

The courage of faith

MARIST COMMUNITIES IN TURBULENT TIMES [1936-1939]

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First Edition - September 2013

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Prologue

By Brother Emili Turú

*We tell the truth, without rest,
for the honor of serving, under the feet of all*

Salvador Espriu, *The Bull's Skin*

In the epilogue to this book, Brother Lluís Serra remarks that the true stories he tells give rise to feelings of sadness, indignation, and respect. He is right. You cannot remain indifferent, as I myself discovered when I read the book. But is there a way to go beyond what could be only skin-deep feelings? Brother Lluís himself suggests and invites us to silence, meditation, and prayer, the practice of which is, unfortunately, not too frequent in our societies.

The events described in this book in such a brilliant and evocative way are very sad, because they refer to the tragic death of 68 people, and we know that the life of every single human being is sacred. We speak about them today, nearly 80 years after their death, because we want to tell the truth, as highlighted by Salvador Espriu, for the honor of serving the men and women of the Twenty-first Century.

But as believers, we want to let ourselves be challenged by the witness of their lives, not only of their deaths. Their courage and dedication in such turbulent times encourage us to give our lives, and bear witness to the experience of God, just as they did.

Moreover, the fact of focusing each chapter on a specific community helps us realize the wonderful gift of community life. This group of martyrs was in fact very aware of the community dimension. It becomes evident both in the way in which they lived fraternal life, as in how they underwent martyrdom.

This book, clearly in line with the legacy of our martyrs, chooses the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. And despite the violence of the facts narrated, it invites us to hope. Elie Wiesel, the Auschwitz survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner, wrote a couple of years ago: "I still believe in man in spite of man. I believe in language even though it has been wounded, deformed, and perverted by the enemies of mankind. And I continue to cling to words because it is up to us to transform them into instruments of comprehension rather than contempt. It is up to us to choose whether we wish to use them to curse or to heal, to wound or to console.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Brother Lluís Serra, for he has managed to use words as instruments of understanding, to heal and console.

H. Emili Turú
Superior general

Introduction

Many people suffered violent deaths in Spain in the early Twentieth Century, especially during the Civil War (1936-1939). Although several decades have gone by, the wounds have not completely healed. Those were turbulent times. Many suffered on both sides, and many were those who inflicted suffering. The Apocalyptic Horseman of Death, with sharp scythe, riding a white horse, went across the cities, villages and battlefields, leaving a path of corpses in his wake. There was great pain, and many families had their hearts torn apart. In the Marist Institute alone, 172 Brothers perished as martyrs of the faith.

I have been given this special opportunity to tell their story. In order to mark the beatification of 522 martyrs of the Twentieth Century in Spain – 68 of whom are Marists, 66 Brothers and 2 lay men – taking place in Tarragona on October 13, 2013, the Marist Institute appointed an international commission to prepare the event. This commission, of which I was a member, asked me to write a book for the occasion.

A complicated task... Besides the short amount of time, the greatest difficulty was finding a way to address such a sensitive issue. The risks are obvious: justifying the situation to the detriment of the victims, or using the victims to denigrate the executioners. Therefore I have followed a historical perspective focusing on the faith of the *martyrs* – the Greek word for *witnesses*. A real challenge indeed! Given that the topic concerns my religious family, the fabric of emotional ties is undeniable. Acknowledging this is essential if it is not to interfere with the result. The task

involves entering into the past, not with nostalgia, but going to the roots of this story: Christ and his Gospel.

Therefore, truth is undeniable, and so are the forgiveness of trespasses, love of enemy, fidelity to the call, the spirit of reconciliation, and the search for peace. Considering life from the Christian faith perspective means opening up a horizon of eternity within the coordinates of time and space. Life is important, though impermanent. Eternal life is the ultimate reality, in whose light the courage of faith is useless if it is not an expression of love.

Before you read the book, I would like to mention a number of elements that can make it easier to understand. They may be unnecessary for experts but are probably useful for those not acquainted with this subject.

1. The book covers only part of the story of the Twentieth Century Marist martyrs in Spain, which actually includes those who died before and, in particular, during the war, when religious persecution worsened. A total of 172 Brothers are part of this martyrology.

The first group consists of Brother Bernardo, killed in Baruelo de Santullán (Palencia) in 1934, and Brother Laurentino and his 45 fellow martyrs, killed in Montcada (Barcelona) in October 1936. They were beatified in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI on October 28, 2007.

The second group includes Brothers Crisanto, Aquilino, Cipriano José, Guzmán and their 64 companions, killed in different parts of Spain in 1936, who will be beatified in Tarragona on October 13, 2013.

The third group, consisting of Brother Eusebio and his 58 companions, killed in different parts of Catalonia, is still in the process leading to beatification.

The following pages focus exclusively on the second group, but we must not lose sight of the global picture, which is not fragmented into canonical causes and labels.

2. The socio-political, economic, and ecclesial context. To understand a fact, we must place it in its historical context. There are numerous studies of unequal value regarding this period and the Spanish Civil War as such. I will make use of them. This book will certainly offer a historical glimpse and some guidance, but does not pretend to be a history text. It assumes that the reader has a historical framework regarding this period or can consult available sources.

Many intertwined and complex elements come into play in a civil war. In this case, there was also a relentless persecution of Catholics for religious reasons, which generated many martyrs and stunned international public opinion.

In addition to the social fragmentation between rich and poor, three problems were intensely felt in the 30s: the left-right ideological polarization, territorial conflict, and tension between clericalism and anticlericalism. An overview of the current situation allows us to conclude that these problems, although presenting different nuances nowadays, have not been overcome, have become chronic and, somehow, are still critically important.

3. The Brothers and their communities. Fraternity is an essential characteristic of Christianity, and a distinctive trait of the Marist Brothers. The courage of a martyr's faith is certainly a personal experience, but it is almost always related to the community. The last steps on the road of life will inevitably be faced alone, but the group's life has a positive impact on keeping the love and the urge for generosity alive. Brother Jean-Marie, for instance, did not claim his French national-



Birthplaces of the blessed brothers and lay men

ity in order to save himself outside the community: “I’ve been living with them, together with them I want to die!”

The chapters of this book follow the order of the *Positio*,¹ with three minor modifications. The 19 chapters have been reduced to 17: the two chapters originally referring to Les Avellanes (1 and 18), have been merged into one; and the same applies to the chapters regarding Valencia (3 and 15). The two lay men included by the *Positio* in chapter 19 have been moved to chapters 9 and 11, so as to place them in their own context.

Some places regarding the martyrs stand out from a numerical perspective. Concerning birthplaces, 26 Brothers were from Burgos, 12 from Navarra, 5 from Leon, and 5 from Teruel (among this last group was a layman). Three were

¹ Document or collection of documents used in the process by which a person is declared Saint. A *Positio* can run to over 1,000 pages in length (translator’s note).

Frenchmen. As regards the number of Brothers martyred, there were 19 in Madrid, 11 in Toledo, and 6 in Barcelona, Cantabria and Malaga.

4. The legal structure of the Marist Brothers. The Institute of the Marist Brothers of the Schools (FMS) was founded by Saint Marcellin Champagnat on January 2, 1817, in La Valla (France). With the passage of time, and given its expansion, the Institute was organized into Provinces, that is, territorial divisions governed by a Brother Provincial, subject to the Superior General and his Council.

Groups of French Brothers came to Spain on three occasions, each time from different places. In 1886, four Brothers from Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux came to Girona to learn Spanish before going to Latin America. They decided to stay and gave birth to the Province of Spain.

In the early Twentieth Century, laws were passed in France expelling almost all religious congregations, especially those engaged in teaching. Two immediate consequences were the closure of more than 12 thousand schools and the arrival of many congregations in Spain. Therefore, a number of Brothers from Aubenas arrived in Pontos, Girona, giving rise to the District of Pontos, and eventually to the Province of Leon.

Other Brothers came from Lacabane to Oñate, Guipúzcoa, which was the origin of the Anzuola Province. The three provinces coexisted during the Civil War, although the most affected was the Province of Spain.

5. The educational work of the Brothers. The 2007 book *Semillas de Vida* (Seeds of Life) states that “the struggle for schools and popular education became a specific field of confrontation between the socialist and anarchist workers movement and the religious congregations.” (p. 27) It was in part due to

the shockwave coming from France. Article 30 of the *French Law of Confessions and Congregations*, dated June 1933, declared: "Religious orders and congregations may not engage in the exercise of teaching." The secularization of Catholic schools was an effect of this law: changes in school ownership, religious habit replaced by secular dress, compulsory educational qualification, etc. The Marist Brothers were present especially in poor and working-class areas.

From the total of 522 martyrs who will be beatified in Tarragona, 83% were religious belonging to 25 different congregations. But the first two groups alone consisted of 141 martyrs, representing 27% of those being beatified. These two congregations were the De La Salle Brothers (75) and the Marist Brothers (66), both dedicated to the education of children and youth.

6. The Marist formation process. The Brothers went through four formation stages at that time. First, the juniorate, a time for basic schooling. In the world of Marist formation, the word 'junior' refers to the very youngest in Marist formation; in other congregations the word is used to describe those who have made their first profession. The youngsters in formation or seminarians would access the next stage if they were of the right age and maturity.

Second, the postulancy, a period devoted to vocational discernment, after which came the taking of the habit and the assigning of a new name. At the time, the Brothers used this religious name exclusively, not their baptismal name. This practice has now fallen into disuse, but is preserved in some other ecclesial situations, for example, in the case of the Pope.

Third, the novitiate, a time to continue discerning and study the theology of religious life and the implications of the vows. This stage concluded with the first profession, which consisted in taking only the vow of obedience.

And fourth, the scholasticate, especially dedicated to teacher training. After a number of years of temporary profession, the Brothers would make perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Some years later, as a sign of greater fidelity and as a requirement for exercising certain functions, some Brothers would profess the vow of stability.

7. The sources of documentation. I have used three basic sources of documentation to write this book. First, the *Positio (Positio super martyrio)* containing research data on the martyrdom of each Brother. Each section develops the biographical profile, the material and formal martyrdom story, and the reputation of each Brother as a martyr.

Second, the book *Páginas de historia marista. España, 1936-1939* (Pages of Marist History), by Brother Eduardo Corredera Gutiérrez, a Ph.D. in History. This is an essential document for those who want to study the historical sources. Brother Eduardo wrote the book by hand with a fountain pen, and a Marist seminarian would then typewrite the text for him.

Third, another book, *Vidas entregadas - Martirologio marista de España 1909-1939* (Lives of Dedication - Marist Martyrology of Spain 1909-1939), by Brother Juan Jesús Moral Barrio. He organized the information provided by Brother Corredera, and after thoroughly consulting the archives, he wrote a file with each Brother's biographical information (social context and personality traits) and a detailed account of his life (birth, sacraments, formation, community experience, and death).

I also complemented my documentation with other bibliographical references. In all cases, it is important to distinguish between the data and the authors' political alignment. The Internet has also been very helpful. Thanks to Google Maps I have explored the geography, even visiting the streets in some locations, to clarify my research.

8. Historical memory. Celebrating the beatification of the martyrs is a touchy issue. Nearly 80 years have passed, but perhaps some wounds are still open. The war and the post-war period claimed many victims. When the wounds heal completely, the past will be left behind. The difficulty of this task is understandable, since this particular civil war did not end with a treaty, but with a victory. Consequently, there remain winners and losers. For this reason, our historical memory sometimes elicits a clash of opposing views. A beatification ceremony certainly enhances the martyrs of the Christian faith, but it does so in solidarity with all victims without distinction, because if truth, justice and love are not universal, they lose their sense and meaning.

Respecting differing sensitivities should not silence a sincere, humble, and loyal recognition of the martyrs of faith, avoiding ostentation, but without any self-conscious feelings. Brother Basilio Rueda, from Mexico, a former Superior General, once said: "I think we have an obligation to pass on the news about our martyrs and their life lessons to future generations". This book is intended as a modest contribution to that goal. I adhere to an essential evangelical principle: we must always be in favor of the victims, no matter who they are, whoever their executioners may be, as the parable of the Good Samaritan indicates. The 68 Marists (Brothers and lay men) were victimized because of their faith. Beyond their fears, anxieties, and uncertainties, their courage was formidable. Their fidelity to Christ, and their Marian spirituality are the key for understanding their life and death, a magnificent testimony to close the Year of Faith.

9. Acknowledgements. My thanks to the commission, composed of Brothers Ernesto Sánchez, Jorge Flores, Antonio Alegre, Santiago Fernández, Juan Miguel Anaya and Ernesto Tendero, who entrusted me with this work. Thanks also to

Brother Maurice Berquet, Provincial of the Hermitage, and to his Council for asking me to be part of this commission.

Thanks to the Brothers who acted as Postulators of these causes, Gabriele Andreucci and Giovanni Bigotto, and to the Vice-postulator, Mariano Santamaría. Thanks to Brothers Eduardo Corredera and Juan Jesús Moral for the contribution of their books, without which the present one would not have been possible. Thanks to Brother José Delgado, who has carefully edited my writing. Thanks to Brothers Ramon Llansana and Enrique Hurtado, who have minimized the errors in the text. This amount of data requires many eyes to avoid mistakes. Thank to Brother Fernando Vecino for his help with the archives. Thanks to my niece Elizabeth Serra for the cover design. Thank you to the men and women who will read this book, whose goal is not to amass knowledge but to spread it.

There is an African saying that “a man is dead when all those who remember him die.” Thanks to the martyrs, because the courage of their faith, lived in turbulent times, encourages me and many others to live like they did. And finally, my gratitude goes to God, because without Him the martyrs could not have been his witnesses.

Lluís Serra Llansana*

* Lluís Serra Llansana is a Marist Brother from the Province of the Hermitage. Among the many books he has written regarding Marist topics, it is worth mentioning the following: *La fuerza de la fraternidad. Maristas, cien años en Avellanes - 1910-2010* (2010) [The Power of Fraternity. Marists, a Hundred Years in Les Avellanes]. In collaboration with other authors: *El educador marista I: su identidad, su estilo educativo* (1983) [The Marist Educator I: Identity and Educational Style]; *Història del col·legi dels Germans Maristes d'Igualada* (1996) [History of the Marist Brothers' School in Igualada]; and *Jiménez Deredia en la basílica de San Pedro del Vaticano* (2001) [Jiménez Deredia at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican].

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Chapter 1

Marist Community of Les Avellanes (Lleida)

YOU ARE PLACING THE PALM OF MARTYRDOM
IN MY HAND!

August 11 and 27, and September 3, 1936

WITNESS OF FAITH IN MAS DEL PASTOR



Brother Crisanto (Casimiro González García)
Born in Torrelaguna. Madrid on March 4, 1897
Martyr in Mas del Pastor, Tartareu, Lleida on Au-
gust 27, 1936, at the age of 39 years and 5 months

WITNESSES OF FAITH AT THE FRONTON COURT OF LES AVELLANES



Brother Aquilino (Baldomero Baró Riera)
Born in Tiurana, Lleida on September 29, 1903
Martyr in Les Avellanes, Lleida on September 3,
1936, at the age of 32 years and 11 months



Brother Fabián (Juan Pastor Marco)
Born in Barcelona on January 14, 1876
Martyr in Les Avellanes, Lleida on September 3,
1936, at the age of 60 years and 7 months



Brother Félix Lorenzo (Lorenzo Gutiérrez Rojo)
Born in Las Hormazas, Burgos on August 10, 1906
Martyr in Les Avellanes, Lleida on September 3,
1936, at 30 years of age



Brother Ligorio Pedro (Hilario de Santiago Paredes)

Born in Cisneros de Campos, Palencia on May 12, 1912

Martyr in Les Avellanes, Lleida on September 3, 1936, at the age of 24 years and 3 months

WITNESSES OF FAITH IN SAGANTA (ESTOPIÑÁN DEL CASTILLO, HUESCA)



Brother Emiliano José (Marcos Leyún Goñi)

Born in Sansoáin, Navarre on October 7, 1897

Martyr in Saganta, Estopiñán, Huesca on August 11, 1936, at the age of 38 years and 10 months



Brother Timoteo José (Julián Lisbona Royo)

Born in Torre de las Arcas, Teruel, on October 23, 1891

Martyr in Saganta, Estopiñán, Huesca on August 11, 1936, at the age of 44 years and 9 months



Brother Andrés José (Francisco Donazar Goñi)

Born in Iroz, Navarre on October 10, 1893

Martyr in Saganta, Estopiñán, Huesca on August 11, 1936, at the age of 42 years and 10 months

1. The drip-feed of news was slow. Most of it was disquieting. People delivering provisions, the postman, and some workers from nearby villages were often the messengers. A week without mail or newspapers fed the obsession of getting a radio to keep abreast of events. The isolated monastery of Santa Maria de Bellpuig in Les Avellanes – located ten miles from Balaguer, in the Province of Lleida – did not have immediate access to information.

There were three different formation stages in the house: juniorate, novitiate, and scholasticate. It also included the provincial infirmary, and a community of Brothers dedicated to a number of tasks: administration, farmhouse, plantation, masonry, repairs and renovations. A total of 210 people were living in this house, counting Brothers and seminarians.

In 1910 the Marists moved to this Premonstratensian monastery, which was in ruins after Mendizabal's confiscation of Church property. The turmoil of the Tragic Week in Barcelona in 1909, with the burning of the Marist house of Sant Andreu de Palomar, forced the transfer of Brothers and seminarians from the coast area to inland Lleida. With much hard work they cleaned up the old monastery and added new wings to the structure. When Brother Diogène, Superior General, visited the house of Les Avellanes in 1922, he claimed it was "the first novitiate of the congregation". But as soon as the initial work started paying back, and the farm began to be productive, new shadows of sociopolitical, economic and religious unrest appeared on the horizon, which was still clouded by the previous events.

2. The left-wing party's victory in the municipal elections of 1931, the abdication of Alfonso XIII and his departure into exile, and the proclamation of the Republic made the situation very uncertain. Months later, Brother Diogène wrote a letter expressing his concern about the possible impact of

these changes on the Church and on religious life. The burning of convents in May did not bode well for anyone. The senior Brothers relived the anguish of the Tragic Week, which involved loss of life and the burning of the novitiate at Sant Andreu de Palomar. The old ghosts of anticlericalism and aggressive politics reemerged. People became polarized. Suspicion invaded the Brothers' mind. The religious content of their letters became more explicit. Their prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament intensified. Brother Laurentino, the Provincial, now beatified, wrote: "I want to save our works, not only materially, but also the Brothers' spiritual strength." Life went on normally but with a silent underlying tension, worsened by each piece of news reaching the monastery. However, the Provisional Government of the Republic declared Santa Maria de Bellpuig of Les Avellanes as a historical monument belonging to the National Art Treasures. It was a contribution to culture on the part of the Marist Brothers, which required many efforts and privations, without any state support.

3. Like every Saturday, Brothers and seminarians climbed up the *Cerro de la Virgen* (Hill of Our Lady), which offered a privileged view of the house and a big part of the property. They fervently sang the *Salve Regina* and prayed the *Memorare*. Musical notes spread through the forest, and their silvery voices broke the silence of nature. Everything seemed quite normal. Things went on as usual. Nobody imagined that this ceremony would be the last for a long time. They got the news of the military uprising after dinner. The last hours of July 18, 1936, were full of worry and anxiety. The events would rapidly precipitate the following week. Brother Director² communicated the official state-of-war notifica-

² Back then, the term "Director" meant community superior and school principal, both tasks being performed by the same brother (translator's note).



