

For the Love of God: The Intersection of Politics and Religion in the Spanish Civil War  
by Kate Harty and Alice Tecotzky

Until she was in fifth grade, Anita Yglesias' priest ate in her Brooklyn kitchen every Sunday, conversing familiarly with her devout Catholic mother. Come 1936, though, a bitter civil war in Spain severed that relationship, and Anita's priest stopped visiting for Sunday dinner.<sup>1</sup> General Francisco Franco's fascist forces battled the left-wing Republican government, a conflict which threw political and religious tensions into sharp relief. Anita's priest, along with the majority of the Catholic establishment, sided with Franco, whom many saw as the redeemer of Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, her mother struggled to reconcile her traditional Catholic beliefs with her view that the Church was ignoring the plight of ordinary Spanish citizens. Religion was a decisive factor in shaping attitudes beyond the Catholic Church as well. Jews recognized that Franco's close ties with Adolf Hitler's Germany posed a threat to their lives, and so the American Jewish community largely supported the Loyalists, with many even volunteering to fight in Spain. Especially in ethnic enclaves in American cities, religious belief as much as political convictions and social class shaped attitudes toward the two opposing sides in the Spanish Civil War. The fear of persecution, biased press coverage, and the limited ideological diversity of religious communities encouraged their members to take sides despite the official United States policy of neutrality.

Communism had long attracted many Jews, both in the United States and Europe, who flocked to the political theory because it promised to break the forms of society that had historically oppressed them.<sup>3</sup> While communism opposed religion, considering it a means through which

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<sup>1</sup> ALBA Videos, "Anita Yglesias," YouTube video, 3:10, posted [January 2011], 2:27, accessed May 5, 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2TMEVoF4ak](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2TMEVoF4ak).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that within Spain, not all Catholics supported the rebel forces. The Basque region was deeply Catholic, but a separatist movement which Franco denounced brought many citizens to the side of the Loyalists. For more on the relationship between Catholicism, the Basque region, and Franco, see Fernando Molina's "Lies of Our Fathers: Memory and Politics in the Basque Country Under the Franco Dictatorship, 1936-68."

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, *Crusade on the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (United States: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 110.

workers were doped into believing the class system just, it advocated equality, which appealed to Jews and contributed to the religious groups' relative attraction to the movement in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> For many, the atheistic nature of communism was trumped by its commitment to fighting fascism.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, some features of Marxism, such as the focus on morality and justice, correspond with core tenets of Jewish culture.<sup>6</sup>

Although American and Eastern European Jews craved the same equality, the former would sometimes divide themselves politically based on their varying levels of piety and economic status. However, during the Spanish Civil War, the fascism and anti-Semitism embraced by Franco and his allies profoundly threatened all Jews, so that virtually the community as a whole united behind the Republic.<sup>7</sup> During the Spanish Civil War, the number of Jewish volunteers who fought for the Loyalists in the International Brigades, which were military units organized by Communist International, manifested the group's adherence or willingness to work with communism. Nearly three quarters of American volunteers were members of their local communist organization.<sup>8</sup> Although Jews comprised only 4% of the American population, they were 38% of American volunteers. As their families, friends, congregations, and neighborhoods learned of their service, the Jewish community would become even more closely linked to left-wing politics, especially Marxism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Zvi Gitelman, "Communism," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, August 26, 2010, accessed June 7, 2019, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Communism>; Howard Sachar, "Jews in Radical Politics," My Jewish Learning, November 2, 1993, accessed June 9, 2019, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-in-radical-politics/>.

<sup>5</sup> Sachar, "Jews in Radical Politics."

<sup>6</sup> Gerben Zaagsma, "Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: A case study of the Botwin company," Marxists Internet Archive, September 2001, accessed June 9, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/botwin.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Singerman, "American-Jewish Reactions to the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Church and State*, no. 2, vol. 19 (Spring 1977): 264, accessed April 19, 2019, [www.jstor.org/stable/23915709](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23915709).

<sup>8</sup> Chris Brooks, "An Analysis of American and Canadian Volunteers Compiled by the International Brigades," *The Volunteer*, September 26, 2017, accessed May 6, 2019, [www.albavolunteer.org/2017/09/an-analysis-of-american-and-canadian-volunteers-compiled-by-the-international-brigades-in-spain/](http://www.albavolunteer.org/2017/09/an-analysis-of-american-and-canadian-volunteers-compiled-by-the-international-brigades-in-spain/).

<sup>9</sup> Martin Sugarman, "Against Fascism - Jews who Served in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War," 1, accessed April 30, 2019, [www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/spanjews.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/spanjews.pdf).

The atheism of communism notwithstanding, the fear of fascism clearly drove Jewish communities to become more tolerant of the ideology and more engaged in activism.

