

Redemptorists of Cuenca

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The Redemptorist Martyrs of Cuenca by Belén del Pino

Redemptorists of Cuenca

SIX MARTYRS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

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Translated from Spanish by Gary Lauenstein, CSSR



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Contents

PRESENTATION	xi
FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS	xv
LIST OF PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS	xviii
PART ONE	
What Happened? The Events Surrounding the Martyrdom	1
CHAPTER ONE	
The Revolution and Religious Persecution of 1936 in Cuenca	3
CHAPTER TWO	
The Community of Martyrs of San Felipe of Cuenca	31
CHAPTER THREE	
Martyrdom: When Love Is Greater than Death	65
✕	
PART TWO	
Biographies: Who Are the Martyrs?	109
CHAPTER FOUR	
José Javier Gorosterratzu Jaunarena	111
CHAPTER FIVE	
Ciriaco Olarte Pérez de Mendiguren	169
CHAPTER SIX	
Julián Pozo Ruiz de Samaniego	221
CHAPTER SEVEN	
Miguel Goñi Áriz	255

CHAPTER EIGHT	
Victoriano Calvo Lozano	291

CHAPTER NINE	
Pedro Romero Espejo	325



APPENDICES	359
-------------------	------------

APPENDIX ONE	
Unedited Documents	361

APPENDIX TWO	
Redemptorists with a Special Relationship to the Martyrs	373

APPENDIX THREE	
Companions in Martyrdom to the Redemptorists of Cuenca	381

APPENDIX FOUR	
Documents Consulted from the Archives	389

BIBLIOGRAPHY	401
---------------------	------------

List of Photos and Illustrations

<i>Apse of the church and monastery, San Felipe</i>	Page 17
<i>Cuenca's Convent of the Discalced Carmelites, later converted to a jail</i>	Page 28
<i>Community of San Felipe of Cuenca, 1929</i>	Page 37
<i>Retablo Mayor before 1936, San Felipe</i>	Page 50
<i>Burned interior of San Felipe</i>	Page 50
<i>Br. Benjamin at the door of the house where he was hidden</i>	Page 52
<i>Little Sisters of the Poor (left) and San Julián Seminary (right)</i>	Page 54
<i>Home of Don Enrique</i>	Page 74
<i>Descent to the Hermitage of Our Lady of Sorrows</i>	Page 78
<i>Hoz del Jucar, the place where C. Olarte and M. Goñi died</i>	Page 82
<i>Place where J. J. Gorosterratzu and V. Calvo died</i>	Page 94
<i>Holy card with the names of the 21 martyrs</i>	Page 106
<i>José Javier Gorosterratzu Jaunarena</i>	Page 110
<i>Fr. J. Gorosterratzu</i>	Page 128
<i>Community of Pamplona, 1915: J. Gorosterratzu, front row, far right</i>	Page 136
<i>Don Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (front cover)</i>	Page 154
<i>Ciriaco Olarte as a young missionary</i>	Page 168
<i>Ciriaco Olarte Pérez de Mendiguren</i>	Page 181
<i>C. Olarte in Mexico</i>	Page 186
<i>Community of Perpetuo Socorro, Madrid:</i> <i>C. Olarte, first on the left, second row</i>	Page 213
<i>Julián Pozo as a young priest</i>	Page 220
<i>Julián Pozo Ruiz de Samaniego</i>	Page 238
<i>Community in Granada: J. Pozo, top row, third from the right</i>	Page 240
<i>Miguel Goñi Áriz</i>	Page 254
<i>Juvenists of San Pablo, 1919: M. Goñi, first on the right, last row</i>	Page 262
<i>Family of M. Goñi</i>	Page 267
<i>Fr. Miguel Goñi Áriz</i>	Page 275
<i>Victoriano Calvo Lozano</i>	Page 290
<i>Br. Victoriano Calvo</i>	Page 303
<i>Church of San Felipe, Cuenca, decorated for the Novena</i>	Page 312
<i>Pedro Romero Espejo</i>	Page 324
<i>Community of Granada, 1914: Fr. Romero, bottom row, first on left</i>	Page 344
<i>Fr. Pedro Romero</i>	Page 352
<i>Cross of Fr. Romero and a piece of his clothing</i>	Page 358

PART ONE

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What Happened?
*The Events Surrounding
the Martyrdom*