View of Santa Maria de Bellpuig de les Avellanes Monastery in 1936

tion. A convivial meal was prepared at Fuente del Carmen (Fountain of Mount Carmel). It was essential to strengthen the ties of brotherhood before facing the tragedy, which was silently predicted as much as feared. The deliveryman from Os, the municipality to which the monastery belongs, was overwhelmed with questions as he arrived at the convent. The military rebellion had failed in Lleida, suffocated by the assault forces and the militias. Entering and leaving Balaguer was under the Communist Committees' supervision. Brother Felipe José, the novice director, tried to go to Barcelona on July 20, but was arrested and then released. He had to return to the monastery. One of the juniors was asked to return home by his parents. The acting mayor of Balaguer, a prominent socialist leader, visited Les Avellanes to announce they intended to turn the monastery into a blood bank hospital.

4. The first militia arrived early on July 25. They placed a banner reading "Blood Hospital" and a red flag, which waved at the infirmary. The Brothers decided to disperse, which meant leaving the monastery and looking for accommodations in nearby towns. Juniors and scholastics went to the town of Les Avellanes; the novices, to Vilanova; the senior Brothers, to Vilamajó. Some Brothers joined the various

groups, while others left without a clear destination. The carts full of food were intercepted by the militia on their way to Vilanova, and were sent back to the monastery. The people in the surrounding villages showed a commendable welcoming attitude, and received the seminarians and Brothers as members of their own families, a friendship that time would not erase. With the passing of time, they would still say: "Our brother has arrived!"

5. Monuments and statues were vandalized: the Sacred Heart in the cloister, the Holy Christ and the Madonna in the church, another Madonna at the fountain near the entrance, the boundary cross (a valuable piece of artwork dating from the XIV century), and the monument of the *Virgen del Cerro* (Our Lady of the Hill). For the rest, the damage was minor. In September 1936, the monastery became a sanatorium for the mentally ill. And yet, the blindness was so strong that it raged against innocent people. Brothers José Oriol, 50, and Félix Alberto, 19, were shot dead on the side of the road, at the end of the slope of Santo Cristo de Balaguer. They were the first victims.

6. Martyrdom of Brother Crisanto. Brother Crisanto, from Madrid, was the director for the juniors, who were the youngest seminarians. He had been entrusted with a delicate mission: caring for the seeds from which future Brothers would grow. When he took the religious habit, on February 2, 1915, he was almost 18 years old. He wrote in his diary: "May God not allow that this day ever vanishes from our memory; and may we crown our lives at the end with the characteristic death of a Marist Brother, who sings *Ave Maris Stella!* The day has come, Brother, to unite yourself to God and to offer him your heart forever." He eagerly took care of the juniors who had found refuge in families and farms at Tartareu and the town of Les Avellanes. However,

he had to present himself to the town hall to append his signature twice a day. Insightful as he was, he knew he had been sentenced to death, and that sooner or later he would be killed. He asked for prayers and intensified his tenderness – even more so, if anything – in dealing with the juniors. One village youngster offered him a safe hiding place, but he refused it to avoid endangering the children’s lives. He had given his word to appear every day before the Committee, and he complied: “If they kill me, the only reason will be that I am a Marist religious, and that I do my duty. If that happens, I will consider myself happy! How could I abandon my dear aspirants? As long as I live, with God’s and Mary’s help, I will take care of them all!”

On August 27, a Thursday, a group of militias from outside town arrived at Tartareu to take control of the place. The chief forced the people who were hanging around



Cross commemorating the place where Brother Crisanto was martyred, near Mas del Pastor, in Tartareu (Lleida).

in town to return home. They grabbed Brother Crisanto and moved to an escarpment three hundred meters further beyond Mas del Pastor. The foreign militias invited the members of the Tartareu Committee to shoot the religious, but they refused, explaining that they lacked the courage to kill one of their own. As they turned around, they heard seven or eight gunshots. Then another shot: "So that he doesn't escape!" A moment before, Brother Crisanto begged them, "For the love of God, do not kill me, let me take care of my youngsters." The militia forced some local farmers to bury the body. They noticed that Brother Crisanto was holding a little cross-shaped piece of wood in his fingers. Two subsequent exhumations, in 1940 and 1967, confirmed that the right hand was incorrupt and still holding this piece of wood. His remains now rest in the monastery church of Les Avellanes. On October 5, the seminarians crossed the French border safely. His prayers had been answered.



Fronton court of Les Avellanes, the place where four brothers gave their lives.

7. The martyrs of the fronton court. The numerous seminarists played and had fun during recess in the various fronton courts of the house. Their hands warmed up and swelled when hitting the leather ball vigorously, and were strengthened by this exercise. A week after Brother Crisanto's death on September 3, a Thursday, the fronton court next to the road leading up to the cemetery became the scenario of another execution.

A soldier nicknamed *El Peleteiro* and two other militias aimed their rifles at four Marist Brothers in plain clothes, lined against the wall of the fronton court.

Brother Aquilino, from Lleida, vice-director of novices, was a deeply spiritual man and a very good teacher. In a letter to his sister, he wrote: "As far as we are concerned, don't worry. I agree that things have changed a lot; the threats against the religious, churches, and convents are frequent. Yet don't forget we are all in the hands of God and fully depend on Him. He called us, gathered us, and watches over us." A prayer to Mary, shortly before his martyrdom, reflects his mystical experience: "Please, may God give himself to my soul, and my soul give itself to God."

Brother Fabian, from Barcelona, the eldest in the group, had done his initial formation in France. Devoted to education, he also had a special sensitivity for the poor, and sometimes went out begging to help them. His health deteriorated a year before his death, so he was at the monastery infirmary, seriously ill.

Brother Félix Lorenzo, from Burgos, was in poor health. Repeated heart crises had taken him to the brink of death. He had received the last rites three times. The severity of his condition did not prevent him from keeping a smiling face, and focusing on small manual jobs requiring detail and accuracy. Shortly after the military uprising, he had to be hos-

pitalized. The militia took him out of the hospital and led him to the fronton court. He could hardly stand up during the execution.

Brother Ligorio Pedro was from Palencia. His family was poor. Very soon he was attracted to Marist life. His early education as a Marist took place in Carrión de los Condes, with the idea of going to the missions. Then he went to France and learned the language. After his first profession, he served two years of military service. Pott's disease – a bacterial infection affecting the spine – changed his life. He wanted to finish his studies, but the disease flared up and he had to go to the infirmary in Les Avellanes. The militia seized him from his bed and, without resistance on his part, took him to the fronton court.

Brother Aquilino, accompanied by the three sick Brothers, addressed the militia:

"I would like to speak to you."

"Say whatever you want while we load the rifles," Peleteiro responded.

"As a man, I forgive you, and as a Catholic, I thank you, because you are placing the palm of martyrdom in my hand, which any Catholic should crave."

"Are you finished?" Peleteiro replied.

"Long live Christ the King!"

"Now turn around," the militiaman ordered him.

"No, facing you."

The four victims looked at their executioners until the shots ended their lives. They were called the martyrs of the fronton court. The bullet holes are still on the wall. Mr. Ramon Miranda (Ramonet), who worked with the Brothers and stayed with for many years until he died, gave them burial.

8. The Three in Saganta. The roaring engine of a truck broke the silence in the fields of Saganta. This village is located five kilometers from Estopiñán del Castillo, at 731 meters of altitude, in the Province of Huesca. Mrs. Joaquina Vidal was preparing a snack in her house, and heard the noise. She looked out the window cautiously to see what was happening, driven by curiosity and anxiety. There were three men in the back of the truck. They were Marist Brothers: Emiliano José, Timoteo José, and Andrés José, the so-called *Tres Josés* (Three Josephs).

They lived in Les Avellanes, and were accompanying the postulants and novices to Vilanova. They helped out with the farm work, but in late July they had to leave the community to avoid raising suspicion and putting the seminarians in danger. Their intention was to reach Navarre. At Estopiñán del Castillo, they asked the Committee for a safe-conduct pass to avoid further hardships and dangers. The militias sensed they were religious and imprisoned them immediately. It was Friday, August the 10th. They spent the night at the town hall, which served as a prison.

Brother Emiliano José, from Navarre, belonged to the community of Sabadell. The Provincial had asked him to take care of the laundry in Les Avellanes during the summer, because there was to be a course with many participants. He was a good teacher, and a handyman for electrical work. Always available, he also proved to be very skilled at tailoring. Just a few days after arriving in Les Avellanes, he was swallowed up in the maelstrom of events.

Brother Timoteo José, from Teruel, had always been in the same community, Les Avellanes, where he took care of the garden and the farm. He had entered the postulancy at 25 years of age, and had to adapt to school life, although he actually belonged in the orchard and garden. In his last visit

to his hometown, a lady had promised to bequeath all her possessions to him if he would only accept to stay with her. His answer was: "It is too little in exchange for my vocation".

Brother Andrés José, from Navarre, the son of a mason, had been disappointed in love when he was engaged to his fiancée. At 28 he entered the novitiate. Work and repairs were not scarce in a house hosting more than two hundred people, but he solved everything efficiently, combining work and prayer. He was excited about the renovation scheduled for Les Avellanes, which could not be accomplished because of the social and political unrest. The Brothers who engaged in manual work had always been respected, admired, and esteemed by the seminarians.

The lady at the hamlet of Saganta was still watching from her window. The truck stopped. Quickly, a man got off. The militias from the Committee of Alguaire, who had been called to perform the execution, shot him in the back. Then the other two got off and suffered the same fate. The sheriff from Estopiñán approached the house and, addressing the woman's husband, ordered: "There, we are leaving you these three vermin. Bury them immediately!" Arriving at the scene, he found the three bodies, their heads covered with berets to hide their coup-de-grace wound. Their remains lie today in the cemetery in Tamarit de Litera, Huesca.

Chapter 2

Marist Community of Toledo

I'VE BEEN LIVING WITH THEM, TOGETHER WITH THEM I WANT TO DIE!

September 23 and 24, 1936



Brother Cipriano José (Julián Iglesias Bañuelos)

Born in Los Valcárceres, Burgos on February 26, 1893

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 43 years and 5 months



Brother Jorge Luis (Lorenzo Lizasoáin Lizaso)

Born in Irañeta, Navarre on September 4, 1886

Martyr in Toledo on August 24, 1936, at the age of 49 years and 11 months



Brother Jean-Marie (Félix-Célestin Gombert Olympe).

Born in Trets (Bouches-du-Rhône) on April 5, 1873

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 63 years and 4 months



Brother Julio Fermín (Julio Múzquiz Erdozáin)

Born in Aldaba, Navarre on April 11, 1899

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 37 years and 4 months



Brother Javier Benito (Jerónimo Alonso Fernández)

Born in Villorejo, Burgos on October 1, 1912

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 23 years and 10 months



Brother Anacleto Luis (Emiliano Busto Pérez)

Born in Quintanilla San García, Burgos on January 5, 1913

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 23 years and 7 months



Brother Bruno José (Ángel Ayape Remón)

Born in Cáseda. Navarre on October 1, 1915

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 20 years, 10 months



Brother Evencio (Florencio Pérez Moral)

Born in Acedillo, Burgos on October 10, 1899

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 36 years, 10 months



Brother Abdón (Luis Iglesias Bañuelos)

Born in Los Valcárceres, Burgos on August 19, 1895

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 41



Brother Eduardo María (Francisco Alonso Fontaneda)

Born in of Valtierra de Albacastro, Burgos on October 10, 1915

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 20 years, 10 months



Brother Félix Amancio (Amancio Noriega Núñez)

Born in Aguilar de Campoo, Palencia on February 10, 1912

Martyr in Toledo on August 23, 1936, at the age of 24 years and 6 months

1. Brother Jacinto Luis entered the building of *Santa María School*. His heart was pounding. The day before, in Plasencia, a national army sergeant had told him a rumor: "All the Brothers have been killed." On Saturday, October 3, he came to Toledo with the hope of finding a more optimistic situation. His superiors had sent him to collect all the possible and reliable information about the Brothers' whereabouts. Silence was the background music for the drama his eyes contemplated. What he saw was reflected in his report: "I move around in the yard: thousands of objects stacked, smashed, blackened by fire... The walls are smoky, especially in some areas. I enter the rooms, and everything is dirty, a mess: broken doors, shattered and smashed windows. The scene oppresses my soul, which feels ready to be exhaled, or at least run away. Frustration and pain crush my heart. I go out to breathe a different air, not filled with so much ruin and murder; or at least, to find

unknown faces, who do not remind me about days and memories like these...”

As he was leaving the school, an old man in rags approached him and asked:

“Are you a Marist?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Let me give you a big hug! (Two thick tears rolled down his cheeks, which looked like cardboard). Oh, Brother, all are dead, all dead! All killed! They triumphed!

He was the chaplain of the *San Juan de los Reyes* monastery, and confirmed the fears of Brother Jacinto Luis. However, the Brother wanted to verify the information given by this priest. The next day was Sunday and there was only one mass in the cathedral. If there was a Marist Brother alive, he would have attended. No one showed up, despite waiting all morning, so he went to the prison, where he got the final confirmation: all of the Brothers’ names were registered there and all of them had been killed. The tragedy was true. End of the inquiry.

2. Toledo has a trait in common with many cities in Italy. It is famous not because of its numerous inhabitants, but for the beauty of its monuments and the work of great artists such as El Greco. A number of stone buildings stand out in the old city center. The tortuous design of its streets offers a walk through history. When the war started, the population barely reached 35 thousand inhabitants. Religious buildings – among them the notable cathedral – proliferate everywhere. On the military side, there were several prominent structures such as the Alcazar, which served as a school for young officers, and the arms factory, which manufactured a large quantity of ammunition. The Civil Guard and the political right turned the city into a center of resistance against



Exterior view of Santa María Marist School in Toledo, 1936.

the revolutionary forces from Madrid. Its geographic proximity to the capital of Spain transformed Toledo into a military scenario for clashes and field operations. The forces loyal to the military uprising were concentrated within the Alcazar. They took weapons and ammunition in great quantity from the factory to the fortress. There General Moscardó wrote historical pages describing the resistance to a siege lasting almost seventy days. Except for some Daughters of Charity, no priest or religious took refuge in the Alcazar. Perhaps they did not imagine what would happen, or the way in which things would get out of control. The facts would belie their naive outlook with extreme harshness.

3. The militias usually selected in advance the people they would arrest and detain. Any minimally reliable information served their purpose. The forcefulness with which they intervened gave them good results. The school of Santa María would not disappoint them. Founded in 1903, the four-story building had 500 students. The first floor had a balcony extending along the entire facade. It was the right

place to find a good number of religious and fill the prison cells with suspects and possible offenders. They used the customary tactic: they fired several volleys and smashed the doors. The noise and violence always intimidated and created fear. This procedure allowed them to take control of the situation. After the shooting, five hundred militias attacked the school, room after room. They broke open all the locked doors, wanting to avoid any surprises. The people they found were sent to the courtyard. They made them stand in row facing the wall. The doorkeeper and the servant were released, but the Brothers were sent to jail. The militias did a search and found some religious symbols which ignited their anger, making them express their contempt with loud blasphemies. Brother Cipriano José, the Director, with the weight of his responsibility for the group on his shoulders, felt helpless. The Militias threw down on the floor rosaries, religious medals and scapulars and trampled them. The Brothers sensed they would meet the same fate. If the militias had been their fellow citizens, they would have shown more respect, knowing them personally and being aware of their educational work with the children and adolescents of Toledo.

4. Three dramatic circumstances converged in prison: the uncomfortable conditions and bad food; the contempt, ridicule and threats to which the guards submitted them; and the awareness of an inevitable death. Food was scarce, and the water contained impurities and bugs. Fortunately, the dark color of the jug prevented them from seeing what they drank, for otherwise they would have vomited out of disgust. But the way they were treated was even worse. They were helpless when the guards insulted and taunted them, although on the other hand, the harassment consolidated their status as religious and their fraternal ties. The threats were very unnerving: "The little stroll will soon be here and



Community of Toledo. School year of 1935-1936.

all will be over!" The "stroll", in their argot, meant going from the prison cell to execution. Given how imminent was their end, the Brothers' relationship with God intensified. Prayer became assiduous. They prayed with the words of Jesus in the Garden of Olives: "If possible, let this cup pass from me, however not my will but yours be done." They lived in these conditions for over a month. Between 450 and 500 people were murdered in Toledo, including the Marist and Carmelite religious communities.

5. The French consul arrived at the prison and asked for an interview with Brother Jean-Marie, a Frenchman, and the eldest in the community. He stated he had taken steps for his extradition. The other Brothers tried to convince him to seize the opportunity.

Brother Jean-Marie had come to Spain at age 19 as a teacher at the juniorate in Mataró. Throughout his 44 years in the country, he gave Christian education in schools located in different cities, and was also Director in Malgrat, Barcelona

and Cullera, Valencia. He had spent 15 years in Toledo. During his initial formation, he met Brothers who had lived with Marcellin Champagnat and the first Brothers. An expert in electrical systems, he was also a renowned teacher of Physics and Natural Sciences, and also taught at the seminary in Toledo.

Being a French citizen, he could have been freed from having to go jail, but his answer to the consul was swift: "Never! I've been living with them, together with them I want to die!" An individual way out was inconceivable, and his commitment to the community went on to its final consequences.

6. The roar of the National Air Force planes thundered over the city as they bombed different key points. A plane flew over the Alcazar at low altitude to drop food and a message of support. The Republican Air Force struck back, but friendly fire killed many of their own people. The retaliation was swift. Ten Brothers of the community, along with



The remains of eight out of the eleven martyred Brothers from the community of Toledo now rest in the Parish of Santa Teresa.

several priests, would go for their “last stroll”. One of the Brothers was inadvertently left off the list. Without trial or defense, they awaited execution.

Brother Cipriano José led the Marist group. He had been the Superior for nearly four years. His hometown in Burgos was on the Way of Saint James. He had a bachelor’s degree and was highly respected for his intellect, but also for his evangelical dedication, especially to the poor, and for his apostolic zeal. The Brothers accepted him as their leader because of his humility and community spirit.

Brother Abdón was two years younger than Cipriano José, his blood brother, so there was a double tie between them: their blood and Marist brotherhood. He had grown up following his brother’s example, cultivating Marist simplicity, responsibility, thoughtfulness, and service, which he combined with his sense of obedience. When he arrived in Toledo, his brother had already been there for three years. They started living together again, only to wind up sharing their final moments together.

Brother Julio Fermín was from a small town in Navarre, and had entered the novitiate of Les Avellanes as a postulant when he was 15 years old. Marked by the religious atmosphere of his family, he was known for his many talents and good nature, which he placed at the service of community life and education. Students and families appreciated his good manners. The Brothers in his community were the first to enjoy his optimism and constant smile.

The community of Toledo was young and dynamic. Brother Javier Benito was one of the five Brothers under 25 years of age. Like the Superior he had been influenced by the Way of Saint James. During the early stages of his initial formation, he was in charge of looking after the newcomers. He had gone through a steep learning process as a teacher in

Lleida and Madrid, before being sent to Toledo. A confrere described him as “smart, friendly and hardworking.”

Brothers Anacleto Luis and Javier Benito had joined the juniorate in Arceniega the same year. Together they had followed the initial formation schedule until their first vows on September 8, 1929. They had also been together in the scholasticate. A few years later, they met again in the community in Toledo. Caring and generous, they had to deal with the difficult art of school discipline. However, nothing prevented them from smiling and helping others.

Brother Bruno José, one of the three from Navarre, was only 21. Brother Dominicio described him as “an angelic young man, good-natured, friendly, lively, charming, careful of his person, and good-looking.” On one occasion, when he was in Madrid, his mother and sister came to visit him. His mother did not hide her concern. She feared that all the religious were in danger. Bruno José replied, “It would be such a joy for me to die as a martyr.” His mother broke into tears. To comfort her, he added, “Don’t worry; there is a backdoor to escape from the school.”

One day a solemn funeral was being celebrated in his home village. The parish priest in his homily, interpreting Brother Bruno José’s spirit, urged reconciliation and asked the congregation to forgive their enemies.

