independent* succeeded in making the anti-clerical violence impossible to ignore. The newspaper’s exclusive focus on “Red” crimes helped paint the conflict to its readers as an easily condensed struggle between a perpetrator and a victim. The paper further attempted to demonize anyone with Republican sympathies, writing that “nobody asserts that this vile gang of criminals has the support of anything, but the barbarian Red hordes, which drink their blood gospels from the still red wells of Moscow.”²⁶ In the *Independent’s* view, Spanish Republicans’ real alliances lay not with Spain but with communist Russia—made clear by the liberal use of the words “Bolshevik” and “Marxist.”

The paper’s exaggeration and narrow focus did not go unnoticed by critics. A Dublin teacher named Colum O’Kiersey was quoted in the *Independent* as witnessing a group of Communists wearing priests’ birettas and rejoicing. However, as Irish history specialist Fearghal McGarry wrote, “The aggrieved teacher later complained that he had not intended to show ‘loyalists in an unfavorable light’ and that the only attack he had seen ‘was the bombing of a

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, August 11, 1936, pp. 4.

²⁵ *Irish Independent*, August 18, 1936, pp. 6.

²⁶ *Irish Independent*, August 31, 1936, pp. 7.

Church from which a demented priest was firing.”²⁷ Beyond complaints of inaccuracy, the *Independent* faced backlash from other publications, and found itself engaged in a smack-down with the *Press* and the *Times*. The *Times* fired off an editorial, writing: “Surely it was not necessary to gloat over atrocities, real and manufactured; to seek to inflame human passions; to revel in an orgy of horror and bestiality, and to treat the situation in Spain as if all the filth were on the one side and all the nobility on the other.”²⁸ The *Independent* shot back, “Certain journals...are now so pro-Anarchist and pro-Communist,” in an attempt to attach incendiary labels to its rival.²⁹ The *Independent* received its own label from the *Press*, which called it a “Fascist contemporary.”³⁰ However, despite the scathing criticism directed to the *Independent*, its primary audience—the Catholic Church—responded exactly as the newspaper hoped, with praise.

With their unyieldingly pro-Catholic response to the Spanish Civil War, the *Independent* had designed their reporting to appeal to Church hierarchy. As previously established, the Catholic Church had a nearly all-encompassing influence over the Irish Free State and a great deal of control. To gain its formal approval was to be thrown into the warm gaze of the public—an attractive position for any newspaper to be in. The Irish Catholic leadership also possessed a well-known distaste for the secular press. In 1929, the Catholic hierarchy launched a campaign to limit the publishing power of what they named the “unclean press” and influenced the government to enact the Censorship of Publications Act.³¹ The power of bishops’ disapproval was so great that it could spur bills and boycotts great enough to drag a newspaper down into bankruptcy. The Catholic Truth Society, composed of an assortment of militantly concerned

²⁷ McGarry, 71.

²⁸ *Irish Times*, September 20, 1936.

²⁹ *Irish Independent*, August 22, 1936.

³⁰ *Irish Press*, January 2, 1937.

³¹ Nolan, 137.

Christians, set up tactics to report what they deemed suspiciously anti-Catholic writing to bishops.³² The *Independent* cunningly avoided the dismal fate of hierarchical odium, and as the *Press* wryly noted, “when it suits its purpose, [did] not hesitate to be more Catholic than the Pope.”³³

With their faithful coverage of Republican atrocities, the *Independent* secured a cozy status as the Irish Church’s favorite pet newspaper. As McGarry wrote, it was “singled out for praise on several occasions in clerical speeches which were predictably well publicized by that newspaper.”³⁴ In the August 18th, 1936 issue, the *Independent* included an article called “Irish Bishop’s Views” in which Rev. Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe expressed his “warm appreciation...of the uncompromising denunciation of the brutal outrages which have been going on in Spain.”³⁵ In contrast, the *Times* and even the government-run *Press* faced criticism from bishops who believed that the papers were not espousing the proper Catholic viewpoint. And beyond a simply a pro-Catholic stance, the Church seemed to require an extra condition for approval: as Bishop Fogarty put it, “unflinching support for Franco.”³⁶

The *Independent* stood firmly on the side of Francisco Franco’s insurgence, with a single-minded focus on Nationalist glory and exclusion of Nationalist violence. The newspaper flooded its pages with support for the Irish Brigade in Spain, intentionally spinning their less-than-satisfactory performance into a tale of Irish heroism in the name of Catholicism. Promoting the Catholic, nationalist, and conservative stance view on the Spanish conflict, the *Independent* looked to increase both its circulation and its profits.