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CHAPTER ONE

The Revolution and Religious Persecution of 1936 in Cuenca

On December 26, 2007, the Spanish Parliament approved the *Law of Historical Memory*, which condemned the reprisals made behind the lines on both sides of the Spanish Civil War against the civilian population “for political, ideological reasons or for reasons of religious belief,” (art. 2) and during the dictatorship, as well as “declaring the illegitimacy of the tribunals, juries, and whatever other penal and administrative organs which, during the Civil War, were constituted to impose for political or ideological motives or because of religious belief, condemnations or sanctions of a personal character, as well as their resolutions” (art. 2). Although not the only cause of violence and reprisal, violence originating from beliefs about the Catholic Church in the zone loyal to the government of the Second Republic is well-established. The government minister of Largo Caballero, Man-

uel de Irujo³ himself, read a memorandum before the Council of Ministers on January 9, 1937, about this religious persecution, which said:

The actual situation of the Church, beginning this past July, in all the loyal territory, except the Basque territory, is the following:

- a) *All the altars, religious images, and objects of worship, save for a very few exceptions, have been destroyed, mostly with vilification.*
- b) *All the churches have been closed against worship, which has been totally and absolutely suspended.*
- c) *A great many of the churches in Cataluña, of the normal type, have been burned.*
- d) *Parks and official organisms have received the bells, chalices, monstrances, candelabras, and other objects of worship; their materials have been melted down and even have been made use of for the war or for industrial purposes.*
- e) *In the churches, all sorts of things have been warehoused by the official institutions which have taken over occupancy of them: markets, garages, paintings, living quarters, shelters, or they have been used in other diverse ways, resulting in the construction of facilities of a permanent character.*
- f) *All the monasteries and convents⁴ have been emptied out and religious life in them has been suspended. Their buildings, objects of worship, and goods of all types have been burned, looted, occupied, and destroyed.*

3 Manuel de Irujo Ollo (1891-1981), Director of the Basque Nationalist Party, minister without portfolio (September 1936-May 1937) in the two administrations of Largo Caballero, Minister of Justice in the cabinet of Negrín (May 18-December, 1937) and again minister without portfolio until August of 1938. [Translator's note: Juan Negrín y López was a leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party and president of the Second Spanish Republic from 1937 to 1939.] In a government meeting, which took place in Valencia on January 9, 1937, he presented the memorandum cited in the above text about the religious persecution. His was the only vote of support.

4 Translator's note: The word *convento* in Spanish is used for religious houses of men as well as religious houses of women. In colloquial English, a convent is the residence of religious women, while a monastery is the residence of religious men. That is the meaning to those words, which we will employ in this translation.

- g) *Priests and religious have been detained, submitted to prison, and shot without due process in the thousands; these actions, even though well diminished, still continue, not only in rural areas, where people have been hunted and killed savagely but in the cities. Madrid and Barcelona and the other great cities add hundreds of prisoners to their jails without any other known cause than that they are priests or religious.*
- h) *It has come down to an absolute prohibition of keeping in private any images and objects of worship. The police in charge of home searches go through the interiors of homes, including the areas of personal and family intimacy, and destroy with ridicule and violence the images, holy cards, religious books, and anything related to worship or which can remind someone of worship.*

In this chapter we do not pretend to do an exhaustive study, but present a summary of the facts to help us understand the microhistories of people within the context of other greater historical processes. Given that a great deal has been written about the Spanish Civil War and its religious persecution, the product of repression in the Republican rear guard, we refer our readers to those studies.⁵ In this work we will concentrate on the city of Cuenca. To do this, we will make use of the study done by the historian Ana Belén Rodríguez Patiño,⁶ one of the few works that deals with development of the Civil War in the provincial capital of Cuenca.

It would be impossible to gather all the viewpoints and to point out the multiple aspects that come to the fore in such a complex process. Given that the object of this work is to present the lives of the six Redemptorists, we examine that part of the Civil War and of the revolutionary process which permits us to understand how events came about. The reality is much fuller than we can present in these brief pages.

5 The most complete work is A. MONTERO, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España 1936-1939*. (Madrid, 1961)

6 A. B. RODRÍGUEZ, *La Guerra Civil en Cuenca (1936-1939)*. Vol. I. *Del 18 de Julio a la Columna del Rosal* (Madrid, 2006); A. B. RODRÍGUEZ, *La Guerra Civil en Cuenca (1936-1939)*. Vol. II. *La pugna ideológica y la revolución* (Madrid, 2006). Later, the author published materials that did not appear in the first works: A. B. RODRÍGUEZ PATIÑO Y R. DE LA ROSA, *Represión y Guerra Civil en Cuenca. Nuevos Testimonios y Fotografías* (Cuenca, 2009).