Brother Evencio, one of the six Brothers from Burgos in the community, had spent eight years in Lucena, Córdoba and had arrived in Toledo in August 1935. He was experienced as a boarding school prefect and was able to combine empathy with discipline, being respectful and challenging at the same time. A Brother who left his mark on so many people, he would be deeply mourned by his former students and those who knew him. He was noted for how tall he was, and for his friendly attitude towards young people.

Brother Eduardo María was the youngest in the community, and about to turn 21. After his initial formation in Arceniega, Álava and Les Avellanes, Lleida, his first community was in Toledo, where he had joined in the school work, although he probably still felt like a Brother in formation. His spirit of prayer was evident in his frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. He was docile and obedient. Eduardo María and other four members of the community, a bit older than him, were the young Brothers in the group.

Brother Félix Amancio was the only one from Palencia in the community. He was settling down in Toledo after having spent four years in four different communities. He had recently taken his perpetual vows, and had done the month-long Spiritual Exercises. Aware of the political situation, he knew that being a religious meant his life was at risk: "Let us not suffer pointlessly; if they kill us, we will die as martyrs." This phrase of his seems even more extraordinary if we take into account he was only 24 years old. It meant real courage in the face of adversity.

7. The story of their martyrdom is brief but moving. Tied in pairs and praying, the Brothers walked in line to San Juan de los Reyes and Puerta del Cambrón, while others stayed at Fuente Salobre. The firing squads and machine guns were ready. Then came the anticipated shooting, and their lives came to a quiet end. The bodies were simply piled up. After a few hours, they were taken by truck to the cemetery, where they were thrown into mass graves. It was August 23, 1936, a Sunday.

Brother Jorge Luis was not included in the execution group because he was working in the prison kitchen. He was the only Brother remaining from the community, but not for too long. When the militias went back to the prison, they realized the mistake they had made and scheduled his execution for the next day.

Jorge Luis had been in Toledo for almost 20 years, only interrupted by the second novitiate in Grugliasco, Italy. Strongly built and of great kindness, he had plenty of friends. As administrator in the community he showed a true Marian and maternal heart. As educator, he had developed a democratic and participatory system to be just and fair with all his students.

When he was taken to execution, he reproached the militias for the cowardice of killing innocent and defenseless people, and then exclaimed: "Long live Christ the King!" The death of Brother Jorge Luis brought to eleven the number of martyrs in the Toledo community.

Chapter 3

Marist Community of Valencia

IN TIMES OF PEACE AS IN TIMES OF WAR

August 4, and October 5, 1936



Brother Luis Damián (Joseph Sobraqués Glory)

Born in Bouleternère, France on March 28, 1891

Martyr in Valencia on August 4, 1936, at the age of 45 years and 4 months



Brother José Ceferino (Elías Garet Ventejo)

Born in Centelles, Barcelona on January 28, 1905

Martyr in Valencia on August 4, 1936, at the age of 31 years and 6 months



Brother Berardo José (José Pampliega Santiago)

Born in Cañizar de Argaño, Burgos on August 27, 1912

Martyr in Valencia on August 4, 1936, at the age of 23 years, 11 months



Brother Benedicto José (Lucio Galerón Parte)

Born in Yudego, Burgos on December 13, 1912

Martyr in Valencia on August 4, 1936, at the age of 23 years, 7 months.



Brother Valente José (Jesús Delgado de la Fuente)

Born in Mazuelo de Muñó, Burgos on April 17, 1894

Martyr in Barcelona on October 5, 1936, at the age of 42 years, 6 months



Brother Eloy José (Eloy Rodríguez Gutiérrez)

Born in Torrepadre, Burgos on September 9, 1899

Martyr in Barcelona on October 5, 1936, at the age of 37

-
1. Dinner on July 19, Sunday, as usual, was at 8.30 p.m. The Brothers in the community of *Liceo Mayans* – in the city of Valencia, Mirasol Square # 5 – were in the dining room, without much appetite. Political tension, street violence, and insecurity about the future were a heavy and silent burden. Some Brothers were still very affected by what they had seen on their walk that afternoon. Revolution was in the air. A small radio was broadcasting worrisome news. After dinner, Brother Director convened a community meeting in the study room. They analyzed the confusing social picture, and decided that each Brother was free to stay in the school or sleep elsewhere. Half the group decided to leave for the night. At the school, some slept and others stood guard. The community gathered in the morning. A priest who was close to the community celebrated Mass in the chapel. On July 20, Monday, a general strike to protest against the military uprising was declared. General González Carrasco hesitated, and the left-wing groups took over the streets of Valencia.

On *Paseo de la Alameda* Street there was another Marist community which ran the *Academia Nebrija*. To circum-



Nebrija Academy – located in 11 Paseo de la Alameda – in 1903, the year of its foundation.

vent the prohibition to teach affecting religious congregations, the Brothers had chosen non-religious names for their schools in order to avoid suspicion. But the situation fell apart on July 21. Different churches and the cathedral itself became columns of smoke. The next day, a squad urged them to leave the school. They were able to return only for their last meal together on the feast of Saint James. Then they dispersed and found accommodation in guesthouses or private homes.

2. Valencia was a dynamic city, bathed by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The Marist presence there dated from 1897, and the founding of the first school had international roots: three Brothers from different nationalities (France, Italy and Switzerland) had opened the first school on *Portal de Valldigna* Street. The rapid increase in the number of students, and the innovative character of their educational project required several relocations. Academia Nebrija – at #11 Paseo de la Alameda – was directed by a community

of six Brothers. It was a primary school, whose pupils usually continued studying at *Liceo Mayans*. There was an excellent relationship between both communities. At Christmas and in the celebrations of First Communion, the Brothers used to meet to pray together and share a meal. To avoid any burden, after a visit from the Brothers of Mirasol, the larger group, the Brothers from La Alameda would visit them twice.

3. Four of the six Brothers from *Academia Nebrija* were martyred on August 4, a Tuesday. Brother Luis Damián was the Director. A Frenchman, he came from a wealthy and very religious family. When the Brothers were expelled from France in 1903, the boy decided to follow his teachers. This meant a great sacrifice for the family, for he was the only son and heir. He entered the juniorate of Vic at age 12. After his initial formation, he was sent to Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia and Murcia. In 1935 he started directing the school at *Paseo de la Alameda*. He was very strict as a religious, but kind and meticulous when preparing his classes and catechesis lessons. A quiet man, he fully lived the spirit of prayer.

Brother José Ceferino, from Barcelona, was sent to Alcoy and Valencia (La Alameda) after his initial formation. From there he went to Morocco, where he taught in Larache and Ksar. He returned to Valencia in 1933. As Deputy Director he formed a perfect team with Brother Director. Somebody once said, "They are made to live together and die together." Due to his young age, and given that the position as Deputy Director did not inherently imply any detachment, he was more accessible to the Brothers and students. He was known for his piety and self-sacrifice.

Brothers Berardo José and Benedicto José, from Burgos, were both 23 years old, with a difference of just four months between them. They shared an unbreakable friendship, forged

over the six years of initial formation together. Brother Berardo José had only worked in Valencia, spending three years in Mirasol before coming to La Alameda. Brother Benedicto José had been in different communities: Vallejo de Orbó, Palencia, Barruelo de Santullán, Palencia, Logroño, and finally Valencia in 1935, where he had rejoined his friend. This would be their last destination...

They had two different but complementary personalities. Brother Benedicto José was funny and witty, and yet under this superficial patina there was a wise attitude: "We should be always prepared for any event". Brother José Berardo was more serious-minded, thoughtful, and welcoming. Both of them were determined to get a teaching diploma, so they integrated apostolic work and teaching studies, following a phrase that was typical at that time: "Religious life and study combine by letting religious life shine!" Both succeeded in integrating these elements without contradiction.

Brothers Manuel Solá and Bernabé José, members of the *Academia Nebrija* community, escaped and tried to reach their hometowns.

4. Brother Director took refuge at Dr. Zumalacárregui's residence, but realizing there were rumors of retaliation, he moved to the house of Mr. Andreu, the baker. In those difficult times, accusations were the order of the day, and the militia squad finally captured its prey: Brother Luis Damián was detained in the street and taken to the Committee to be questioned, while the house where he was staying was searched. The information aroused suspicion because he was French by birth but with Spanish citizenship, and working as a teacher in Spain. Thanks to the intervention of a union worker, the threats against the baker did not materialize.

For his part, Brother José Ceferino, the Deputy Director, went to the school chaplain's house. They were both taken pris-

oner. Meanwhile, the two younger Brothers had also gone through moments of anxiety. They were staying in a small guesthouse on Puñalería Street, near the Cathedral of Valencia. They were living, like any person under persecution, on the razor's edge between life and death. A patrol of four gunmen stopped them. The landlady would recall afterwards they did not even have time to finish their bowl of soup.

5. The Salesian School on Sagunto Street had been turned into an improvised prison controlled by the Committees. The four Marists were taken there. Brother Luis Damián went to confession with the parish priest of Benissa, Alicante, who was also a prisoner, and after receiving absolution he said, "I'm happy and fulfilled facing martyrdom; I know they will kill us tonight." He urged the priest to deliver a sermon on the Kingdom of Christ, so that "our blood may not be shed in vain." A guard by the name of Ungría, head of the prison, burst into the cell and shouted: "The Superior of the Marists and his four companions!" He meant the four Brothers and the school chaplain. They all followed Ungría. Five shots ripped the silence of the night. A moment later, the metallic sound of hammers nailing the wood coffins creepily echoed. It was between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening of August the 4th. A heartless routine: the merciless foolishness of the executioners driving these innocent victims to the epic of martyrdom.
6. The situation worsened in Valencia. The Brothers still there tried to avoid jail and death. In the midst of all this concern, anxiety, and insecurity, Brother Carlos Víctor – delegate of the Provincial, Brother Laurentino – arrived by train from Barcelona. He spoke to Brother Valente José to suggest a possible but risky proposal: the Brothers could make their way to Barcelona, take a boat, the *Cabo San Agustín*, and escape to France. They had already taken

all sorts of precautions for the operation to be successful. Brother Valente José visited the different hostels and guesthouses to inform the Brothers about this possibility. There was no agreement in making a decision. Three positions came up in the group. Some of them did not trust the operation and thought traveling to Barcelona was unsafe. Taking a boat implied an agreement with an unreliable opponent, which did not bode well. They had seen too much in just a few days. A second group was willing to participate in a second operation – which was already scheduled and programmed if the first succeeded. And finally, five Brothers warily accepted the proposal. They were Antonino, Valente José, Crispín Lope, Eloy José and Martiniano. In those difficult times, when betrayal and suspicion were rampant, trust was shaky and uncertainty was ever present. The situation was too complicated to arrive at any consensus.

7. Protected by the shadows of the night, the five who had decided to go to Barcelona went to Valencia's Central Station together with Brother Carlos Víctor. They had dinner shortly before leaving, said goodbye to the Brothers, and got some money for any unforeseen events. There were handshakes, and their eyes struggled to contain the tears. Three other Brothers accompanied them to the station. Brother Inocencio Mateo could not hide his reluctance and said: "Better the devil you know than the angel you don't!"

They had a collective safe conduct pass which would protect them in case they were stopped by any militia or police. Brother Crispín was chatting on the platform with Brother Eloy José's brother, and noticed some unknown individuals staring at them, but finally the train started leaving and the tension decreased as they moved away. The rattling was

like background music to so many images from the preceding weeks parading through their minds.

An hour and a half later, doing their best to remain awake, they saw four individuals arrive and ask Brothers Carlos Víctor, Crispín and Antonino for their travel documents. Although everything was in order, they kept asking questions and complaining that there was something fishy. The train arrived in Castellón. The three Brothers were forced to get off, and their money was taken away from them. The interrogation focused on finding out the purpose of the trip, and the location of their Superiors. The Brothers were questioned separately. They began with Brother Crispín. Insults and blows followed his unclear answers, leaving the Brother bruised and with his left eye swollen. Then it was Brother Antonino's turn. They repeatedly pretended to execute him, even firing into the air, and then they slapped and punched him. The Brothers were taken back to Valencia, where the dungeon awaited them.

8. The rest of the Brothers continued the trip. Brother Martignano arrived in Barcelona only to join the group who was killed in the prison of San Elías. Brothers Valente José and Eloy José were killed before joining them.

Brother Valente José, from Burgos, came from a very large Christian family living in Mazuelo de Muñó, a village with only 130 inhabitants. At 13 he entered the juniorate of Vic. After his initial formation, he was sent to Badalona, Barcelona, Lleida, Madrid, Murcia, Toledo, Girona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Grugliasco and Pamplona. He had returned to Valencia to work at the *Liceo Mayans*. This Brother was a competent educator who efficiently taught high school subjects. His strong and courageous character had driven him to accept the proposal of going to Barcelona, after acting as an informant for his Brothers in Valencia.

Brother Eloy José, from Torrepadre in the Province of Burgos, also came from a large and very Christian family. At age 11 he had entered the juniorate at Arceniega, Álava. Burgos had been his first community after initial formation. He carried out his educational and pastoral work in Valencia in two different periods, interrupted by a three-year interval in Cartagena. Appreciated as a good and efficient educator, his students loved him. His attitude was always unassuming and discreet, without trying to call people's attention.

We do not know precisely where Brothers Valente José and Eloy José were killed. It must have been after Castellón, on the night of October 5th since they continued the journey by train after leaving the other three brothers behind. Some accounts claim it happened when the con-



During the Republican period, the school took the name of Liceo Mayans. It was located in 5 Plaza de Mirasol.

voy arrived in Barcelona or its immediate vicinity. Perhaps Brother Valente José was killed in Horta, and Brother Eloy José in the Catalanian capital. Murderers often left little or no trace, so it was difficult to track down the exact place. Eventually, the fiasco of this first escape by ship, due to betrayal on the part of the authorities, made the second attempt impossible.

Chapter 4

Marist Community of Vic (Barcelona)

WE KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT AND
WHAT IT COSTS

August 1st and September 8, 1936



Brother Severino (Severino Ruiz Hidalgo)

Born in Fuencaliente de Lucio, Burgos on November 5, 1907

Martyr in La Palma de Cervelló, Barcelona on August 1, 1936, at the age of 28 years and 8 months



Brother José Teófilo (José Mulet Velilla)

Born in Mazaleón, Teruel on June 28, 1917

Martyr in La Palma de Cervelló, Barcelona on August 1, 1936, at the age of 19 years and 1 month



Brother Justo Pastor (Máximo Aranda Modrego)

Born in Gallur, Zaragoza on September 3, 1907

Martyr in Barcelona on September 8, 1936, at the age of 29



Brother Alipio José (Maximiano Drona Leoz)

Born in Uztároz, Navarre on June 8, 1916

Martyr in Barcelona on September 8, 1936, at the age of 20 years and 3 months

1. Since July the 19th fell on a Sunday, the community followed the ordinary rules and went for an outing with the juniors, in spite of the confusing information being received³. The Spanish Army of Africa had risen against the Republican Government the day before, but the small city of Vic seemed removed from all the political agitation. However, the disturbing shockwaves from Barcelona and its “red” belt would soon arrive in Vic, capital of the Osona jurisdiction, which was only 69 kilometers away. The Brothers accompanying the juniors were wearing the religious habit. They went through the city to the countryside, but noticed something strange in the eyes of the passers-by. Upon returning home, some friends advised them not to leave the house again wearing the habit. The situation had radically changed and foreshadowed turbulent times. The indefinite general strike proclaimed the next day, added more tension.

The city was an episcopal see. It only had over 15 thousand inhabitants, and was considered a Levitical city because of its many convents, religious foundations and centers. The paintings by Sert decorating the interior of the cathedral, famous for its mixture of architectural styles, were destroyed by fire. The new decoration by the same artist after the Civil War – with its strong contrasts between light and dark – would reflect Christ’s passion and the suffering of humanity, an artistic expression inspired by the experience of pain in people’s own flesh.

2. The Marists had three centers in Vic: a school established in 1888; a juniorate founded in 1903; and the provincial tailoring workshop, in 1909, the year of the Tragic Week.⁴

³ Francisco Franco’s uprising had taken place the day before, on July 18, 1936, but the brothers still decided to go for an outing. (Translator’s note)

⁴ *Tragic Week* (25 July – 2 August 1909) is the name used for a series of bloody confrontations between the Spanish Army and the working classes of Barcelona and other cities of Catalonia (Spain), backed by anarchists, socialists and republicans, during the last week of July 1909. (translator’s note)



Our Lady of Carmel Convent in Vic, formation house of the Marist Brothers.

There were seven Brothers in the juniorate community, headed by Brother Jerónimo Emiliano. Vic, the City of Saints,⁵ was an ideal place to form the future Marists. When they concluded the juniorate program, the seminarians would go to Les Avellanes for the three following stages. The school was located in a former Carmelite convent, and was run by six Brothers. The Director was Brother Carlos María. Brother Alfonso was in charge of the provincial tailoring shop.

3. The Brothers were farsighted. If the situation worsened, they had a plan B, which actually became operative the following day, July 20, at seven in the evening. They found accommodation for around 35 of the oldest juniors in a

⁵ Many saints had lived there, such as Miquel dels Sants, Antoni Maria Claret, Joaquina de Vedruna, Francesc Coll, etc. (Translator's note)

number of farmhouses and cottages, with which they had made arrangements in advance. The Brothers accompanied them. They all got enough groceries and clothing. Can Armengol was the first stop, where they stayed overnight. The next day they moved into different farmhouses. The remaining 48 juniors left a bit later. The Brothers also dispersed, but some stayed at the school, despite knowing that the looting and burning of religious properties had already started. A neighbor betrayed the Brothers and told the militias they had a clandestine radio station and a machine gun. The search confirmed it was a hoax. The gunshots in the distance, the blaze of bonfires, and the rumors of murder kept the Brothers on tenterhooks.

The militias forced the Marist administrators to close their bank accounts and give the money to the Committee of Vic. On July 28 all the Brothers went back to the juniorate house together with the 60 juniors or so, who had returned from the farms. The militias showed up and loudly proclaimed: "From now on, any relationship between teachers and students is completely forbidden." They lined up the juniors, called the roll, and then led them to the Charity House.⁶ When the juniors got to the dining room, they took a stand and did not touch the food, so the militias had to call a Brother to resolve the situation. The juniors eventually returned to their families; only 19 of them, from Castille and Navarre, stayed a while longer.

The Brothers had to disperse. The farewell was very moving. Nobody knew the fate that awaited them. Some went to the train station, others to hide with their friends or return to their families.

⁶ A Catholic charity aimed at educating and raising poor, orphaned and/or street children, or helping the pilgrims and the poor in general. (Translator's note)

4. Four young Brothers left Vic for Barcelona on July 30, including Brothers Severino and José Teófilo. They found accommodation at the San Antonio guesthouse. The following day, they got all their personal documents in order and went to a park to meet the Director, who was taking one of the juniors home.

At about 10:00 in the evening, they were heading for San Pablo Street, back to the guesthouse, when suddenly a group of hostile men appeared and shouted: "Hands up!" They pointed their guns at them, searched them, took away all their belongings and made them in pairs to the closest prison. There they were turned over to be interrogated and threatened in an effort to force them to speak. The Brothers cunningly played the game and answered without providing any conclusive information. On Saturday, August 1st at 4:00 in the morning, they were taken in two cars for the so-called *stroll of death*.

Brothers Dionisio David y José Teófilo were in the first car. Brother José Teófilo, from Teruel, was very young, only 19



Juniors playing flag game at recess in the schoolyard.

years old. He was always optimistic, frank, dedicated, hard-working and smiling. One of his brothers was also a Marist. Vic was his first and only community. His companion, Brother Dionisio, managed to break free, run into a nearby cornfield and then, hiding in the reeds weeds, reached the river. While he was figuring out how to cross it, he heard the shot that put an end to Brother José Teófilo's life.