³² McGarry, 83.

³³ *Irish Press*, August 28, 1936.

³⁴ McGarry, 83.

³⁵ *Irish Independent*, August 18, 1936.

³⁶ *Irish Independent*, September 24, 1936.

Non-intervention in the Civil War was considered the only correct response by the majority of Western Europe, the Free State government, and even Fine Gael, the political party the *Independent* most closely identified with. Through Prime Minister de Valera, Ireland's official stance on the conflict aligned with the French-led non-intervention plan that continued to recognize the Spanish Republican government.³⁷ However, the *Independent* alone campaigned for Irish action on behalf of Catholic Spain. Amidst the stirrings of an Irish brigade, the newspaper published letters from concerned citizens. A reader identified as "Southern Catholic" asked, "Why leave this matter to the Government when it behooves every Irishman to stand up for Christianity?"³⁸ This call to action echoed through subsequent letters, articles, and reports in which the *Independent* publicized support for General Eoin O'Duffy, the leader of the emerging Irish Brigade. O'Duffy, a now almost unspeakable figure in Irish history, was an IRA hero in the War of Independence, the leader of the Irish patriot group the Blueshirts, the unofficial founder of Fine Gael, and a virulent authoritarian whose stances often strayed to the side of fascism. (He proudly adopted Mussolini-inspired tactics—from organizing marches and parades to cultivating a colorful persona, drenched in scandals and alcoholism).³⁹ Struggling with his fading influence, O'Duffy latched onto the idea of an Irish Brigade and led over seven hundred men to fight for Franco.⁴⁰ The Brigade, known by Franco as XV Bandera, performed extremely poorly in Spain in insignificant battles. In a letter to Irish diplomat Joseph P. Walshe, the Irish ambassador to Spain Leopold H. Kerney wrote that the Brigade's lack of discipline had led to the suggestion that a Spanish officer be placed in charge of the Irishmen, which "O'Duffy refused flatly."⁴¹ The

³⁷ Bell, 142.

³⁸ *Irish Independent*, August 31, 1936.

³⁹ Rodden and John Rossi, 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Confidential Report from Leopold H. Kerney to Joseph P. Walshe* (1937), NAI DFA Madrid Embassy, (St. Jean de Luz: Documents on Irish Foreign Policy), 1. <https://www.difp.ie/volume-5/1937/eoin-oduffy/2201/#section-documentpage>.

letter went on to quote Spanish General Juan Yagüe as saying that “the worst possible Irishmen had been sent to Spain and that it would be a good riddance to pack them all into aeroplanes and send them over to the Reds.”⁴² Due to O’Duffy’s rejection of authority and a general unwillingness to fight among the Brigade, Franco sent the Irish troops home after only a few meager months.

Despite the failure of the Brigade, the *Independent* hailed the men as heroes. On February 10th, 1937, headlines included “IRISH BRIGADE HONOURED” and “STAY IN THE CITY COMMEMORATED.”⁴³ One of the paper’s primary war correspondents, Gertrude Gaffney, could be counted on to exalt the Brigade’s military prowess. She even noted that “the Irishmen were better groomed, too,” establishing superficial superiority of Irish forces.⁴⁴ Gaffney’s exciting, even glamorous articles describing Spanish society were “preceded by an unusual degree of publicity and admonitions for regular subscribers to order their copies,” hinting that the *Independent* recognized the potential profitability of the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁵ In an attempt to avoid the lack of interest and low circulation resulting from impartiality, the *Independent* took liberty after liberty in attempting to mask the Brigade’s lack of successes. It dubbed the Brigade a sort of “Catholic cruzada” and likened its fighters to Gaelic heroes of centuries bygone, infusing overtly Irish sentiment into an unrelated conflict to stir up support.⁴⁶ To cater to its mass Catholic audience, the *Independent* offered an exciting, patriotic vision of the war in Spain: Ireland’s best were putting their lives on the line in the name of Christianity. Their not-so-triumphant return home was obscured in the *Independent* by its coverage of the exclamations of enthusiastic fans, such as a former sergeant’s description of the Brigade’s fight

⁴² *Confidential Report from Leopold H. Kerney to Joseph P. Walshe*, 2.

⁴³ *Irish Independent*, February 10th, 1937.

⁴⁴ Gertrude Gaffney, *Irish Independent*, March 1, 1937, pp. 6.

⁴⁵ McGarry, 88.