In final consideration, this history is told from the viewpoint of six innocent victims. It is important that the reader understand from the first that the events are related as seen and felt by the victims—that is, these six Redemptorists. In this way we can understand what they went through in the first person: “The war is experienced at the front, yes, but no less at the rear. And the silent and atrocious war that the unarmed and undefended civilian population endures is the most disgraceful of all wars.”⁷ To scrutinize the hearts of the victims is to place ourselves before each individual. In these pages we go beyond the causes and statistics of the Civil War and instead portray as human beings those who died in rear-guard actions due to repression. We give a face and a history to the protagonists.

The City of Cuenca at the Beginning of 1936

Cuenca was a small capital of a poor province⁸ situated between provinces of greater social, economic, and political significance, such as Madrid, Valencia, and Toledo. It was the seat of a bishopric, for which reason all the diocesan institutions were centralized there. The province was predominantly rural, for which reason the capital was tied to traditional agriculture, and fundamentally depended upon the other populated areas of the province.⁹

The city enjoyed a good social climate. With hardly any industry, the social ills stemming from conflicts between business and labor were rare. Social relationships in Cuenca were rooted in networks of friendship, family, and function. From the beginning of the 1930s, Cuenca experienced growth brought on by emigration from the farm to the city. The city absorbed this demographic increase without modernization of its urban, social, and economic structures.¹⁰

In 1936 the city could count 20,086 inhabitants.¹¹ Socially, it was

7 A. B. RODRÍGUEZ Y R. DE LA ROSA, 175.

8 Translator's note: In 1833, Spain was divided into fifty provinces. In 1978, with the democratization of Spain, provinces were grouped into seventeen autonomous regions. These regions did not exist as a political entity at the time of the Spanish Civil War, but their distinct cultural differences were well established.

9 Cf., A. B. RODRÍGUEZ, II, 17.

10 *Ibid*, 17-20, 142.

11 A. B. RODRÍGUEZ Y R. DE LA ROSA, 180.

CHAPTER TWO

The Community of Martyrs of San Felipe of Cuenca

The civil province and diocese of Cuenca have a special place in the memory of Redemptorists. In 1864 Fr. Victor Loyódice established in Huete (Cuenca) the first foundation in Spain. The same priest founded the second Redemptorist presence in Alhama (Granada), but both were closed by the liberal Revolution in 1868.¹²⁰

The residence in Huete scarcely lasted four years, but it was the first witness of the community life and the missionary charism of the congregation founded by St. Alphonsus. That is where they initiated the popular mission campaigns. Also in Huete the first authentic copy of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Mother of the Redemptorist popular missions, arrived. In that same town there occurred the first miracle in our country wrought by that venerable icon. But Cuenca was also significant at the level of vocations in that the first to join the Redemptorist Congregation in Spain, the priest Pedro López, was born in Torrejoncillo del Rey (Cuenca) and was pastor in Jabalera (Cuenca) when he came to know the missionaries. Finally, the first Spanish Redemptorists who had to abandon

120 Cf. MISIONEROS REDENTORISTAS, *Los Redentoristas en España. Primera fundación (1863-1879)* (Madrid, 2013); D. DE FELIPE, *Fundación de los Redentoristas en España* (Madrid, 1965) 331-335.

their homeland because of revolution, were called from this community to go into exile in other countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that, since the first foundation was frustrated for political reasons, the Redemptorists in Spain thought of Cuenca when they had the opportunity to rebuild a second foundation.

The restoration of the Congregation was begun with the arrival in Madrid of Fr. Meinral Jost on December 15, 1878. Two years later he opened the community of Nava del Rey (Valladolid), Granada. El Espino (Burgos)¹²¹ followed that, then Villarejo de Salvanés (Madrid), Astorga (León),¹²² and the communities of Madrid—first Santa Barbara, then San Miguel and el Perpetuo Socorro (Perpetual Help), Cuenca, and Pamplona (Navarra). It was in these residences that all the witnesses to the faith from Cuenca spent the greater part of their lives.¹²³

The Community of San Felipe de Neri of Cuenca

On February 1, 1895, the Redemptorists opened the first foundation in the city of Cuenca. The community consisted of four priests and two brothers. Fr. Pedro López, a native of Cuenca, was the founding superior. He was a Redemptorist from the beginning of the Redemptorist presence in Spain, and was outstanding in his preaching and missionary work.

The bishop, D. Pelayo González Conde, the former dean of the chapter

.....