5. Brothers Severino and Cleto Luis were in the other car, which parked near the first one, in the municipality of La Palma de Cervelló. Brother Severino came from a family of seven children. Two of his Brothers were Marists, and some of his sisters were also Religious. Despite his desire to be a Brother, his parents refused to let him leave home. Finally, after three years of military service in Africa, he got his parents' permission to join the Brothers. The two communities where he had been were formation houses, and he had been prefect of discipline with novices and juniors. Recently he had written to his family, "Do not worry about us. We know very well what we are looking for and at what cost! Dreadful days will come, maybe very dreadful and without delay, but with Christ we say, 'We have overcome the world.' "

After a discussion with the militias, who promised to let him free if he shouted "Long live the FAI!"⁷ Brother Severino exclaimed instead: "Long live Christ the King!" and "Long live Our Lady of Pilar!" He was murdered on the spot. They sprayed him with gasoline, set him on fire, and left him on the wayside. He was buried by a peasant in a vineyard along the road.

⁷ FAI stood for *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Iberian Anarchist Federation), founded in Valencia in 1927, a Spanish organization of anarchists active in close collaboration with various labor unions. Members of the FAI were at the forefront of the fight against Francisco Franco's forces during the Civil War. (Translator's note)

6. Brother Justo Pastor contacted the Director of the Charity House and offered his services as music teacher, so as to be close to the juniors. The Director accepted the proposal because he loved music. Brother Justo's interaction with the juniors became a great opportunity to entertain, encourage and catechize them. The Director was very pleased one day with a musical performance in his honor, but he eventually had to dismiss Brother Justo Pastor because he had no trade union affiliation. The Brother consulted his Superior and followed his instructions: he was called to Barcelona, to be with Brother Alipio José, and stayed with him in a guesthouse on Aviñón Street.

Brother Justo Pastor, from Zaragoza, had entered the juniorate of Vic at age eleven. After initial formation, he had been sent to Barruelo, Villafranca de Navarra, Larache and Vic. Being very dedicated to his apostolate, people remarked that he "seemed unable to live without his juniors." He saw music as a service, and showed an exquisite musical sensitivity.

Brother Alipio José, from Navarre, was twenty years old. Moved by missionary zeal, he had decided to cross the Atlantic and should have gone to Uruguay, but political events kept him from fulfilling his dream. When he was expelled from Vic, he went to Manresa and found accommodation in the house of a man he did not know, who turned out to be a communist. However, he established a good relationship with him. Then he tried to go to France, but he ended up returning to the communist's house, who advised him to cross the French border through La Seu d'Urgell and Andorra. Instead he went back to Vic. Sometime later he joined Brother Justo Pastor in Barcelona.

They were arrested in the Catalan Capital and, without a trial or verdict, were executed on September 8, Tuesday, Feast of the Nativity of Mary.

Chapter 5

Marist Community of Ribadesella (Asturias)

THEY'LL KILL ME BECAUSE I'M A RELIGIOUS

September 4, 1936



Brother José de Arimatea (Restituto Santiago Al-
lende)

Born in Bustillo del Monte, Cantabria on June 10,
1902

Martyr in Sama de Langreo (Asturias) on Septem-
ber 4, 1936, at the age of 34 years and 2 months

1. The *Mistral*, a merchant ship loaded with food and ammunition, had docked in the port of Ribadesella. This town of Asturias had about eight thousand inhabitants and had been founded by Alfonso X the Wise. The surrounding landscape brings to mind a beautiful interplay between the shoreline and the Sea of Cantabria. But sometimes the cruelest dramas are performed in the most attractive settings...

It was mid-August, 1936. A line of prisoners, walking two by two, guarded by militiamen, was moving from the church, where they had been confined, to the port in order to remove cargo from a ship. As they marched along they bore insults and abuse. The task was arduous. Some bales were large and heavy. Hunger and weakness were taking their toll. The militias were particularly cruel with the parish priest. Another priest was forced to clean the latrines without any tools, by using only his hands. Brother José de Arimatea, Director of the Marist School, took part in



The Brothers' house and school in Ribadesella, currently not in use.

unloading the ship just like everyone else. His age allowed him to work hard, but physical exhaustion was already having an effect on him. Moral and psychological abuses were especially difficult to endure.

2. Brother José de Arimatea had arrived to town in July 1930, after spending a year at the second novitiate in Grugliasco, Italy. He had recently turned 28 and, following his Superiors' orders, was to found and run a school, which had been requested by the parish priest and a board of neighbors. They provided him with a large house, where he taught three grades of primary school and three of high school. Five Brothers and two lay men formed the teaching staff. José soon achieved a reputation for his professional competence as an educator and catechist. He also worked closely with the parish. Music was a passion for him, so he created a polyphonic choir to brighten up fiestas and ceremonies.

But the situation was not at all easy for him. In times of uncertainty informers have their heyday in creating havoc.

In mid-March 1936, three Brothers were returning from the parish where they had been preparing things for the feast of Saint Joseph. People pelted them with stones. Darkness overtook the attackers, helping the Brothers avoid further injury. Social and political tension erupted in the form of aggressive behavior. When they got home, trying not to worry the rest of the Brothers, they said nothing. As they were about to fall asleep, a loud knock at the door made them jump out of bed. A group of municipal guards and civilians had come to detain the Director, saying that there was an allegation against him. They also insisted on searching the house. The charges were not insignificant: plotting to assassinate the mayor, and the clandestine manufacturing of gases and explosives. The interrogation took place in the town hall and was tough and persistent, bordering on the ridiculous. The alleged gas and explosives charge involved nothing more than having the high school students carrying out experiments in the chemistry laboratory, which was very sparsely equipped. The guards drew back from further investigation. Brother Director was allowed to return without a problem. However the episode was a foretaste of what would happen months later, after July 18th.⁸

3. The social situation in Ribadesella seemed normal, but the constant movement of cars and trucks did not bode well. The detonating factor was the arrest of the parish priest on the afternoon of July 25, the feast of Saint James. The crowd insulted him. The next evening, on Sunday, Brother Director was arrested together with other significant people in town. The ground floor of the Socialist Center became the prison, but soon there was not enough room for all the pris-

⁸ Francisco Franco's uprising. (Translator's note)

oners, so they were taken to the unfinished parish church, which was turned into a detention center. This is the place from which the parish priest and the Brother occasionally used to go to unload cargo from the ship. A senior commander of artillery seemed to have gone missing from the prison, but was actually taken and burned alive in a forest near a neighboring village. This event shocked the whole town.



Parish Church of Ribadesella. Since 2000, there lie the remains of Brother José de Arimatea in an urn to the left of the main altar.

The community of Brothers remained at the school, and Brother Lorenzo José led the group. They were forced to undergo several searches. In one such incident the militias burned all the religious objects in the yard, together with any book that seemed slightly suspicious, anticipating Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953. Meticulously they searched the Director's room and took away some silver coins, saying, "He won't need them anymore, since not even Christ can save him." The lady who cooked for the community often visited Brother José de Arimatea in prison, bringing clothes and food. Trying to encourage him, she once told him, "You're getting out of here, you'll see." He answered: "No, that won't happen. They'll kill me because I'm a religious, but I accept that for I've been chosen by God."

4. The die had been cast. Its engine roaring, a truck was waiting impatiently for the director of the Marist School, two priests, and several lay men. They all had their hands tied behind their backs with wire. The truck headed off to an unknown destination. The militias did not want to leave any trace of their murders.

In the summer of 1938, the press announced the discovery of numerous bodies in a pit mine located in the mountains of Sama de Langreo. The identification of the remains took place, and María Cuevas Victorero, the dedicated cook, recognized Brother José de Arimatea's clothing and noticed the initials "JA" on his shirt. The funeral was solemn and the remains were placed in a mausoleum funded by former students. At that time, the Marist Brothers were no longer in Ribadesella, and the school never reopened.

The forensic report was shocking. All the victims had been thrown handcuffed and alive into the macabre mine pit, which was over two hundred meters deep. A woman who lived nearby said she could hear horrifying screams at night that made sleep impossible.

Chapter 6

Marist Community of Badajoz

FAITH IS OUR FIRST TREASURE

August 7, 1936



Brother Aureliano (Pedro Ortigosa Oraá)

Born in Torralba del Río (Navarre) on February 5, 1894

Martyr in Badajoz on August 7, 1936, at the age of 42 years and 6 months

1. Brother Aureliano came every day to the diocesan seminary of Badajoz, located on the outskirts of the city. He directed the *Escuela Preparatoria de Ingreso* (Preparatory School), which had been founded by the bishop. He had lunch with the seminary staff. The silhouette of the city walls caught his eye as he returned to the community, which ran *Our Lady of Carmen School*, on Donoso Cortés Street. It had been founded in 1930. There were twelve Brothers in the community. Brother Estanislao José was the Director. Badajoz had over 50 thousand inhabitants, and ranked as the most populous city in Extremadura. Both the City and Province felt Republican. The precarious situation of the peasants, underpaid and often exploited, favored the ideas of revolution and change. Violence did not take long to arrive in Badajoz. The first symptoms were already present.

Upon returning from an outing to Seville, the community encountered a full search of the property. All the rooms in the house, and even the two cars they had used on the



Community of Badajoz in 1935

trip to Seville, were thoroughly inspected. The inspection began on the evening of July 13, and lasted until half past four in the morning the next day. But the real problems began on August 2nd. After Sunday Mass, three Brothers were arrested and imprisoned. The rest of the community dispersed and took refuge in homes and guesthouses. Brother Aureliano thought the seminary would be safer.

2. A group of friends organized a flight to Portugal for the community, and Brother Aureliano was supposed to join them, but when he saw they were carrying weapons, he decided to return to Badajoz and ask a friend of the Brothers, Mr. Antonio Pesini, for shelter. The family's cook revealed his hiding place to the militias, who were seeking the Brother, but he avoided being captured. While he wandered from one place to another, he remembered his writings from the second novitiate in Grugiasco eight years earlier. He wrote, "Faith is our first treasure. For instance, when the martyrs were asked to decide between faith and life, they chose losing their life, not their faith." This conviction was starting to become incarnate in the situation he was facing.

3. There are different and complementary versions of how Brother Aureliano fell into the hands of the militia, and about his martyrdom. First a friend claiming to be an eyewitness says that in the afternoon of Friday August 7th some militias arrested him while he was looking for a new shelter.

A second version, from a former student claiming to be an eyewitness, holds that Brother Aureliano was walking down the road to the train station, towards the entrance of the Palmas Bridge, when he arrived at a checkpoint. The militias accused him of being a priest, hit him with their weapons, knocked him to the ground, kicked him until one of his eyes came out of its socket and left his face covered with blood. They urged him, without success, to blaspheme against God. A group of women yelled: "Strip him!" Then they led him to one of the arches of the bridge on the Guadiana River, forcing him to stand up so that they could shoot him, but he knelt down, holding his crucifix until they murdered him.



Our Lady of Carmel School in Badajoz, 1936

A third version, from a lady who also presented herself as an eyewitness, states that Brother was walking on the road with his head bowed in humility, without saying a word. A militia saw him and simply shot him in the back. The militiaman's leader, surprised by the speed of events, asked his subject,

"Did you 'send him out for coffee' already?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well now, go back and shoot him again for me!"

A shot rang out sharply under the arches of the bridge over the Guadiana River.

At half past nine in the evening, three people came to the scene to collect the body. They were unable to do so because there were two people watching the place. They returned the next morning, but the body had already been removed. There was a truck dedicated to collecting the bodies of those who had been executed and carting them off to a common grave.

4. A week after Brother Aureliano's execution, the so-called Battle of Badajoz against the government of the Second Republic took place, and was followed by a real slaughter. North and south were joining forces, isolating Portugal in the conflict. The Marist School suffered no damage. Two bombs fell in the courtyard, one of which exploded causing minimal damage. In October, the school year started with an increased number of students.

Chapter 7

Marist Community of Malaga

THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP SAVES HIMSELF LAST

August 27, September 24 and October 18, 1936



Brother Guzmán (Perfecto Becerril Merino)

Born in Grijalba, Burgos on April 19, 1885

Martyr in Malaga on September 24, 1936, at the age of 51 years and 5 months.



Brother Fernando María (Celedonio Martínez Infante)

Born in Acedillo, Burgos on August 30, 1895

Martyr in Malaga on September 24, 1936, at the age of 41



Brother Teógenes (Pedro Valls Piernau)

Born in Vilamacolum, Girona on November 22, 1885

Martyr in Malaga on August 27, 1936, at the age of 50 years and 9 months



Brother Luciano (Mauro Álvarez Renedo)

Born in Albacastro, Burgos on January 15, 1892

Martyr in Malaga on August 27, 1936, at the age of 44 years and 7 months



Brother Pedro Jerónimo (José Félix Serret Anglés)

Born in Ráfales, Teruel on November 20, 1904

Martyr in Malaga on August 27, 1936, at the age of 31 years and 9 months



Brother Roque (Abilio Villarreal Abaza)

Born in Arazuri, Navarre on February 22, 1885

Martyr in Malaga on October 18, 1936, at the age of 51 years, 7 months

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1. There was a phone call for Brother Guzmán, Director of the Marist School. The Commander of the Civil Guard was at the other end of the line to alert him about the Communists' intention to burn churches, convents, and religious schools. It was the evening of July 17, 1936.
 2. Brother Guzmán had spent 12 years in Malaga. Going back over the events, the month of May 1931 immediately came to his mind. Back then, when the burning of convents had taken place, he was Deputy Director of the school, and had risked everything to defend Manuel González, Bishop of the diocese.

The Marist School, located in the old seminary – which still seemed like new, although it had been founded seven years earlier – was looted and burned. The Brothers had to start over. They chose a well-placed farm on Palo Avenue. They dialogued and arrived at two decisions: they would keep the name of *Our Lady of Victory* for the school, no compromise; and they would stop wearing the religious habit. The Brothers' dedication, coupled with the intelligent attitude of Brother Guzmán as Director, able to wisely contend with

the constant attacks from anticlerical groups, brought success to the school and gained it a great reputation, something that would later cause trouble.

Malaga, bathed by the Mediterranean Sea, had about 200 thousand inhabitants at the time. It was one of the most populated cities in Spain. The difficult social situation had caused a latent dissatisfaction, which exploded in the historical context of the insurrection.

Following the wave of violence of May 1931, the debate on the new Draft Constitution had started on July 27 the same year. The chronic issues of Spanish politics resurfaced: regional and territorial autonomy, religion, and the ideological polarization between left and right, as particularly expressed in the issue of property. Articles 26 and 27 of the



Brother Guzmán (Perfecto Bacerril Merino), school director in Malaga and “friend of the Malaga workers”.

Draft Constitution fully intended to affect the religious field. It attempted to dissolve the Society of Jesus because of its “vow of obedience to an authority different from the legitimate State;” nationalize the assets of religious orders; forbid religious congregations from teaching and from creating or funding private schools. Some of these claims remained a dead letter. The outcome of the 1933 elections attenuated the application of these rules. However, the tension was still alive in the background, covering a wide range of issues.

The Brothers did not abandon their mission, but were careful about the external use of symbols – the habit, for example – and in some cases, they changed the name of their schools to avoid suspicion. Old photos of the Brothers in suit and tie reflect this historical moment.

3. On July 19, after Sunday Mass at the church of the Paulist Fathers in the Limonar district, the Brothers went for an outing to the mountains, looking for some quiet time to address the delicate situation in which they were living and decide what action to take. The Director was late. He had to go to the school to collect money. Some members of the community were impatient. As soon as he arrived, they started the meeting. The nine Brothers of the community were there. The view overlooking the city was gruesome. Nearly 400 buildings had become columns of smoke and fire. They did not know the Marist School would be added to the list of looting and destruction the next day. After weighing the pros and cons of the various alternatives, the Brothers decided to disperse in order to avoid danger. Brother Guzmán distributed all the money he had brought with him.
4. Six of these nine Brothers were to die as martyrs. Brother Guzmán, from Burgos, was the Director. The newspaper *Sur*, on the first anniversary of his death, remembered him

in a photograph caption: “Brother Guzmán, friend of Malaga’s workers, who thanks to his kindness, warmth and good heart earned the sympathy of all who related to him.” He was always attentive to the needy: “We are poor, but have everything, while poor people have nothing to eat today and are enduring a thousand sufferings trying to find something to feed their children.” He assumed his responsibilities at the risk of his life: “Salvation was within my reach but I didn’t want to leave my own. As Director, I thought myself obliged to follow the same fate as the others, not leaving Malaga without them. The captain of the ship saves himself



Malaga. School of Our Lady of Victory. Stained-glass window in memory of the six Marist martyrs.

last. While there is a single person in danger, I will remain at the helm.”

Brother Fernando María, from Burgos, was ten years younger than Brother Guzmán. He had been in many communities before, and only one year in Malaga. With a teaching diploma and a master’s degree in chemistry, he was known as a competent educator, a man of God and a faithful witness to Him. In prison he would be nicknamed “The Teacher.” The militias would even say, “He was such a good man! Killing him was a mistake...”

Brother Teógenes, from Girona, was the community administrator. He worked closely with Brother Guzmán, and had been in Malaga for seven years. He taught algebra, trigonometry, and general math, as well as catechesis. His heart condition gave him a special sensitivity to suffering, and moved him to serve the sick. Once, in a particularly difficult circumstance, he said, “When it comes to helping the Brothers, do not think about the risk you run, and just do it swiftly.”

Brother Luciano, from Burgos, had been sent to eighteen communities in twenty-six years. It is not easy to draw conclusions from his service dossier, but we can underline his availability, and the positive assessment from his students. He was always jovial and smiling, and never criticized the Brothers or the students.

Brother Pedro Jerónimo, from Teruel, was the youngest Marist martyr in Malaga. He had been at the school of *Our Lady of Victory* only one year. The new political situation prevented him from going to a spiritual renewal session scheduled in Les Avellanes, although he was already registered. He was docile to the Spirit and constant and persevering in pursuing his goals.

Brother Roque, from Navarre, had spent four years in Malaga. He was considered a good educator and an excellent

religious, but several health problems affected his work as a teacher. He organized the Association of the Holy Childhood in the school, and fostered priestly and religious vocations among his pupils. A member of the domestic service from the place where he was about to take refuge would state: "He was prudent, very unselfish, undemanding, and did not ask for food or any special treatment".

The three other Brothers were able to find refuge in the Mexican Consulate, where they remained until being released.

5. In various ways, five of the six Brothers died between August and September. Brother Guzmán was arrested several times, because he often left his hiding place in order to help the Brothers. A doorman and a maid from the school betrayed him to the militia, who stopped him on August 25. Several false charges against him were presented to the Committee. He did not say a word. After a National Air Force foray, the crowd, waving red flags, went to the prison to slaughter the prisoners. Brother Guzmán was in the hos-



Community of Malaga in 1936

pital with a high fever. They called him over the speakers at two o'clock. Some initial shots were heard coming from the prison. Along with some priests he was taken by car to the cemetery, where all were executed and then buried in a mass grave.

Brother Fernando María was arrested at the school and taken to jail on August 23. A month later, on September 24, he was released after questioning. As he was walking out towards freedom, he went through the first and second doors, but at the third, an FAI member, recognized him and shouted, "This is a Marist!" He pounced on him, twisted his arms behind his back and shot him twice. Other militias finished him off, and then took the body to a mass grave.

At nine o'clock in the morning on August 27th, Brothers Pedro Jerónimo, Teógenes and Luciano were tracked down and arrested at the guesthouse where they were staying, which belonged to a certain Mrs. Rosario. The dialogue between Brother Pedro Jerónimo and the militias went as follows:

"Who are you looking for?"

"We are looking for some priests that we have been told are staying here."

"You won't find any priests here."

Well, we have been told there are, and we know you are one of them even if you want to deny it; you are priests."

"We are not priests. We are Marist Brothers, and if that is the reason why you are searching for us, we don't mind dying, because our conscience is clear."

"What a waste of time! It makes no difference to us."