⁴⁶ Rodden and John Rossi, 99.

as “for Christ against Communism” and “glorious.”⁴⁷ After all, as the newspaper conceded, “the Irish people love a hero.”⁴⁸ But besides the uncommon instances of welcome highlighted by the *Independent*, the Brigade was not warmly received because of the uproar over certain Nationalist atrocities.

In alignment with the views of the Irish Catholic Church hierarchy, the *Independent* wrote extensively of Republican atrocities but almost undetectably of Nationalist ones. Since the Nationalist movement was “composed of the intelligent and Catholic people of Spain,” any crimes on its part were presented as justified.⁴⁹ The newspaper was not inclined to speak on the period of Nationalist atrocities known as the White Terror or Francoist Repression, in which thousands were publicly executed at the hands of Franco’s army, sometimes assisted by clergymen.⁵⁰ The Massacre of Badajoz in August 1936, in which up to 4,000 Republicans were shot, was dismissed by the *Independent* as pure retaliation, mentioning their previous crucifixion of priests in the area.⁵¹ Badajoz, categorized by contemporary human rights associations as a crime against humanity, was labeled by the *Independent* with a headline blaring “INSURGENT SUCCESSES.”⁵² But perhaps the event most indicative of the *Independent’s* willingness to excuse suffering at Franco’s hands was the bombing of Guernica in April 1937.

The Basque town of Guernica was bombed by a combination of aerial Nazi and Fascist Italian forces on April 26th, 1937. The bombing campaign, whose primary victims were Spanish civilians, was approved by General Franco because Guernica was a Republican communications center, and it was carried out by Franco’s German and Italian allies because they viewed it as a

⁴⁷ “Kilkenny City to Honour Gen. O’Duffy,” *Irish Independent*, June 24, 1937, pp. 11.

⁴⁸ William O’Malley, *Irish Independent*, September 1, 1936, pp.4.

⁴⁹ *Irish Independent*, August 31, 1936, pp.6.

⁵⁰ Jorge Marco, “Francoist Crimes: Denial and Invisibility, 1936-2016,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 52 (2017): 158-160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416678811>.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, August 29, 1936, pp.13.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 9.

sort of ‘practice’ for the upcoming World War II. The town was engulfed by fires that burned for three days. Franco immediately denied any involvement.⁵³ Both the *Press* and *Times* wrote speedy responses to the bombing, detailing the mass destruction and machine-gun murders of civilians. The *Press* wrote that Guernica was “an inferno of death and destruction” on the front page of an April 28th edition, with the headline “800 KILLED IN HISTORY’S BIGGEST AIR RAID.”⁵⁴ In stark contrast, the characteristically inflammatory *Independent* reported on the bombing in emotionally void, unfazed language. A week later, an editorial stated that while “a few bombs may have fallen on the city...its destruction was the work of Red incendiaries.”⁵⁵ The paper’s unique acceptance of Franco’s denial solidified its unyielding pro-Nationalist—which it equated with pro-Catholic—stance.

In the first edition ever published, on January 2nd, 1905, the *Independent* asserted that its pages would be “free of unwholesome sensationalism,” that “the news of the day will be given without colouring or prejudice,” and that it would be “neither offensive nor aggressive in its style of advocacy.”⁵⁶ But in 1937, after publishing more than a year’s worth of articles promoting strictly pro-Catholic, anti-communist rhetoric, as well as gruesome, often inaccurate descriptions of atrocities, and views that denied any nuances, could the *Irish Independent* say it had stayed true to its original intentions? The newspaper had been swept up in the tangle of ideologies that constituted the Spanish Civil War, like countless others across the globe. However, the *Independent* had also played upon the Irish people’s sympathies to garner higher circulation and selectively highlighted the plight of the Church to gain the attention of high-status clergy. While the paper eagerly journeyed towards recognition, spewing explosive language, its coverage of the

⁵³ William Burton, “Guernica, 1937,” *History Ireland* 25, no. 4 (2017): 42-43.

⁵⁴ “800 KILLED IN HISTORY’S BIGGEST AIR RAID,” *Irish Press*, April 28, 1937, pp.1.

⁵⁵ *Irish Independent*, May 4, 1937, pp.11.

⁵⁶ *Irish Independent*, January 2, 1905, pp. 4.

Spanish conflict and Franco's regime illustrates just how deeply ingrained Catholicism was in the cultures of both Spain and Ireland. In this instance, Catholicism served as a guiding force and a not-so gentle hand that steered the press and greatly influenced the moral judgment of millions of Irish citizens about a conflict with serious, often deadly, ramifications for Spain and the direction of history.

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