121 The monastery of Nuestra Señora de El Espino is an old Benedictine cloister closed by the property alienation of Mendizábal. [Translator's note: Juan Álvarez Mendizábal was a Spanish economist and politician. In 1835 he became Minister of the Treasury. To restore the Spanish treasury to solvency, he issued a series of decrees, which closed and sold off church property, with the proceeds going to the treasury.] The monastery is situated near the River Ebro, almost at the dividing line between Álava and Burgos, in the township of Santa Gadea del Cid. It was acquired by the Redemptorists in 1879, and once it was rehabilitated, it was inaugurated in 1882 as the minor seminary of the Spanish Redemptorists. The majority of Spanish Redemptorists, including the protagonists of this book, passed through this minor seminary, what is called a *juvenatus* (juvenile) in France.

122 The monastery of Astorga was inhabited by Franciscans since 1272. The French occupation [Translator's note: by Napoleon's troops in 1808] damaged it severely. It was again inhabited in 1818 until the expropriation of 1836 [Translator's note: when church property was confiscated by the Spanish civil government.] In 1883 it was given to the Redemptorists by Bishop Brezmes and in October, 1884, it became their theological center. In these first years, Fr. Edward Bührhel created the formation structure to prepare Spanish Redemptorists for the priesthood. We emphasize the importance of this place as the major seminary in which the greater part of the Redemptorist priests mentioned in this book were formed.

123 Cf. D. DE FELIPE, *Fundación...*, 399-421.

in Astorga,¹²⁴ was a great friend of the Redemptorists and especially of Fr. López. He gave the Redemptorists the Oratorian monastery and the church of San Felipe de Neri, a baroque work from the eighteenth century, abandoned since the time of the confiscation of Church property under Mendizábal in 1835. It is located in the upper zone of the city, the so-called “Vatican of Cuenca” because of the presence of the cathedral, episcopal palace, seminary, and other convents and churches. It is an area favored with a wonderful view of the rift created by the rivers Huécar and Júcar, so much admired by poets and painters. But at the same time, it suffered from an absence of residents because of its geographical location, an abundance of churches in the area, and the displacement of the population to the lower part of the city, caused by a new urbanization.

The house that the community inhabited was a big, uncomfortable place, vacant for many years. Since the time that the Oratorian Fathers left it, it had been used as a barracks for the Civil Guard, a school, living quarters for poor families, and as a recreation area.¹²⁵ The church, nevertheless, was a lovely jewel.¹²⁶ It was a single edifice in the form of a Latin cross with side chapels on both sides. It was decorated in a florid and baroque style, with paintings in the vaults by the brothers González Velázquez.¹²⁷ Below the church, an ample crypt opened up. A beautiful retable rose behind the main altar gilded with paintings on wood. A statue of the patron saint of the church was in the center. The Redemptorists placed in the center an icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help made of bronze at the workshop of Marco Pérez in Cuenca. The face and hands were made of marble. An image of Our Lady of Sorrows, attributed to Salzillo,¹²⁸ was also venerated in the church and another of St. Francis attributed to Zurbarán,¹²⁹ which was in the Iberoamerican Exposition of Seville in 1928.

124 Translator’s note: The dean is the official who presides over the chapter, or clergy, of a cathedral.

125 Cf. R. TELLERÍA, *Un instituto misionero* (Madrid, 1932) 390-392.

126 Cf. D. DE FELIPE, *o. c.*, 141.

127 Translator’s note: In the eighteenth century, three brothers, Luís, Alejandro, and Antonio—all sons of the sculptor Pablo González Velázquez—collaborated with one another on a variety of paintings.

128 Translator’s note: The Spanish sculptor Francisco Salzillo worked in the neoclassical style during the eighteenth century.

129 Translator’s note: Francisco de Zurbarán painted in Spain in the seventeenth century.

Twenty-six years after leaving Huete, Fr. López was enthusiastically welcomed at the station in Cuenca as the superior of the new community, but—it also has to be said—with heavy criticism from the old liberals who kept intact their old anticlerical attitudes. They were a minority, but they made themselves heard in the city's press.

As with every foundation,¹³⁰ things were not easy in the beginning. The crypt had been used for keeping horses. The first task of the new tenants was to get rid of the troughs that lined the right wall and to get it ready to receive the missionary icon of Perpetual Help. In addition, it was the only house for religious in the city, which soon made it one of the most beloved and frequented places of worship by the citizens of Cuenca in the upper zone. Two other factors contributed to the splendor of the church of San Felipe: one was the special cultivation of the sacrament of reconciliation, which brought about a closeness to the faithful, and the encouragement of frequent Communion. When the Redemptorists first arrived in the city, frequent Communion was rare. The second factor had to do with the religious communities, especially of women. They came to the Redemptorists of San Felipe to ask for preachers for their annual and monthly retreats, or other preaching events in the boarding schools. Their requests were always generously attended to.