At the Committee Office they were forced to sign their death warrant. They were driven near to the cemetery of

San Rafael, where they were executed. Their bodies were buried in a mass grave.

Brother Roque was hiding in a hostel called *La Fonda Imperial*. A squad came by and imprisoned him on August 24. Thanks to the efforts of the Consul of Mexico he was set free. The Consul lodged him at his brother-in-law's home, on Alameda Street # 31. The family that owned the house was away in Tangier at the time.

He spent much time in prayer, and kept the memory of the Brothers in his community in his heart. On October 18, a Sunday, there was an air raid on Malaga, and the sound of guns encircled the property where he was staying. A squad showed up to inspect the houses in the Alameda sector of the city. One of the militias, a former pupil, recognized Brother Roque and displayed a vengeful attitude. When his companions found out he was a Marist Brother, they immediately declared he had to die. He was shot at the foot of a tree in the area. Mortally wounded, before his last breath he mumbled words of Christian forgiveness for his executioners.

A few years later, the Marist work in Malaga resumed in a rented property on Marqués de Valdecañas Street. After making the renovations necessary, the school began anew in October, 1937.

Chapter 8

Marist Communities of Madrid

MAY IT BE WHAT GOD WANTS!

From July 20, 1936 to August 21, 1937



Brother Benigno José (José Valencia Janices)

Born in Artajona, Navarre on November 16, 1906

Martyr in Paracuellos del Jarama, Madrid on August 11, 1936, at the age of 29 years and 8 months



Brother Adrián (Manuel Llop Plana)

Born in La Mata de Morella, Castellón on January 1, 1896

Martyr in Paracuellos del Jarama, Madrid on August 11, 1936, at the age of 40 years and 7 months



Brother Euquerio (Euquerio Llanillo García)

Born in Solanas de Valdelucio, Burgos on February 20, 1914

Martyr in Madrid on January 4, 1937, at the age of 22 years, 10 months



Brother Gaspar (Pablo Martínez Esteban)

Born in Los Balbases, Burgos on March 24, 1898

Martyr in Madrid on July 24, 1936, at the age of 38 years and 4 months



Brother Camerino (Braulio Álvarez Palacín)

Born in Villamedianilla, Burgos on March 27, 1900

Martyr in Madrid on July 24, 1936, at the age of 36 years and 3 months



Brother Luis Alfonso (Luis Moreno Aliende)

Born in Quintanilla San García, Burgos on June 24, 1911

Martyr in Madrid on August 26, 1936, at the age of 25 years, 2 months.



Brother León Argimiro (Argimiro García Sandoval)

Born in Calzadilla de los Hermanillos, Leon on July 31, 1913

Martyr in Madrid on July 20, 1936, at the age of 22 years and 11 months.



Brother Luis Daniel (Juan Viñuela Flecha)

Born in Navatejera, Leon on June 2, 1910

Martyr in Madrid on October 16, 1936, at the age of 26 years, 4 months



Brother Ángel Hipólito (Aniceto Pablos Carvajal)

Born in El Burgo Ranero, Leon on May 13, 1903

Martyr in Aravaca, Madrid on November 3, 1936, at the age of 33 years and 5 months.



Brother Julián Marcelino (Marcelino Rebollar Campo)

Born in Tresviso, (Cantabria on November 29, 1914

Martyr in Paracuellos del Jarama, Madrid on December 3, 1936, at the age of 22



Brother Domingo Ciriaco (Dionisio Domínguez Martínez)

Born in Villoria de Órbigo, Leon on January 24, 1911

Martyr in Madrid on April 20, 1937, at the age of 26 years and 3 months



Brother Jorge Camilo (Vidal García García)

Born in Cuadros Leon on February 7, 1916

Martyr in Madrid on August 21, 1937, at the age of 21 years, 6 months

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1. The Madrid sky, with its vivid color combinations, has always inspired talented artists. In 1936 it covered just over a million people living in the metropolitan area. The sweltering summer temperatures went hand in hand with the political temperature that year. Tempers were starting to flare. Being the capital of Spain, Major cities in the country viewed Madrid as being in the spotlight for signs of things to come. Since it was home to the institutions in charge of political, economic, and military decision-making, it hosted both power moves and conspiracies. Rumors were the order of the day, and the people responsible for them were carefully followed. The core of the rebel group was too far

away, and its collaborators in the capital were giving signs of weakness and disorganization. The fall of the *Cuartel de la Montaña* lifted all restraints on the militia squads, who unleashed house searches, arrests and murders without the Interior Minister being able to control them. Property seizures, pillage, improvised prisons to lock up detainees, the burning of churches and religious houses and “death strolls” as a form of summary execution were commonplace. Political activity became frenzied. August 1936 was termed a “month of atrocities” in Madrid. Government forces wanted to hold onto the capital city at any price while supporters of the insurgency wanted to conquer it to cause a domino effect in pursuit of their territorial ambitions. Resistance was summarized in the famous slogan, “They shall not pass!” In spite of high-minded political concepts flowing through the public discourse, day-to-day survival became more and more challenging, risky and uncertain.

2. Two Marist Provinces worked in education in Madrid. As we already mentioned, in 1886, four French Brothers arrived in Girona to learn Spanish with the intention of going to Latin America. They eventually decided to stay and opened the first Marist school on the Peninsula. The canonical Province of Spain was established years later. In 1903, because of the expulsion of religious orders from France, two new groups of French Brothers arrived in Spain, from Aubenas and Lacabane.

Brothers from the Province of Aubenas settled in Pontós, Girona, a town of just 500 inhabitants. At first it opened schools in Catalonia (Figueres, Borrassà, Besalú, and La Bisbal d’Empordà). Later they went to Galicia, Asturias, Leon and Castile.

In 1920, the General Council created the Province of Leon, declaring that “The railway line linking Madrid and Oviedo



Chamberí School on 3 Paseo del Cisne (currently Eduardo Dato Street).

will separate the new Province from the Province of Spain." At the time it was created, Leon had 184 Brothers, 3200 students, 19 houses, and its formation centers. This Province had a strong expansion in France and Argentina.

The Province of Lacabane began its presence with four Brothers in Oñate, Gipuzkoa. They soon established a novitiate in Anzuola in Gipuzkoa, the town that gave its name to the third Marist Province in the country.

The Provinces of Spain and Leon were both present in Madrid, with two communities each. The first had two schools: *Colegio Externado Chamberí* and *Colegio Los Madrazo*. The Province of Leon ran *Colegio San José* and *The Cardinal Cisneros Students Residence*. In three of these communities, there were Brothers who would bear witness to their faith through martyrdom.

3. The community at *Colegio Chamberí*, located at #3 Paseo del Cisne, now Eduardo Dato, consisted of 15 Brothers, eight of whom lived in an apartment on Modesto Lafuente

Street. Since 1902, the year it was founded, the school had repeatedly changed its location: Echegaray Street, Amor de Dios Street, Los Madrazo Street, Paseo de la Castellana and, beginning in 1923, Paseo del Cisne. It also changed its name twice: to *Colegio Santa María* and *Colegio Sagrado Corazón*. These changes resulted from efforts to improve and develop the center.

With the arrival of the Republic, the Brothers established the *Cervantes Cultural Limited Company*, and the school was renamed after the neighborhood where it is located: Chamberí. The Brothers enjoyed success running this center that included a primary and high school with close to 700 students. When the war broke out, the Republican authorities transformed it into a hospital.

Life for the Brothers was constantly on the razor's edge. Their expulsion from the schools meant dispersion, and forced them to find accommodation with friends or in guesthouses where they could go unnoticed. The Brothers had a Sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, living in an atmosphere of continuous threats. Consequently, a number of them left religious life: some returned to their families, others joined trade unions or leftist parties. The vast majority, however, decided to be single-minded. Compromise was impossible. Three Brothers in this community embraced martyrdom.

Brother Benigno José, from Navarre, came from a large family. After completing his initial formation in Vic and Les Avellanes, he was sent to Barruelo de Santullán, Malaga, and Madrid. Once he served out his alternative military service in Larache, he went to Lucena, and finally returned to Madrid. An excellent educator, he had a great sense of humor and a contagious joy. But his enthusiasm and optimism did not prevent him from being realistic. He wrote to his family: "This is going from bad to worse if God does not

intervene... God grant that we may see the beginning of the next (school year), despite many people thinking that the picture is very gloomy.”

Brother Adrián was from Mata de Morella in Castellón, a small town that encompassed the region’s market. He had gone through the same initial formation process: Vic and Les Avellanes. Alcoy had been his first mission. There is a lapse of 12 years without precise indications in his dossier. He combined his work as a cook with his dedication to teaching. Gradually he specialized in nursery school and started training new teachers. He was unpretentious and humble in his way of relating to people. He always assumed the most difficult tasks to make things easier for others.

On August 11, a Tuesday, these two Brothers, having found accommodations in a guesthouse on Modesto Lafuente Street, were cooking their meal. All of a sudden, the militias burst into the room, arrested the Brothers, gagged them with a towel, and let go a torrent of insults. They took them to the Bellas Artes prison, likely finishing them off in the town of Paracuellos del Jarama, scene of one of the more lurid pages of the Civil War.

Brother Euquerio, from Burgos, was only 23 years old. There were eleven children in his family, six of whom were Marist Brothers. Hermenegildo, his father, was a teacher, which was evident in the way he raised his children. Euquerio did his initial formation in Arceniega and Les Avellanes. After his professional studies, he left for what would turn out to be his only assignment: the community on Paseo del Cisne in Madrid, where he spent the last five years of his life. Despite his youth, he had the stamp of a leader.

Together with two other Marists, one of which was his blood brother, he was detained and taken to the *Dirección General de Seguridad* (The Security Police). The next day

he ended up at the Piarists' School on Porlier Street, which had been converted into a prison. As the weeks passed Euquerio's prison hardships worsened. By Christmas, he fell seriously ill. Together with his brother José (Fidel María), he was taken to a stuffy basement to prevent the spread of his infection. José described his brother Euquerio's last days: "No food, no clothes, no medicine; my brother raved and raved until he lost consciousness on the ninth day and died without any medical attention." An endearing story of brotherly love. As learned subsequently, two days later, on January 6, 1937, Wednesday, Euquerio's body was buried in the Municipal Cemetery at La Almudena.

4. The Marist presence at #19 Los Madrazo Street # 19, near the Cibeles Fountain and the current Ministry of Education, dated from 1917. Due to a dramatic increase in the number of students, the Brothers had to open a new center at #37 Paseo de la Castellana. The community consisted of 23 Brothers, led by Brother Sérvulo. Located in the heart of Madrid, they could not go unnoticed.

On Monday, July 20, they underwent the first search. A militia patrol brought all the Brothers together in the hallway, with the exception of Brother Ángel Andrés, who was in Barcelona doing some work for the publishing house. It was 3:15 in the afternoon. Six militiamen, accompanied by the Director, conducted a thorough search of the school premises and the community residence. The administrator of the community had just been visiting the Mercedarians as to advise them to get out of their place, and was surprised by the scene when he returned home. He was still able to hide some money and a number of documents, and then called the German Embassy to inform them about the arrest of Brother Guillermo, a citizen of that country. The Brothers were taken to the *Dirección General de Seguridad*. Such

a large group of men caught the eye of the passerby and the people watching from windows. The holding place was overcrowded. Feeling helpless they filled out the forms. Two days later, they were declared innocent and freed. They agreed that the Director would stay at the school together with Brother Pío during the day, that they would sleep at a guesthouse with three other Brothers, and that he would be the only one to know where to find each of them.

On July 23rd, Brothers Gaspar and Camerino were in the dining room ready for supper at the San Blas Inn on Atocha Street. Brother Gaspar, from Burgos, had entered the juniorate of Arceniega when he was twelve. His brother was also a Marist. The list of communities where Gaspar had worked was long: Pamplona, Logroño, Barcelona, Madrid, Burgos, Mataró, Murcia, Barcelona, Pamplona, and Madrid again, living on Los Madrazo Street for the second time. He had a reputation as an excellent teacher and animator of apostolic movements. He was also known for his simplicity of life.

Brother Camerino was also from Burgos, and had entered the novitiate of Les Avellanes at 24 years of age. A late vocation, he discerned God's call after returning from military service. After initial formation in Les Avellanes, he was sent to the community at Los Madrazo Street, his first and only assignment. He worked side by side with Brother Gaspar in the apostolic movements. A good teacher, he was appreciated for his open and thoughtful nature.

While Camerino and Gaspar were discussing the recent events, a group of militiamen burst in and demanded their personal documents. They took both Brothers with them. From that moment, their names were added to the list of the missing. On July 25, Brothers Sérvulo and Pío took steps to find out their whereabouts. From the information they gathered, they concluded that both had been killed. The

site and circumstances of their martyrdom and the place where their remains rest are unknown. It is more difficult to mourn such deaths than killings done in broad daylight.

Brother Luis Alfonso, from Burgos, came from a large family. One of his brothers was a Jesuit. His initial formation took place in Arceniega and Les Avellanes. He had spent his first three years in the apostolate at Calatayud, and the last four in Madrid, initially with the community on Cisne Street and then the one on Los Madrazo Street. In spite of the turbulent times in Madrid, he spent many hours studying at the National Library. He was considered a promising young man. On August 26, while having dinner with Brother Filogonio Mateo, a stranger came running into the room and whispered: "You have to get out of here immediately, they are coming for you!" Brother Filogonio quickly escaped and disappeared into the streets. Brother Luis Alfonso was not so fortunate. He was captured by the militias and taken away, which meant certain death. He became another name on the list of the missing.

5. In late 1918, the Brothers' Pontos District founded a school named the *Colegio Hispano-Francés de San José*, on Martín de los Heros Street. Two years later, when the District became the Marist Province of Leon, the school moved to #126 Fuencarral Street. In 1928, this new Province opened *The Cardinal Cisneros Residence* for students attending university, special schools, and other centers of higher education. In 1936 it had around 70 residents. The most popular careers were engineering, medicine and pharmacy, and agricultural education.

San José School had over 800 students, with 31 Brothers in the community. Most of them were Spanish, a few were French. In July, several Brothers were in Tuy, Pontevedra for spiritual exercises. The assassination of Calvo Sotelo caused

a real shockwave. The situation descended into chaos immediately. When the uprising began, some Brothers moved to the Cardinal Cisneros Residence, which was a safer place, and only the Brothers of foreign nationality stayed at the school. The Government wanted to give the impression that life was going on normally, but could not stop the burning of churches and religious buildings.

The assailants eventually arrived at *San José School* and followed their usual practice: shots in the air and lots of noise to scare the occupants of the house. They brought everyone to the entrance hall with hands up while they pointed their guns at them. Eustasio Aguilar, a member of the domestic staff, was searched and some money was found in his wallet. The militias started insulting him and calling him “enemy of the people” and “disgusting bourgeois.” They shot him on the spot, and left him on the floor in a pool of blood. Then they discovered Brother León Argimiro and brought him to the entrance hall, too. When he saw Eustasio’s body covered with blood, his fellow community



San José School on Fuencarral Street, Madrid

members facing the wall with their hands up and guns being pointed at them, he fainted. The militias were outraged. They dragged him to the street, and took him in a yellow car to an unknown destination. They probably executed him at the *Casa de Campo* as usual.⁹

This Brother was from Leon, and about to turn 23. He had done his initial formation in Venta de Baños, Palencia, Blancotte, France – where he learned the language – and Tuy, Pontevedra. In 1935, he combined his military service with teaching. He was always generous and faithful. *San José School* was his first and only assignment.

Almost three months later, a militia group arrived at the Oporto Guesthouse, where Brother Luis Daniel was staying there with another Brother, who was not home at that moment. They asked where that Brother was. Since they did not get the answer they wanted, they took Luis to the next room and brutally beat him. His body was covered with bruises and wounds and his face disfigured. Then they searched his pockets. When they found a rosary, the mocking became increasingly harsh, and the beating intensified. He did not say a word. Unexpectedly, they released him and went away, but returned a few days later, on October 16, a Friday. This time they were looking for a right-wing member of the Congress of Deputies. When those in command saw Brother Luis Daniel, they said: “That young man, to the truck!” One more Brother who went missing and who probably suffered the same fate as the politician.

Brother Luis Daniel was from Leon and came from a large family. He had been a playful child, dynamic and kind-hearted. Regarding his vocation, his father wanted to keep him home. He acquiesced and so Luis started his initial for-

⁹ The largest urban park, situated to the west of downtown Madrid. (Translator’s note)

mation at Venta de Baños. As a Brother he spent a year in Lugo, and seven in Fuencarral. His mother, foreseeing the tragic events that lay ahead, once told him: “My son, you better get out (of the congregation) lest they kill you.” His answer was: “Never. May this is what God wants!”

Sometime later, Brother Ángel Hipólito was prayerfully strolling through the courtyard of the women’s prison at Ventas, which temporarily was being used to house. He was recalling how he had been arrested at the Cisneros Residence on August 15, taken to the *Dirección General de Seguridad* (Security Police) and eventually to jail. Another Brother, a fellow prisoner, asked him what he was doing. He replied, “I’m fulfilling my duty to God, and preparing myself for what might happen!”

Brother Ángel Hipólito, from Leon, belonged to a large family. At first his mother wanted him to be a Marist, but when the time came to say goodbye to his family, she urged him to stay and he did. One of his older brothers was in the community at Tuy, and from there he encouraged him to follow his vocation. Ángel eventually found the courage to leave home. Later he carried out his Marist apostolate in



Cemetery of Paracuellos del Jarama (Madrid)

nine different communities, and had been in Fuencarral for three years. He was a good teacher, fervent and constant.

The days in jail went by laden with fear that the worst could happen at any time. On November 3, at three in the morning, 72 prisoners were to be taken from Ventas, supposedly to be transferred to another prison. But the preparations for this did not bode well. The vehicles took the road to La Coruña and stopped at the cemetery of Aravaca. The prisoners were ordered to get out of the cars, enter the graveyard and fully undress. They were tied up in sets of two. An instant before the 18 militias fired their machineguns, the prisoners shouted: "Long live Christ the King!" Their bodies fell into a mass grave. The first light of dawn was struggling to overcome the night's darkness.

Brother Julián Marcelino went through the same initial process as Brother Ángel Hipólito. Arrested on August 15th, he was led to the *Dirección General de Seguridad* (Security Police), and then to the prison at Ventas to endure three and a half months of confinement, abuse, constant danger, and disrespect. He was 21 years old. His union with God made sense out of all this incomprehensible suffering and allowed him to patiently bear it.

Julián was born in Tresviso, Cantabria. His father had 16 children: 7 by his first wife and 9 by a second. His vocation to be a Brother started when he was a boarder in the Marist school in Oviedo. His initial formation took place at Venta de Baños, Blancotte and Tuy. He was sent to Sahagún for an apostolic experience. Then he went to the school at Fuencarral.

On December 3, 1936, a convoy was supposed to transfer a massive number of prisoners from Madrid to Alcalá de Henares. That convoy never reached its destination. In Paracuellos del Jarama, Brother Julián Marcelino was murdered and buried in a recently dug mass grave.

At the market of *La Magdalena* in Madrid, a 26 year-old young man worked as a clerk in a vegetable shop. This was Brother Domingo Ciriaco, who had found refuge in the house of his relatives. His position allowed him to help the Brothers, arrange their ID documents, and affiliate them to the UGT.¹⁰ Called to active military duty, he applied for admittance to the *Escuela de Intendencia Militar of Valencia* (a Military Quartermaster School) and joined the Transport Workers Union of the CNT.¹¹ When he submitted his documents together with another Brother, he was detained, while the other Brothers was released. According to later information, it seems that he was denounced by a former student, who handed him over to officials at the Fuencarral Prison, located in the same building as *San José Marist School*. He was assassinated on Tuesday, April 20, 1937.

Domingo, from Leon, came from a large family. Two of his sisters were religious. Although his mother was hoping he would become priest, he eventually entered the juniorate at Venta de Baños. *San Jose School* in Madrid, where he spent eight years, was his first and only assignment. An excellent teacher, he was known for his teaching skills. His good nature and his dedication to others enriched the community.

Brother Jorge Camilo, also from from Leon, was the youngest Marist martyr in Madrid. He received an emergency baptism the same day he was born. The youngest in the family, he thought about joining the Marists after the invi-

¹⁰ UGT, *Unión General de Trabajadores*, General Union of Workers, the major Spanish trade union, historically affiliated with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. (Translator's note)

¹¹ CNT, *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, National Confederation of Labor, a Spanish confederation of syndicated anarchical trade unions affiliated with the International Workers Association. (Translator's note)

tation from his older brother, already a Brother. Jorge was noted for his intelligence. His initial formation included the training houses at Venta de Baños, Blancocotte (where he quickly learned French), and Tuy. He was assigned to a single community: *San José School* at Fuencarral, Madrid. He had all the skills of a good teacher, which his premature death prevented him from developing.

When militiamen stormed into the school on July 20th, Brother Jorge Camilo was ill in bed. However, this made no difference and they took him to the prison known as *Cárcel Modelo* along with the others. He suffered deprivation, abuse, and hardship. In November he was transferred to the first gallery of the *Porlier Prison*, improvised at the *Piarists' School*. There he made friends with a certain *José María Menoyo*. Once he was freed, that gentleman's family welcomed him as one of their own. He had to join the army, and was assigned to a labor battalion. In the evening he would return to the *Menoyo* household to sleep. But one day in August, 1937, he did not come back. Initial inquiries led nowhere. But the truth came to light later on: "He was discovered to be a monk, and was killed in the barracks courtyard as a warning to everyone." It was Saturday, August 21st.

Chapter 9

Marist Community of Chinchón (Madrid)

WE NEED NOT GO TO THE MISSIONS

July 29, 1936



Brother Feliciano (Severino Ruiz Báscones)

Born in Fuencaliente de Lucio, Burgos on November 2, 1884

Martyr in Madrid on July 29, 1936, at the age of 51 years and 8 months



Brother Felipe Neri (Fermín Zabaleta Armendáriz)

Born in Artajona, Navarre on September 24, 1899

Martyr in Madrid on July 29, 1936, at the age of 36 years and 10 months



Brother Herminio Pascual (Saturnino Jaunsarás Zabaleta)

Born in Irurzun, Navarre on February 11, 1912

Martyr in Madrid on July 29, 1936, at the age of 24 years and 5 months



Mr. Julián Aguilar Martín, an employee of the Marists in Chinchón, Madrid.

Born in Berge, Teruel on November 24, 1912

Martyr in Madrid on July 29, 1936, at the age of 23 years and 8 months

1. Four men, each carrying a suitcase, walked along Conde de Xiquena Street in Madrid. They stopped at No. 3. Mrs. Paula Aparicio lived on the second floor of this building. The men greeted the doorman, who did not let them take their luggage upstairs. He rang the doorbell and a maid opened the door immediately for she knew who they were. The owner of the house warmly welcomed them. She immediately recognized Brothers Feliciano, Felipe Neri and Herminio Pascual, who were accompanied by Julian Aguilar, an employee of the community, who was also an assistant for the first grades in the primary school. All of them worked at the *Primary Education School* in Chinchón, which was sponsored by a board founded by Mrs. Aparicio and other ladies in Madrid to provide education free-of-charge for poor children.

As they waited for an afternoon meal to be served, the Brothers told Mrs. Aparicio the latest developments. The



The Brothers' School in Chinchón, not in use anymore but still showing the original structure. The road is now called Marist Brothers Street.

situation in Chinchón had deteriorated on July 20, with the arrival of militiamen from neighboring villages. They invaded the school, assaulted and expelled the Brothers. Several families welcomed them warmly, for they knew the excellence of their work in favor of poor children. Only strangers from out of town could have treated them with such harshness and intolerance. The new authorities gave them 24 hours to leave town. They departed from the Tajuña railway station in Chinchón on July 29th. Their reasoning had been that in a big city like Madrid, 44 kilometers away, it would be easier to go unnoticed, and that they would find it easy to stay at one of the Brothers' schools, either on Los Madrazo or Cisne Street. But as they arrived, they realized that both schools had been raided. So they went to Paula Aparicio's place, since she was the founder of the center where they worked.

Brother Felipe Neri accurately foresaw what was going to happen. On March 29, a few months before the conflict began, he had written in a letter: "Politics are taking a bad turn, and we expect worse times ahead, for we are living in evil times and God is purifying us with the lashings of persecution. I'm very calm and willing to suffer whatever God wants.... I think Communism is advancing by leaps and bounds in Spain. It may last for a long or short time, whatever God wants will happen, but it will indeed arrive."

2. Chinchón had nearly seven thousand inhabitants at that time. Because of the beauty of its buildings, four decades later it would be declared a *Conjunto Histórico*.¹² The town's *Plaza Mayor* (Main Square), with its balconies and porches, created a pleasant and evocative space. The different po-

¹² A *Historical District*, listed as one of Spain's national treasures. (Translator's note)

litical trends were quite intense among its inhabitants, but the Brothers concentrated on their work of education and pastoral care, conducting a school that had been founded on October 1, 1932, one that required all their energy. They had many students and an endless waiting list.

Brother Feliciano, from Burgos, was the eldest in the group and also the Director. One of his brother's was a priest. He entered the juniorate in Burgos, went on to postulancy and novitiate in Vic and graduated from the scholasticate in Sant Andreu de Palomar. Throughout his life he was assigned to many communities. He had spent four years in Calatayud and thirteen at the school on Los Madrazo Street, teaching the first-year class in high school. Then, after a year in Granada, he had been appointed Director of the three following communities to which he was assigned: Barruelo, Toledo and Chinchón. A man of outstanding qualities, he was a natural leader. Moved by his example four of his nephews entered the Institute.

Brother Felipe Neri, from Navarre, was the eldest in a family of eleven children. Two became Marist Brothers, and three, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny. He did his military service in Melilla. About to turn 24, he entered the formation house in Les Avellanes, where his brother, Juan Norberto was living at the time. Then he carried out his apostolate in two free-of-charge schools, first in Burgos, where he taught for seven years at the *Círculo Católico de Obreros*, and finally in Chinchón. His trust in Divine Providence oriented all his efforts.

Following instructions from the Superiors, and in order to go on with their work in the new political climate, the Brothers started dressing in civilian clothes and adopted new names to look like lay teachers. Brother Felipe Neri adopted the alias of Victoriano García, and even asked his family to refer to him by that name in order to circumvent

ensorship and control. He was aware of how important his apostolic work was: "Without having to leave for the missions, we have a place right here to 'civilize' people, one that is incredibly close to Madrid... I have 62 students in my class, all very good ones, at least when I'm around...." (Letter dated November 29, 1933)

Brother Herminio Pascual, also from Navarre, was the youngest in the community. He had entered the juniorate in Villafranca de Navarra, and then completed his postulancy, novitiate and scholasticate in Les Avellanes. After that he was assigned to five communities: Calatayud, Baruelo, Burgos, Lucena and Chinchón, where he had arrived in January. The turbulent times in the sociopolitical sphere went hand in hand with his personal doubts regarding religious life. He considered leaving and returning home, but in Chinchón his inner flame flared up again. His community's support and the good example of his Brothers allowed him to rekindle his vocation. There was still fire under the ashes.

Mr. Julián Aguilar Martín was from Berge, Teruel. At age 12 he had entered the juniorate in Vic. When he was a postulant in Les Avellanes, he suffered an accident that affected his eyesight. For this reason, he had not been admitted to the novitiate. He went back to his family, and engaged in agricultural work, but still dreamed of becoming a Brother. He was hired as an employee, and worked in several communities. He arrived at Chinchón and became like one of the Brothers there. In fact, he was addressed as a Brother by the students and parents, although he always tried to correct them. Brother Felipe Neri wrote in 1933: "We are three teachers, plus a fourth member, the cook. The four of us are "monks," but in plain clothes. The cook helps me in the classroom most of the day. We have 162 students, with more than 70 on the waiting list, i.e., all the students in town". Julián was treated like a Brother among Brothers,

and suffered the same fate as the community. A witness said, "He could have abandoned the community when it was in danger, since he was simply attached to it without being a professed member, but instead he chose to die together with the other Brothers."

3. While the four men were having a pleasant conversation with Mrs. Aparicio and María Ontalva, the maid, was preparing dinner, the doorman betrayed them to militiamen passing by. These searched the bags at the entrance and found several religious objects and documents. No further proof was needed. Stepping aside, the doorman added, "The four *birds* are upstairs." As the maid was placing a bowl of food at the center of the table and the guests were about to take a seat, the doorbell rang. The militias burst in, nabbed the four men and took them away. It was between 4:30 and 5:00 in the afternoon. They were probably taken to *Casa de Campo* Park, or as some believe to *Puerta de Toledo*, and shot immediately. Three more Brothers and a lay Marist received the palm of martyrdom for the courage of their faith.

Chapter 10

Marist Community of Torrelaguna (Madrid)

TO SERVE AND LOVE

July 22, 1936



Brother Victorico María (Eugenio Artola Sorolla)

Born in Cincorres, Castellón on April 12, 1894

Martyr in Redueña, Madrid on July 22, 1936, at the age of 42 years and 3 months



Brother Jerónimo (Trifón Tobar Calzada)

Born in Susinos, Burgos on July 3, 1876

Martyr in Redueña, Madrid on July 22, 1936, at the age of 60



Brother Marino (Pedro Alonso Ortega)

Born in Amaya, Burgos on January 14, 1901

Martyr in Redueña (Madrid) on July 22, 1936, at the age of 35 years and 6 months

1. Night descended on the city of Torrelaguna. It was sunset on July 20, a Saturday. The local jail had never been so crowded. More than twenty neighbors were in detention, including three Marist Brothers, Victorico María, Jerónimo and Marino, all in plain clothes. When silence took over the cells, it was difficult to sleep be-

cause of the sultry summer weather, but more so due to the emotions seething inside these three inmates. All the tension that had been brewing for such a long time had exploded two days earlier, on July 18. They had lived through incredible suffering and their memories, like a film-editing device, brought back the painful facts of that day in excruciating detail: the assault on the school, their arrest, all the pushing and shoving and the relentless aggression of the screaming horde that pursued them.

Torrelaguna, 53 kilometers from Madrid, became a political echo chamber for the capital city: the same goals, and similar outrages. The town had roughly over 2 thousand inhabitants in seven districts called *granjerías* (farm assemblies). Cardinal Cisneros, one of its illustrious sons, had embellished the town, which still had part of its walls. The Brothers taught primary school for the children of farmers and laborers. Brother Moisés, a



Square and parish church of Torrelaguna

Provincial Visitor,¹³ had written sometime earlier: “The attendance and punctuality of the students is excellent. Supervising the different grades, one is convinced that the program is followed and that the students assimilate the contents well. As for the overall order and discipline in the school, it could not be better. And regarding religious life in the community, it is a true example of Marist life. The Brothers live in perfect unity. Where there is a job to be done, there you will find the three of them.” They also taught evening classes for adults. One hundred and twenty workers attended this evening program. Due to the extremely high rates of illiteracy at the time, this service offered by the Brothers was a top priority.

2. Brother Victorico María, from Castellón, had entered the juniorate in Vic at 15 years of age, and a year later was sent to the postulancy in Les Avellanes. Except for his first two assignments, in Badalona and Palafrugell, usually he stayed longer in his other communities: 3 years in Sants, 6 in Sitges, 3 in Orbó, and then Torrelaguna, where he would spend 8 years as teacher and Director. As an educator, he was disciplined and well organized. As an apostle, he was motivated by zeal for the Glory of God. As a religious, he was known for his fidelity. A Brother once summarized Brother Victorico María’s ideal this way: “To serve and love.”

Brother Jerónimo, from Burgos, was the third of five children. His family was engaged in agriculture. He had entered the novitiate in Mataró at age 15, and professed the vow of obedience at 19. In those days, as mentioned earlier, the first profession included only this vow, before taking the final

¹³ The Provincial Visitor was a Brother in charge of certifying a school’s educational quality and organization at the Province level. He visited the schools and supervised the Brothers and played a very important role at that time. (Translator’s note)

vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. After attending the scholasticate in Canet de Mar, he earned a teaching degree at the Girona Normal School. From 1895 to 1928, he went to Colombia as a missionary (in Santander, Cali, Popayán, Pasto, Palmira, Cabal, and Ibagué). Then he returned to Europe for the second novitiate in Grugliasco, Italy, and after other mission work, wound up in Torrelaguna in 1932, being the eldest in the community, with thousands of miles behind him.

Brother Marino, from Burgos, came from another large family, this one with ten children. His two formation houses were Arceniega and Les Avellanes, where he lived the painful experience of a terrible flu epidemic that caused many deaths among the seminarians. His health weakened, and he was not able to keep up with his studies, so he dedicated himself to the kitchen, a task he would perform throughout his communities that followed. He



Relatives of the Brothers next to the sarcophagus at the Chapel of the Rosary in the parish church of Saint Mary Magdalene, Torrelaguna (Madrid). The remains were transferred in 2000.

had been in Torrelaguna since 1929, except for spending a year at the infirmary in Les Avellanes. He was fully integrated in his community, and enjoyed a close friendship with his two fellow Brothers.

3. On Tuesday, July 21st, a column of militias from Langreo, Asturias, on their way to Somosierra, made their way back through Torrelaguna. Their first goal was to eliminate all the prisoners. They could not enter the prison because the key was missing and the guard had fled the spot, trying to avoid making their scheme easier. The prisoners could not sleep, because the militias spent the entire night insulting them and beating the window bars with their rifles. At dawn the next day, they finally broke in and dragged the prisoners into the courtyard. They singled out from the group those who had no calluses on their hands: the three Brothers, two priests, and four lay people (three men and a woman). A militia woman with scars on her chest was particularly aggressive and insulting. They brutally loaded the prisoners onto a truck and took the road to San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Four kilometers ahead, they took them off the truck and shot them. They gave them the coup de grace in the town of Redueña.

Nobody in Torrelaguna suspected there had been an execution. The only one to know was the head of the Committee, a teacher who ran a school with a few children, and was moved by anticlericalism and resentment, knowing the success that the Brothers enjoyed in their school. A milkman from Redueña – a town that had taken an oath to avoid any excesses in its territory – was heading to Torrelaguna as usual. Some traces of blood on the road attracted his attention and led him to a hollow spot in the countryside, where nine bodies were lying. They were disfigured, and the blood had already turned black. He immediately

informed the authorities in his town. They prepared the coffins. Items and objects that could help identify the victims were placed next to each body. The Brothers and their compatriots were buried in a ceremony imbued with respect and silence. When the people in Torrelaguna learned what had happened, a mason prepared a proper burial site for them.

Chapter 11

Marist Community of Villalba de la Sierra (Cuenca)

TRUSTING DIVINE PROVIDENCE

July 28, 1938



Brother Julián José (Nemesio Cabria Andrés)

Born in Susilla, Cantabria on August 5, 1908

Martyr in Villalba de la Sierra, Cuenca on July 28, 1938, at the age of 29 years and 11 months



Mr. Ramón Emiliano Hortelano Gómez, a lay teacher from Cuenca

Born in Cuenca on August 8, 1908

Martyr in Villalba de la Sierra, Cuenca on July 28, 1938, at the age of 29 years and 11 months

1. The Government of the Republic drafted for active military service all men born in 1908. In early March 1938, two young men aged 29 were assigned to the auxiliary services of the headquarters in Villalba de la Sierra, Cuenca, a small town on the banks of the Júcar River, about 20 kilometers away from Madrid. The military atmosphere clashed with their sensitivity and training. Their lifestyle sharply contrasted with that of their fellow soldiers. Bonds of friendship and trust gradually developed among these two young men.

Julián José, a Marist Brother, revealed some pages of his life to his new friend. He was from Susilla, Cantabria, and had two brothers who were also Marists. His childhood

had unfolded in a family dedicated to farming and cattle raising. After attending the juniorate in Arceniega, his initial formation continued at Les Avellanes. He taught in the formation houses in Les Avellanes, Vic, and Arceniega. He then spent two years in Manzanares and Murcia, arriving in Cuenca in 1934 to found the *Fray Luis de León School*, located at #6 José Cobo Street. Julián also told him he was planning on switching sides and joining the National Army, but the circumstances of place and time made it almost impossible.

Mr. Ramón Emiliano, his friend, also spoke in confidence and told Brother about his religious convictions in line with his parents' tradition. He was a certified teacher, and had placed third on the Civil Service Exam. He enjoyed education and had an interest in innovation. Shortly after the war began, on Saturday, August 22, 1936, he had married Rufina Ángeles Saiz Abad. Ramón thought about her all the time.



Villalba de la Sierra (Cuenca)

2. Brother Laurentino, the Provincial, shrewdly figured out a way to get around Republican legislation that prevented religious congregations from teaching. Instead of confronting the authorities or giving up educating young people, he circumvented these laws by using a clear slogan: "In case they close our schools because we are recognized as Marist, we will gradually set up schools in cities where we are unknown." The Marist center in Cuenca was a result of this decision. *Fray Luis de León School* was governed by a strictly secular statute. It consisted of a primary and middle school.

When the conflict erupted, there were seven Brothers in the community. They dispersed to the homes of friends. Many people liked them and welcomed them warmly. As soon as persecution intensified, the seven Brothers ended up in jail, where they stayed for several months. Since they were rather unknown, and had no charges against them, they were released. They had to find accommodations and earn a living amid dangers and difficulties.

Brother Julián José took refuge in the home of the school's doorman, a humble place, but filled with warmhearted people. Two years earlier, Julian had written in a letter: "In short, politics is a mess, and it's better to stay away from it, trusting Divine Providence, which will not allow anything outside of God's desires." When his age group was summoned to active military service, he had to leave the doorman's house and join the army.

3. On July 28, 1938, the two friends lived intense emotions. In the morning, Ramón Emiliano told Brother how happy he was. He had obtained permission to visit his wife, and meet his first child. It was just a one-day visit, but he was radiant. He experienced the joy of parenting and family life, and wanted to share these special moments with his friend, Brother Julián José. They both celebrated in their



Parish Church of Villalba de la Sierra

own way, discreetly, but with great affection. Earlier that month, they had both been assigned to a town near Villalba in order to prepare a campsite to host the 51st division of the guerrillas who remained from the famous *Rosal Military Column*, named after the Colonel in charge. As the atmosphere became increasingly hostile, they felt the need to strengthen their friendship. They went for their customary stroll at eight in the evening. Some militias followed them. When they reached the cornfields, they shot them dead.

A farmer discovered the bodies and warned the Yugoslav captain who commanded the troops. This captain, together with a lieutenant doctor and a commander, tied the bodies to a light pole, sprayed them with gasoline, and burned them. Ramón Emiliano's wife, Rufina, recalled the details: "The next day, on July 29, 1938, a friend very discreetly came to break the news to my mother. I saw the visitor and, although I sensed the tragedy, they kept the truth from me

to protect me during the difficult times I was going through and the immense grief I felt after receiving the news. My father-in-law came from Valencia and made some inquiries. The militias had left the place, and when they went to pick up the remains, they just found some bones and a large puddle of grease on the ground.” Criminal proceedings were instituted regarding the murder. The case went from the Provincial Court to the Military Court, which absolved the defendants.

4. Julián José and Ramón Emiliano shared an unshakeable friendship, the courage of a seamless faith, and the timing of birth and death. All this is symbolized in the fact of sharing a small burial urn which contains their remains.