One segment of the clergy did not receive the arrival of the Redemptorists with the same enthusiasm, as frequently happens in small clerical cities where there is fear of “competition.” However, they soon realized that the newly arrived religious at the community of San Felipe were, by their charism, missionaries. And the Redemptorists soon dedicated themselves to evangelization in the city as well as throughout the large rural areas of the diocese and in the neighboring region of La Mancha. A report sent to Rome in 1897 said:

Until now, because of a lack of personnel, we have given few missions, though we could give relatively many. In this diocese of Cuenca we will always find difficulties, either on the part of the clergy or on the part of the people. The faith here has received many blows. The bishop here has

130 R. TELLERÍA, o. c., 390-392; T. CEPEDAL, *Las Comunidades de la Provincia. Cuenca-San Felipe*: BPE XXVII, 151 (2000) 73.

given the Fathers what is necessary to meet the costs of giving missions. He has set aside 3,000 pesetas for this purpose.¹³¹ For missions of ten days, they have 100 pesetas, for others that are longer, 200 pesetas. If the local priests don't want to have anything of this, all this stays with us for the benefit of our house.

However, the report concludes: "The community, in general, is esteemed in the city and in the diocese."¹³²

The popular missions were the principal apostolic work of the community. In 1896 they preached eleven; six missions and three renewals¹³³ the following year; the number rose to twenty-two missions and twelve renewals in 1898. To this has to be added novenas¹³⁴ and brief sermons in rural areas. In the year 1897, with few missions for lack of personnel, "they preached more than one-hundred sermons on special occasions."¹³⁵ In Cuenca it was the custom that the missionaries precede and accompany the bishop to prepare the people spiritually for his pastoral visits in rural towns. Moreover, throughout the forty years of the Redemptorists' presence, they preached the gospel—not only throughout this province, but even in other neighboring provinces, such as Teruel, Guadalajara, Valencia, Toledo, Madrid, and reaching as far as Málaga.¹³⁶

The community of San Felipe always had an average of eight to twelve members. Twelve was the number of which the community was formed

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131 Translator's note: a Spanish gold peseta in 1897 weighed about .29 grams; in 2016 values, each would be worth \$11.68 U.S. dollars, for a total of 3,000 pesetas calculated at around \$35,000.

132 AHGR 30150002, 0006h. We must clarify that normally two Fathers would go on a mission. This would mean that the contribution given by the bishop was five pesetas a day, including costs. The mission was offered free to the people. This clarification is necessary because of the ongoing accusations stemming from the anticlericalism of the age about the wealth of the clergy.

133 Translator's note: A *renewal* was a follow-up series of talks given after a mission had been preached and for a much shorter period of time than the mission itself would have required. It was an innovation of St. Alphonsus himself with the purpose of cementing in the good results achieved by the mission.

134 Translator's note: A *novena* comes from the Latin word for "nine" and refers to a preaching event of nine days duration. It is modeled after the nine days that the Apostles and Mary spent praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:14).

135 D. DE FELIPE, *o. c.*, 382.

136 R. TELLERÍA, *o. c.*, 395-397. Translator's note: The distance from Cuenca to Málaga is 564 kilometers, more than 350 miles.

when the Civil War broke out. Sometimes, there were those who were sick with tuberculosis within the community—a frequent illness at that time. They were sent there to recuperate in the dry air of La Mancha. But its high number corresponded to an intense evangelization activity throughout the whole city.¹³⁷ Along with the missionary campaigns throughout the diocese and the neighboring dioceses, we need to remember the ordinary apostolate of the church itself: well-planned liturgies, careful attention to confessions, labor-intensive conferences, spiritual exercises for laypeople, devotions, pious associations, for example. Because of the decree about frequent Communion by St. Pius X, San Felipe became one of the churches most attended for the celebration of the Eucharist, where the necessity of frequent Communion was drummed into the laypeople. During the forty years of Redemptorist presence, San Felipe was an evangelization center known throughout the city of Cuenca, “bringing about a flourishing of the Christian life.”¹³⁸

137 Cf. *Ib.*, 393-394.

138 *Ib.*, 393.