Chapter 12

Maristas Communities of Cabezón de la Sal and Carrejo (Cantabria)

THE FRIEND OF THE POOR

January 2, 1937



Brother Pedro (Jaime Cortasa Monclús)

Born in Millà, Lleida on July 15, 1883

Martyr in Santander, Cantabria on January 1, 1937, at the age of 53 years and 5 months



Brother Narciso (Baldomero Arribas Arnaiz)

Born in Santibáñez de Esgueva, Burgos on February 27, 1877

Martyr in Santander, Cantabria on January 1, 1937, at the age of 59 years and 10 months



Brother Colombanus Paul (Henri Oza Motinot)

Born in Lyon, France on August 1, 1877

Martyr in Santander, Cantabria on January 1, 1937, at the age of 59 years and 5 months



Brother Néstor Eugenio (Tesifonte Ortega Villamudrio)

Born in Arlanzón, Burgos on April 10, 1912

Martyr in Santander, Cantabria on January 1, 1937, at the age of 24 years and 8 months

1. Cabezón de la Sal, Cantabria is a municipality and a regional jurisdiction which includes, among other places, the village of Carrejo, located 1.2 kilometers away. There were Marist communities in both places working in underprivileged schools. In Cabezón de la Sal, which had almost 4 thousand inhabitants, Brothers Pedro, Narciso, Luis María and María Ruperto taught 182 students, both in primary school and a Commercial Studies program. The first two would become martyrs. In Carrejo, a village with few and scattered inhabitants, Brothers Erasmo José, Colombanus Paul, and Néstor Eugenio had 44 students in their school, which was divided into three primary classrooms. The last two Brothers would achieve martyrdom.

Santander, the capital city of the Province, was 46 kilometers away. The uprising of the Spanish Army of Africa generated different reactions. Military forces supported the Movement. The first barricades were being built in the streets. People were well armed. The Popular Front support-



Commerce School in Cabezón de la Sal (Cantabria), directed by the Brothers. It currently holds a Vocational School, and an Adult Education Center.

ers organized themselves. The militias became active. On July 20, the first arrests took place. The militia seized files and lists which provided information. There were murders in broad daylight on the streets. Other people were cast into the sea. New jails were improvised. The ship *Alfonso Pérez* became a floating prison. After the first bombing of the city, the mob went to the ship and urged the prisoners deemed innocent to leave. Once outside, they shot them point blank and threw hand grenades at them. The persecution of priests and religious was the order of the day.

2. The war also arrived in Cabezón de la Sal and Carrejo, but in a less aggressive way. Armed civilians controlled the roads, inspected the vehicles, searched the passersby and confiscated the merchandise in stores. The picture had been transformed within a few hours. There was suspicion, mistrust and fear everywhere. The Brothers managed to remain untroubled during the first weeks.

In late July, Brother Erasmo José visited the community in Cabezón. On the way back to Carrejo, a car cut off his path. The occupants demanded he hand over a hundred pesetas “for the expenses of the revolution”. In the afternoon, these same individuals went to the school and searched the house. After finding a red and yellow flag,¹⁴ they arrested Brother Erasmo José, the Director, and imprisoned him in Cabezón.

He was thrown into a dirty, dark and filthy cell with other prisoners. Some friends brought him a mattress and food, since the guards would not even give him a glass of water. The hours seemed endless. To fill the time, Erasmo asked

¹⁴ The Provincial Visitor was a Brother in charge of certifying a school’s educational quality and organization at the Province level. He visited the schools and supervised the Brothers and played a very important role at that time. (Translator’s note)

Brother Colombanus Paul to bring him a book. The guards leafed through the book and found some scribbles, which they considered “suspiciously secretive and esoteric”. They were only shorthand questions. Renewed interrogations. In the end, after paying another fine of a hundred pesetas, Brother Erasmo José was released.

On September 30, the Brothers in Cabezón were ordered to leave the school. They were only allowed to take their personal belongings with them. Until then, Brother Director’s friends had succeeded in delaying the operation. The Brothers moved to Carrejo, where several families kindly welcomed them. They started giving private lessons to make a living. In mid-October, the local Committee forbade them to go on teaching.

3. It was December 28, at 11:00 in the evening. The Brothers from both communities were gathered around a radio.



Cabezón de la Sal. A residential area known as Marist Brothers Quarter was built behind the school.

They were commenting on the previous day's events in Santander. 18 planes from the National forces had bombed the city, bringing about many deaths. Reprisals were immediate. The militiamen murdered 170 detainees from the prison ship. Raids were intensified. The Brothers tuned into a radio station which was broadcasting a message by Queipo de Llano.¹⁵ A knock at the door startled them. They rushed to hide the radio. The delay in opening led to the windows being shot out, spraying glass all around them. The Brothers justified their delay in opening by recalling the government's order to avoid answering the door at night. They were taken to the prison in Cabezón, where they joined many other people who had been arrested that night. Without any explanation, they were set free the following afternoon.

4. The roaring engines of a three-car convoy shattered the silence of the night on the road from Cabezón de la Sal to Santander, headlights dramatically piercing the darkness. The Marist Brothers were among the passengers. The Santander Police had arrested them at their house on December 30th at around four in the afternoon. Two were away at the time. Brother Luis María had gone to Santander with Brother María Ruperto to register him as a citizen of Argentina, since he had all the requirements. When they returned home, they were also arrested and taken back to Santander.

The trip in the convoy left them with much time to think that their lives on earth were about to end. Given the imminence of death, prayer arose as a spontaneous movement of their faith. At two in the morning they arrived at a police station, where they were locked up and spent a dreadful

¹⁵ Gonzalo Queipo de Llano was a Spanish military leader who rose to prominence during Francisco Franco's coup d'état. (Translator's note)



Carrejo. The former school and house of the Brothers is two kilometers away from Cabezón de la Sal. It is presently the Museum of Nature of Cantabria.

night, restless and unable to sleep. At 8 in the morning they were taken to the prison and thrown into two different cells. In one of them, Brothers Erasmo José and Luis María shared the space with gentlemen from Carrejo. For 3 days they were prevented from communicating with anyone. Time seemed to stand still.

5. At 9 p.m. on New Year's Day, 1937, two jailers called the four Brothers. Brother Pedro was from the Àger area in Lleida. At 15 he had entered the novitiate in Vic. His first assignment was to Sant Andreu de Palomar. He had different jobs there, especially working in the kitchen. He was also a teaching assistant, and soon became a teacher himself. He then taught in Sabadell, Sant Andreu de Palomar and Torrelaguna. From 1916 to 1936 he directed the school in Cabezón de la Sal, with the exception of the 1924-25 school year, when the

center was closed due to difficulties with the Foundation. The children from poor and humble families were the first beneficiaries of his apostolic endeavor. Local people recognized him as an authority figure due to the many years he had spent successfully directing the school.

Brother Narciso, from Burgos, was the youngest son in a family of farmers who had three children. He had entered the novitiate at Canet de Mar when he was about to turn 15. In Girona he earned his degree as primary teacher and two years later, his Master's in Education, both of them from studying on his own, without attending class. Although assigned to many communities, he stayed for longer periods in Girona (eight years, the last two as Director), Murcia (five years), Lleida (four) and Cabezón de la Sal, where he arrived in 1931. He was noted for his intelligence, competence as an educator, Marist simplicity and cheerful and open personality. People used to call him "the friend of the poor." On one occasion, an anonymous letter criticized him: "It would have been better for you to work with your *students' class* rather than the *poor class*."

Brother Colomanus Paul was born in Lyon, France. While very young, his parents moved to Saint-Donat, where he attended a Marist school. At 15 he entered the novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, obtaining a French high school diploma, the *Brevet*, at 17. Prior to 1903, he was sent to different regions in France. After that time – when religious were expelled from the country – he joined the Marist Province of Spain. He lived in many communities, finding it hard to fully adapt. When he settled in Carrejo in 1926 however, he discovered his place in the world. This Cantabrian corner of the Peninsula offered him a hidden, undisturbed, and peaceful life. His intellectual gifts, language skills, and musical knowledge were perhaps veiled by his indecisive nature. He never used his French citizenship to

free himself from persecution and, moved by the power of fraternity, willingly followed the fate of his fellow community members.

Brother Néstor Eugenio was from Burgos. His parents had two sons. At 12 he entered Arceniega, but returned to his family because of poor health and his difficulties in school. Yet these conditions had a therapeutic purpose: since hardship and disease were frequent, returning to his family's home in the countryside, with its pure air and water, had healing effects. He did not give up, and five years later, fully recovered, he was admitted to the novitiate of Les Avelanes. His apostolic activity began as a cook and primary school assistant teacher in Haro. In 1935, after a brief stay in Zaragoza, he became part of the community in Carrejo.

6. The foundation of the Marist Institute, as we know, took place on January 2, 1817. In the small French town of LaValla, Marcellin Champagnat brought together two young men to start a project that was as humble as it was ambitious: "Every diocese in the world figures in our plans."

On New Year's Day 1937, almost exactly 120 years later, four Marist Brothers gave their life in a diocese of northern Spain, the four murders covered up by the perpetrators, who vehemently claimed that the prisoners had been released. However, well informed people insisted they had been "martyred next to the lighthouse in Santander, and then thrown into the Cantabrian Sea." Raging storms must have deposited their disfigured and unrecognizable bodies on a random beach.

Chapter 13

Marist Community of Barruelo de Santullán (Palencia)

I HAVE A FOND MEMORY OF MY BROTHER

October 23, 1936



Brother Egberto (Leonardo Arce Ruiz)

Born in Arcellares del Tozo, Burgos on November 6, 1907

Martyr in Campoo de Suso, Cantabria on October 23, 1936, at the age of 28 years and 11 months



Brother Teófilo Martín (Martín Erro Ripa)

Born in Viscarret, Navarre on March 3, 1914

Martyr in Campoo de Suso (Cantabria) on October 23, 1936, at the age of 22 years and 7 months

1. The train, powered by a steam engine, drew a straight line on the Castilian plateau. A slight rattle served as background music to the routine of the trip. It was July 22, 1936. Among the passengers, three young men were in a hurry to get to Burgos: Brothers Heraclio José, Egberto and Teófilo Martín. They belonged to the Marist community in Barruelo de Santullán. The memories of Brother Bernardo's murder and the looting of the school there two years earlier were very much alive in their minds. Escaping was a prudent choice after the serious events of July 18. The Director had suggested traveling by road, thinking it would be safer. However, they decided to take the train as the fastest means



Current view of the ADEMAR Center (Marist Alumni Association), former school for the children of miners in Barruelo de Santullán (Palencia).

of transportation. With the Superior's permission, they had chosen the route through Cillamayor. They intended to arrive at Quintanilla, walk from there to Aguilar de Campoo, and then continue on to Burgos by car. The train stopped at the Quintanilla railway station. The three got off. They left the station without a problem, but some individuals from Barruelo saw them and informed the head of the militia. They were immediately detained and taken to the prison of Reinosa, which had been improvised in the school belonging to the Brothers of Christian Instruction. Meanwhile, the three Brothers from the community of Vallejo de Orbó reached Burgos on foot.

2. In 1914 The Marist Brothers arrived in the mining area of the Province of Palencia and took over *Colegio Santa Bárbara*, a free elementary school for the children of miners

in Vallejo de Orbó, owned by the Spanish Carbon Society. Six years later, the Brothers accepted a new request from the same Society to direct *Las Escuelas de las Minas* in Barruelo de Santullán. This educational institution received a tremendous boost thanks to the efforts of Brother Bernardo Fàbrega Julia, martyred for his faith in 1934 and beatified in Rome on October 28, 2007. When the Civil War broke out, these two communities were still in place. There were seven Brothers in Barruelo de Santullán teaching 343 students. In Vallejo de Orbó, 3 Brothers, teaching 138 students.

3. Brother Egberto, from Burgos, lost his father very early. His mother remarried. He entered the juniorate in Arceniega when he was about to turn 12 and then continued his initial formation in Les Avellanes. He was sent to different communities, and even taught at the Ksar-el-Kebir Polytechnic



Vallejo de Orbó. There is presently nothing left of the Brothers' school and house building, but the alumni's fond memories, and a street dedicated to Brother Bernardo remain.

Academy, Morocco for two years. Always willing to serve, he showed perseverance and patience in his educational and apostolic work. He was part of the group inclined to leave rather than remain in the dangerous region of the coalfields.

Brother Teófilo Martín, from Navarre, belonged to a family that gave the Church many vocations. At 11 he entered the juniorate in Villafranca, and then completed his initial formation in Les Avellanes. He was appointed to only two places. The first was Burgos, where he spent three years; the second, Barruelo, where he arrived just a year earlier. With an outgoing nature, he was a sportsman and a good student. As a teacher, he prepared his classes very well. As a religious, his piety, family spirit, and love of work were evident.

4. On October 12, the inmates at the prison in Reinosa, including the three Brothers, were informed they were being transferred to Santander. Later on it would become clear that for many of them this was to be nothing more than the sadly famous “death stroll.” In those two months they had seen and heard many things. On the day of arrest of the Brothers, someone had said: “If they are Brothers, I would like to give them the tonsure with an ax”. Brother Heraclio José who survived this tragedy, conveyed the anxiety prevailing in the prison: “The key sliding into the lock was a piercing noise etched in our minds.” Some of his cellmates were ruthlessly beat, punched and kicked the Brothers. Because of the constant abuse, “the prison actually turned into a hospital, albeit without any medical aid.”

The fateful final day dawned. Brother Heraclio José recalled it this way: “On Friday, October 23rd, at ten o’clock in the morning, the basement door opened. Martín Erro Ripa and Leonardo Arce Ruiz were called. We parted, never to meet again. The timing of the event did not arouse suspicion, but

we were able to see through the keyhole that, once outside, they were handcuffed and put into a car that later disappeared. We all assumed they were taking them for some kind of interrogation. Eleven o'clock... Twelve o'clock... But our companions never returned!" For a few months, despite some moments of doubt, Brother Heraclio José thought they had simply been transferred to Santander.

When Santander was eventually liberated, several families from Reinosa went out looking for the bodies of their relatives in neighboring areas. On October 14, 1937 - at Mount Saja, belonging to the municipality of Campoo de Suso - people discovered a mass grave containing the remains of 43 people. Brothers Egberto and Teófilo Martín were among them. All the remains were all transferred to the cemetery in Reinosa. The truth was uncovered just a year after the executions took place. Dorotea, Brother Teófilo Martín's sister, stated: "I feel a true spiritual devotion for my brother and keep a fond memory of him. My mother (May she rest in peace) used to tell us that if we needed something from God, we could ask our brother for it, for she firmly believed that he was in Heaven."

Chapter 14

Marist Community of Barcelona

THE IDEA OF ABANDONING MY VOCATION NEVER OCCURRED TO ME

December 8, 1936



Brother Benedicto Andrés (Enrique Andrés Monfort)

Born in Villafranca del Cid, Castellón on April 25, 1899

Martyr in Albocácer, Castellón on December 8, 1936, at the age of 37 years and 7 months

1. Sitting at his desk, Brother Benedicto Andrés was holding a letter from his cousin Jerónimo Emiliano, who was also a Marist. He read it over and over to fully grasp its content. It left him baffled. It was written in a harsh tone, and he wanted to make sure if the story was true: “There are rumors that Brother Benedicto Andrés has given up the cloth.” When communication does not flow in a clear and transparent way, gossip takes over the public square. In troubled times, hearsay, calumny, and betrayal are the order of the day. He took a blank sheet of paper and wrote back, stating in one of the paragraphs: “If I followed human reasoning, I would have an excuse to throw everything overboard. But, thank God, I am far from thinking about leaving. I do not forget I made a commitment... So tell these people that Brother Benedicto remains Brother Benedicto.” It was not the first time he had to face rumors and slander. In fact, Brother Eduardo Escolà, an eyewitness, recalled: “When Brother Benedicto Andrés was in Torrelaguna, he suffered a minor setback: the parents



Maristes La Immaculada School in Barcelona, where the Marist blessed were honored in October 12, 2013, the eve of their beatification in Tarragona.

of a student reported that their son had suffered some kind of sexual abuse. Brother Benedicto Andrés, aged 23 at the time, was initially accused. After 72 hours, when the trial opened and the family saw him, they said, 'This is not him, we were thinking about someone else.' They were referring to someone who had fled the town. Brother Benedicto Andrés was released without charge, gave no sign of indignation, and was glad to have suffered for Christ."

2. Brother Benedicto Andrés was born in Villafranca del Cid (Castellón) in 1899. Brother Isidro Guix once got lost in the area around Maestrazgo and he ended up in the home of Benedicto's family to get some rest. Two Marist vocations flourished after this visit: Benedicto Andrés and his cousin. Benedicto entered the juniorate in Vic at age 11. His next stages of initial formation took place at Les Avellanes. Valencia, Torrelaguna, and Valdemoro were his first three communities. Then he spent three years in Africa, doing his military service. He was appointed Corporal and a Noncommissioned Officer. His friendship with a De La Salle Brother helped him to keep his religious ideals alive. He had to endure the Battle of Melilla, which lasted two years. The letters

he wrote during that time showed his affection for his family and the brothers. He did not hide his disappointment regarding the extension of military service and the use of weapons. Upon returning to Spain, he was hoping to visit his family, but did not receive permission. He mentioned this in a letter dated November 1922: "I wrote to my Superior asking him to let me spend 15 days with you, but he told me not to go, so as you can see, it's not my fault that I'm unable to visit you, for I'd really like to spend some time with you now that I'm back from Africa." He accepted the decision.

He was sent to schools in Valencia, Murcia, Zaragoza and Pamplona. In Barcelona, he lived in the community located at #38 Lauria Street, which had eleven Brothers and an enrollment of 274 primary school students. As soon as the Brothers there realized the danger looming over them, they decided to disperse. They were able to take some personal belongings with them before the militiamen showed up and looted the house, although they were unsuccessful in trying to burn it down. The brothers took refuge in hostels or friends' homes. It was difficult for them to take refuge with their own families since, according to the custom of the time Brothers were stationed in places far from home. However, Brother Benedicto Andrés, with the Provincial's permission, did seek refuge with his family.

3. In his hometown, he remained confined to his family's house, very seldom venturing outside during the long four months of his "captivity." In early December, he faced a dilemma. The Committee issued a voluntary sign-up call, promising to exempt from punishment any who volunteered after having previously avoided military service. After weighing up the pros and cons, he decided to attend the call-up, mostly because he did not want to put his family at risk. In the Committee he underwent a long and hard interrogation. Upon returning home, he told his sister, "I've made up my mind!" He added,

“Tell Emiliano (his first cousin who was also a Marist) not to attend. If they kill me, at least he will be safe.”

4. It was Monday afternoon of December 7, 1936. There was a knock on the door at Brother Benedicto Andrés’ home. His sister answered. It was a prominent member of the Committee, Benedicto’s childhood playmate and military service companion. His sister went for him. His response was, “My hour has come! See you in Heaven!” It sounded so much like a permanent goodbye. He encouraged his family, and then greeted the visitor:

“Let’s go to the Committee!”

“You mean to my death, don’t you?” Benedicto replied.

“Don’t be afraid, nothing will happen to you. I’ve told you that you and your cousin will be fine.”

“May things turn out as God wants!”

The Committee immediately sent him off to jail without a trial. There he met one of his former teachers, to the delight of both. A cousin brought him food and a blanket. He refused the food but accepted the blanket, because it brought comfort to his kidney condition.

5. It was December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Close to Sant Pau Hermitage, near the village of Albocàsser, the teacher, his 17-year-old son, a doctor, the sacristan, and the Marist Brother were executed. A religious Sister heard one of the murderers describe the last moments of Brother Benedicto Andrés, “How brave he was! When we were about to shoot the priest, he folded his arms across his chest and shouted, ‘Long live Christ the King! Holy Mary, protect me!’ We fired and he fell to the ground. Then we heard him say, ‘Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me!’ We fired again, and still heard him say, ‘Jesus, Joseph and Mary, into your hands I commend my soul!’ And then he died.”

Chapter 15

Marist Community of Denia (Alicante)

SUFFERING MARTYRDOM FOR GOD AND THE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

August 10, 1936



Brother Millán (Esteban Llover Torrent)

Born in Les Planes d'Hostoles, Girona on July 27, 1885

Martyr in Alcira, Valencia on August 10, 1936, at the age of 51

1. *San Juan Bautista School* had been founded in 1928 by Mrs. Cándida Carbonell. Now its Principal, Brother Millán, could not believe his eyes. The message from the mayor left no room for doubt, "To avoid any possible problems, you need to pack up and leave the school and the town of Denia by this afternoon." It was one o'clock in the afternoon on Good Friday, April 10, 1936. The news spread like wildfire despite it being a holiday. Gradually, the older students and alumni came to the school. All of them were "ready for anything." Some gave a hand taking out books, removing furniture and fittings and following the Brothers' instructions. Others kept guard. Some went to the Civil Guard asking for protection, so that the crowd gathered outside the building would not cause trouble. The insults and swearing could be heard from the school. In those times, any incident could ignite the people's rage. Denia had over twelve thousand inhabitants. The left had won the elections in February that year.

A hired car came to pick up the four Brothers, who were escorted by a large number of pupils, former students, and parents. Five very intense hours had passed. The Director stayed in town, hoping the efforts of the alumni would succeed in convincing the municipal office to revoke its decision. They even went to the Governor, and presented a “polite but brave protest.” The reasons were clear: it was impossible for the students to move to another location and finish the school year, and the law about replacing religious instruction referred only to places where this was viable. In any event the school year needed to be completed. The Governor summoned Brother Millán to discuss the issue. At first they seemed to resolve the problem, but in actuality the situation worsened. The schools parents and students refused to accept teachers replacing the Brothers. If these teachers were imposed on them, they would make their life impossible. The owner of *La Cenia*, a farmhouse on his property, let the students use it as a meeting place and the Brothers helped them prepare for the state examination. A few days earlier, Brother Laurentino, the Provincial, had visited them to see the situation firsthand. Eventually, he



View of Denia, with San Juan Bautista School in the foreground.

left Denia taking the young Brothers with him. At the train station, a crowd of people expressed their support and appreciation for all they had done.

2. Brother Millán, from Girona, belonged to a large family. He had ten siblings, but eight had died as children. Good at combining manual work and study, he wanted to become a priest, but had to give up his aspirations because his parents could not afford the seminary tuition. He decided to be a Marist Brother, and worked as a laborer to purchase clothing and other things he needed before entering the juniorate in San Andrés de Palomar.

The Superiors appreciated his personal qualities and religious spirit so much that he was appointed formator in Arceniega, San Andrés, and Vic. He was also Director in several schools: Centelles (five years); Badalona (six); #38 Lauria Street in Barcelona (six); and Denia (since 1928, the year the school was founded). The schools he was asked to direct were always for the children of humble laborers.

3. In reality the five Brothers in the community at Denia experienced hostile conditions months before the war broke out on July 18th. Tensions were extremely high, and they realized they could not play with fire. Brother Millán left Denia, and joined the Brothers who would periodically move to various farms and ranches. As the situation worsened, they looked for other places where they could go and be even more unnoticed. Brother Millán went to Ondara, where he pretended to be a travelling salesman. He mistakenly thought the revolution would last days, weeks at the most. Being prudent, he moved to different places, and never returned to Denia, but eventually he decided to visit the Provincial in Barcelona. In late July, on his way there, he was arrested in Tabernes de Valldigna, a town in the Province of

Valencia and sent to prison. He did not say a word against the railroad worker who betrayed him, even though Brother Millán had admitted the man's son to the school for free.

4. Brother spent twelve days in the prison at Tabernes de Valldigna. The seemingly endless hours allowed him to dwell on what really mattered in life, turning silence into prayer. Uncertainty weighed heavily on him. On August 10th at one o'clock in the morning, he and Mr. Rodrigo Gil, the most promising young man at the Marist School in Denia, were ordered to get into a car. The driver, Mr. José Giner then was told to drive off with them and three other men, identified as *El Carabinero* (the Police Officer), *El Calderero* (the Boilermaker) and *El Carrero* (the Chariot Maker). As an eyewitness, Mr. Giner, narrated what happened: "El Carabinero gave orders to stop, and told everyone to get out of the car. After walking for about two hundred yards, the Carabinero, Calderero, and Carrero turned around and fired at Mr. Rodrigo Gil and Mr. Esteban Millán, murdering them and leaving the corpses behind on the road." Brother Lorenzo Sangés stated: "Being a religious was reason enough to suffer martyrdom for God and the faith in Jesus Christ." Brother Millán and Mr. Gil shared their last moments side by side. Their bullet-ridden bodies were buried in the municipal cemetery in Alzira, Valencia.

Chapter 16

Marist Community of Arceniega

NO FEAR WHATSOEVER OF DYING FOR CHRIST

September 25, 1936



Brother Luis Fermín (Luis Huerta Lara)

Born in Torrecilla del Monte, Burgos on June 21, 1905

Martyr in Bilbao on September 25, 1936, at the age of 31 years, 3 months

1. The *Cabo Quilates*, a former merchant ship of the Ybarra Company that had been turned into a floating prison, was anchored in the bay at Bilbao. Brother Luis Fermín was a prisoner there. Locked in this horrifying scenario, he was carefully going over the latest developments that had taken place at his community in Arceniega, Álava. There were two Marist centers in that town of about twelve hundred inhabitants: a school downtown, where the Brothers taught 104 primary students, and the juniorate, next to the shrine of Our Lady of the Oak, a mile or so outside of town, where a community of 8 Brothers was accompanying 84 juniors.

On July 21st, six armed men barged in and searched the formation house, yelling that “the convent” was full of weapons, even though they might be well hidden. The search lasted well into the night. Meanwhile, the juniors, who remained in the school yard, began to realize that tension was building. The Director tried to reassure them, reminding them of a similar incident that Marcellin Champagnat had to deal with at the Hermitage in 1830.

The school community was formed by Brothers Luis Venancio, the Director, Luis Fermín and León Pablo. On the eve of July 18th, Brother Director left for Burgos. His two fellow community members were supposed to join him a few days later. However the school in Arceniega underwent further searches. So the two remaining Brothers, León Pablo and Luis Fermín, decided to move everything to the juniorate property outside of town, all the while preparing to leave for Burgos. León Pablo brought his suitcase up the hill to the juniorate; Luis Fermín left his luggage at the baker's house so it could be taken there the next day by truck, along with the bread delivery. The militiamen showed up at the bakery. When they saw the locked suitcase, they forced Luis to come and open it. His misery began. The militiamen found religious books and papers, together with some newspaper clippings. They arrested him on the spot, took him to the barracks for questioning, and then led him to jail, where he languished for a week. The Brothers did everything they could to help him. He was



Present-day view of the Arceniega juniorate, now serving as a retreat house. Many brothers started their initial formation in this place.

transferred to the police station in Bilbao, and finally to the holds of the prison ship, the *Cabo Quilates*. Another ship, the *Altuna Mendi*, was on hand, serving the same purpose.

2. Living conditions in these floating prisons were apocalyptic, and the prisoners endured horrendous suffering: “Hunger, humiliation, bare-chested floggings, beatings, lashings with whips afire, burnings, being suspended overboard, the relentless cruelty of mockery, derision, swearing and insults. Ordeals of every kind were the daily bread of the helpless occupants confined in those prison ships anchored in the Bay of Bilbao, especially if they were priests and religious.” An eyewitness, one of Brother Luis Fermín’s fellow prisoners, with whom he spent about twenty days aboard the *Cabo Quilates*, recalled the suffering they went through: “We were bunched together like animals. There were four storage rooms. Brother was in the first one, and I was in the third. I had met him before and knew he was a Marist Brother. Martyrdom aboard the *Cabo Quilates* took place at a firing range on the aft deck. It was not only the fact of knowing the men were shot, we heard the shooting! Sometimes machine guns were used. Once in a while the victims were shot in the neck and finished off by being beating with rifle butts. And these sad scenes were accompanied by endless harassment, insults, teasing, slapping, etc.”
3. Brother Luis Fermín, from Burgos, had three brothers. A vision defect, severe myopia, would plague him for life, but it didn’t stop him from fulfilling his vocation. About to turn 13, he entered the juniorate in Vic and went on to complete his initial formation in Les Avellanes. His poor eyesight prevented him from becoming a teacher, so he performed other services. Despite being keenly engaged in humble jobs, he yearned to teach the first-grade children. This became his world, although he was more valued for other works.

He worked in the communities at Orbó, Les Avellanes, Barcelona, Centelles, Palafrugell and Haro, and arrived in Arceniega in 1932, where he stayed for a longer time. He appreciated community life very much. Brother Luis Fermín evidently had a great zeal for education, and wanted to go on missions to shed, if possible, his blood for Christ. He never imagined he would attain martyrdom in the most unexpected way.

4. The National Air Force bombed Bilbao twice on September 25, a Friday. The operation was carried out by five German Junkers Ju 52 aircraft, first in the morning and then again in the afternoon. They also dropped leaflets signed by General Mola, urging the militias to surrender. This was the first in a series of bombings at Bilbao. War was not only waged on the front line, in close combat in the trenches, but also through the air, in rearguard raids. This was a new form of conflict which greatly undermined the people's morale. The militia groups reacted immediately by assaulting the *Altuna Mendi* and *Cabo Quilates* prison-ships anchored in the Bay and retaliating against the prisoners. On the *Cabo Quilates*, after overcoming resistance from the militiamen who were guarding it, the attackers got the upper hand late at night and started singling out their victims. A militiaman appeared in the storage area and loudly called: "Priests, friars, Dominicans, come out, and if anyone of you stays in there I will hang him from the mainmast!" On deck, screams, swearing, machine-gun fire, the sound of falling bodies and the cries of men profusely bleeding served as a taste of things to come for the prisoners in line to be mowed down. Brother Luis Fermín, martyr from the Arceniega community, was among the fifty people executed that day. Their bodies were buried in the Vista Alegre cemetery in Derio, which at that time was part of the municipality of Bilbao.

Chapter 17

Marist Community of Mataró

THE CONSOLING ANGEL

January 29, 1939



Brother Pablo Daniel (Daniel Altabella Gracia)

Born in Aguaviva, Teruel on October 19, 1911

Martyr somewhere near the border with France, on January 29, 1939, at the age of 27 years and 3 months

1. Having lost its offensive capabilities, the Republican Army withdrew to the French border in late January 1939. There was a Company in the region of the Catalan Pyrenees, near Figueras, about 30 kilometers from the French border. A glimpse of liberation was dawning, as if the painting *La Liberté Guidant le Peuple* (Liberty Leading the People, by Eugène Delacroix, 1830) reflected the mood of the weary soldiers. A Marist Brother, Pablo Daniel, was among them.

After the coup d'état, his life had gone through ceaseless changes and situations. He recalled the beginning of the war. There were twenty Brothers in the community at Valldemia School in Mataró, a small industrial city near Barcelona, on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This boarding school, founded in 1855, was handed over to the Brothers in 1888. At the *Exposition Universelle de Paris*, it won the "education quality" gold medal in 1878 and 1900. In the community at *Externado San José*, the other Marist school in town, there were five Brothers. The burning of proper-

ties started on July 20th. Across the landscape, columns of smoke billowed up from convents and religious houses.

Two thousand workers, preceded by a group of young people carrying cans filled with gasoline, marched toward Valldemia School. The Brother who was Assistant Director did everything he could to turn them away and prevent the school from being torched. He realized some of the leaders in the mob were people he had helped in times of economic crisis, and even provided food and clothing for their families. The union leader heading the group stepped forward and shouted to those who followed him: "This man is a good democrat and comrade, a Frenchman who loves Spain. So nobody will touch his school, which later on will continue to serve children from poor families." From that moment on, the school was protected by militia guards. As time went by *Valldemia School* became a hospital and blood bank during the war.

2. Brother Pablo Daniel was in the group of 107 Brothers who were to board the *Cabo San Agustín*, a ship anchored off the coast of Barcelona, supposedly booked to take them to France. It was actually a trap, detailed in the book *El precio de la traición* (The Price of Treason). But on October 7, the Brothers ended up in *San Elías* prison, in the Sarria area of Barcelona, actually the basement of the Poor Clares of Jerusalem convent. The next day, Brother Laurentino and 45 fellow Marists were executed in the cemetery of Montcada. Those who remained behind in the prison had to endure every kind of insult and abuse. Brother Pablo Daniel was among them. He was then transferred to the prison of *La Audiencia*, and finally to the *Modelo* prison, where he spent 13 months. Surprisingly, in the absence of charges and evidence, he was released.

Brother Pablo Daniel, from Teruel, was the eldest of his brothers. One of them was a priest, and the youngest died from pneumonia while attending the Marist juniorate. At age 11,



Present-day view of Valldemia School in Mataró. It was a hospital and blood bank during the war.

Pablo entered the juniorate in Vic and went on to complete his formation in Les Avellanes. His mission began in Alicante. Then he spent two years at the Marist School in Mataró. After a few months in the community at #3 Lauria Street, in Barcelona, he went to Valldemia School for a second time. He was known as a competent educator, a determined apostle and an excellent debater. He had rejected the offer of a judge who, when he saw the talented way in which he had defended himself, offered to pay for his education at law school.

3. After gaining freedom, nobody and nothing could stop his apostolic zeal. He went back to teaching, boldly and courageously promoting the Cause of God. A short time later, because he continued to proclaim the Gospel, he was arrested a second time. The vessels *Uruguay* and *Argentina*, anchored in the harbor at Barcelona, had been turned into prison-ships. On the *Argentina*, Brother Pablo Daniel spent four months in harsh conditions. His cabin, shared with five

other people, became his small monastery, providing daily Mass, morning prayer, a full rosary, meditation, and evening prayer. Brother led the prayer services and gave the homilies. Captivated by his spirit, the prisoners started calling him “The Consoling Angel”. Prisoners from other cabins would confide in him and seek his moral support. Then he was sent to the Montjuic Castle Prison, a military fortress, to await trial. But before the hearing was to take place, he was moved again, this time to Ogern, a concentration camp that the Republicans had created in the municipality of Basella, between Ponts and Solsona, in the Province of Lleida. The prisoners worked on forced-labor projects, building bridges, repairing roads and building new ones. Brother Laureano Larrea remembered his experience living with Brother Pablo Daniel at that time: “In the work camp, when we came together at night, we recited our prayers as well as we could and shared with each other. One night, when we were short of everything and dying of hunger, itching with lice and shivering in the cold, Pablo said to me, ‘It is true that we suffer much here but those who are free are suffering more than us.’ And he added, ‘When Jesus made his way through Palestine as an itinerant teacher, didn’t he endure similar challenges, being tired, famished and at the mercy of the weather? Let us be brave in accepting our fate!’ ” In October 1938, his age group was called to military service and he enlisted in the Republican Army as part of the health corps, wanting to take care of the wounded. He was sent to the Catalan front. Some young people from his hometown recognized him. Knowing he was a religious, they informed the official in charge, none other than the renowned Enrique Líster.¹⁶

¹⁶ Enrique Líster Forján was a high-ranking Republican Army officer commanding the 11th division (which he turned into the most efficient Republican military unit), widely regarded as a war hero for the Republican cause. (Translator’s note)

4. The Republican Company was encamped in the vicinity of Figueras, near the border with France. It was January 29, 1939, a Sunday. Brother Laureano Larrea write a most detailed account of Brother Pablo Daniel's last moments: "The version of his death that I got, which I believe is common knowledge and no secret, is this: at the end of the war he was at the border region in Figueras and active in the Republican Army. One day, when the end of the war was approaching, he stayed behind and chatted with some of his colleagues about how they should thank God for protecting them, keeping them unharmed and free from their enemies. Most likely someone in the group was angered by Brother's position and informed the military command, which I believe was presided over by Lister. Lister dispatched a squad to shoot this entire group of patriots, including Brother Pablo Daniel." This was common practice as the war wound down, and led to the martyrdom of many priests and religious who thought their freedom was imminent.

Epilogue

These events, knit together by the thread of history, give rise to deep feelings of sadness, indignation, and respect. To remain indifferent is impossible. At the same time, however, they invite us to silence, meditation and prayer. My final thoughts, open to all victims without distinction, are focused on the martyrs, and include four points.

1. How to explain the behavior of the executioners? How could they shoot defenseless people? How were they capable of torturing the prisoners? As the *Positio* asked, where did this hatred for the faith come from? Considering these people as monsters does not solve the problem. In day-to-day life, perhaps they were ordinary people, like any of us.

Hannah Arendt raised this question when she attended the Eichmann trial. She spoke of the banality of evil, and the absence of thought. Arendt's point, undoubtedly with Socratic roots, is still valid today. If there is a conscience, it is impossible to act in this way. The exercise of thought unmasks the monstrosity of evil.

Gurdjieff repeatedly addressed the issue of war. He thought it was possible to stop it. To do this, all that was needed was "to awaken people. It seems a simple thing to do. However, it is the hardest thing ever, because this sleep is induced and maintained by the surrounding life-style as a whole, by all the conditions of the social environment." Consciousness and thought are the key elements, but perhaps they do not always fully explain the issue.

2. Victims in a civil war always belong to both sides. In the case of the Marist Brothers, what moved them to keep their commitments? Why did they stand firm in their faith and not yield to proposals to give up their religious convictions? Many of them were ordinary people, with their wishes, dreams and projects, with their flaws, limitations and failures. Some were extraordinary. Where did all of them find the boldness and courage to face the absurdity of a deadly persecution based on the simple fact of being religious? What did they find in their mission, since they were unwilling to give it up? What did they find in their community, since they cherished it to the end?

I find no other explanation than the faith in God which drove their lives. When you are on the verge of death, you put things in perspective and cling to what is essential. Sören Kierkegaard wrote, "Faith alone gives man the courage and the strength to look death and madness in the eye and not bow helplessly before them." The Brothers' priority was clear: "What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?" (Mk 8:36)

3. A great commitment emerging from this historical account is that of education. It is enough to remember the conference entitled "Education after Auschwitz," presented on Hessian Broadcasting by Theodor W. Adorno on April 18, 1966, "The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again. Its priority before any other requirement is such that I believe I need not and should not justify it. I cannot understand why it has been given so little concern until now. To justify it would be monstrous in the face of the monstrosity that took place." Education involves teaching history so as to promote understanding of the past. To educate is to awaken people to the values of truth, reconciliation, forgiveness, acceptance of diver-

sity, respect, coexistence, dialogue, empathy, and spirituality. The educational curriculum is excessively focused on learning and acquiring important contents, but does not go down to the depths of the human heart. What kind of education do we need in Spain in order to promote real understanding among people and not repeat history? There is so much to do!

4. Why do so many people who deeply live their Christian life end up being martyrs? How can we understand this? Almost 80 years ago, thousands of people were martyred in the Civil War, as happened to these 68 Marists. But what about today? Andrea Riccardi wrote: "Martyrs in the XXI Century are Christians who are not being attacked by the machine of totalitarian regimes, but by the violence of their own fellow citizens. Many religious have chosen not to look for protection, and have carried on living among defenseless people, working in places where barbarity reigns." Prevailing ideologies to blind them, silencing news about the many deaths that take place nowadays. Religious freedom is still a right that has not reached a reasonable development. Perhaps the final answer lies in the words of Jesus: "Go now, but be careful! I am sending you out like sheep among wolves." (Luke 10, 3) Persecution is extremely painful, but the prophet Isaiah says: "I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child." (Is 66, 13) The Church's recognition of the Blessed Martyrs fulfills the Lord's promise: "And your bones will flourish like the new grass." (Is 66, 14)

Whoever lives their faith courageously with love, like our martyrs did, will hear these words of Christ: "Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven." (Lk 10, 20)

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