A majority of Jewish volunteers fought in order to stop the spread of fascism, and many were influenced by the struggles of those in their immediate communities and families. A noteworthy 80% of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers were either first or second generation immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Europeans and European immigrants were likely more aware than Americans of the anti-Semitism baked into the history of Spain, which stretched back to 1492 when Jews were expelled during the Spanish Inquisition because they were considered a threat to Catholicism.<sup>11</sup> Sygmunt Stein, a Parisian volunteer of Polish-Jewish descent, even named the Inquisition's expulsion of Jews as part of his motivation for fighting against the fascists.<sup>12</sup> Since most American Jewish immigrants emigrated from Eastern Europe, the Jews who signed on knew either first hand or from family or neighbors of the imminent danger posed by fascism and nationalist rhetoric, as well as Spanish anti-Semitism. Unsurprisingly, immigrant-dense New York City sent the largest contingent of American volunteers, most from the very self-contained and somewhat insular Ashkenazi communities in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan.<sup>13</sup> The acute fears of fascism and the awareness of Spanish history held by European immigrants were perhaps more readily disseminated

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<sup>10</sup> The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was the primary American unit of the International Brigades. For more information on the brigade's composition, see: Fraser Ottanelli, "The Lincolns: A Battalion of Anti-Fascist Immigrants," *The Volunteer*, March 2013, 7, accessed April 19, 2019, [www.albavolunteer.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/TheVolunteer\\_MARCH2013\\_comp.pdf](http://www.albavolunteer.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/TheVolunteer_MARCH2013_comp.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Michael Alpert, *Crypto-Judaism and the Spanish Inquisition* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), QuestiaSchool, accessed June 10, 2019, 26, <https://www.questiaschool.com/read/102569184/crypto-judaism-and-the-spanish-inquisition>.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Ivry, "Sygmunt Stein: A Spaniard in the Works," *The Forward*, January 11, 2013, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://forward.com/schmooze/168760/sygmunt-stein-a-spaniard-in-the-works/>.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Brooks, "An Analysis of American and Canadian Volunteers Compiled by the International Brigades."

throughout the community, thereby compelling more left-leaning young Jewish New Yorkers to volunteer.<sup>14</sup>

In recounting their personal and political reasons for fighting, many Jewish volunteers illuminated the close relationship between religion and ideology. Carl Geiser and New Yorker Milt Wolff were both members of the Young Communist League whose decision to fight stemmed from a disgust with and fear of fascism.<sup>15</sup> The men's Jewish identity likely drove their participation in the YCL, as communists directly opposed a regime associated with anti-Semitism, but not all were highly religious. Upon returning home from the battlefield, Geiser studied American volunteers of differing backgrounds and Wolff became an advocate in the civil rights movement; neither man devoted himself to Jewish struggles.<sup>16</sup> However, Hyman Katz, another Jewish volunteer from New York, was motivated by his Jewish identity, as is clear in letters he wrote to his family about the responsibility he felt to fight.<sup>17</sup> Describing the rise of anti-Semitism throughout Eastern Europe, Katz wrote that to ignore the personal threat fascism held would be to ignore the realities of the world, and urged his mother to recognize that he "took up arms against the persecutors of [his] people -- the Jews -- and [his] class -- the Oppressed."<sup>18</sup> The twenty-year-old socialist and son of a rabbi, Sam Levinger, articulated similar sentiments. "The difference between world Fascism and world socialism is too great," he wrote just before his death, "to permit our safeties to be a factor for

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; Jenny Goldstein, "Transcending Boundaries: Boston's Catholics and Jews, 1929-1965," master's thesis, Brandeis University, April 24 2001, accessed May 4, 2019, [www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/goldstein.htm#top](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/goldstein.htm#top).

<sup>15</sup> ALBA Videos, "Milt Wolff," YouTube video, 3:00, posted [January 2011], 0:39, accessed April 27, 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6KchlQGFBE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6KchlQGFBE); Carl Geiser, "Letter to Brother," letter, May 9, 1937, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, 3, accessed April 23, 2019, [drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpij2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpij2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view).

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Johnson, "Carl Geiser," Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, November 18, 2017, accessed June 9, 2019, <https://wp.nyu.edu/albaoh/carl-geiser/>; Douglas Martin, "Milton Wolff, 92, Dies; Anti-Franco Leader," The New York Times, January 17, 2008, accessed June 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/17/obituaries/17wolff.html?auth=login-smartlock>.

<sup>17</sup> Hyman Katz, "Letter from the Front in Spain," letter, November 25th, 1937, Jewish Currents, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed April 19, 2019, [drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpij2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpij2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

consideration.”<sup>19</sup> There were discrepancies in the level of religious engagement among volunteers, with some, like Katz, naming the threat to Jews as a primary motivator for volunteerism, and others, like Wolff, fighting against more general fascist oppression.<sup>20</sup>

The Jewish press largely echoed the ideas expressed by volunteers, as it focused on Franco’s close relationship with Hitler and emphasized that a win for the Nationalists would be a win for Nazism, making it a threat to Jewish existence. Community newspapers immediately labeled Franco a fascist, practically ensuring Jewish support for the Loyalists.<sup>21</sup> Most Jewish newspapers at the time aimed to mobilize their readerships and instill in them a sense of duty, which likely contributed to the volume of Jewish volunteers.<sup>22</sup> Jewish newspapers viewed the conflict in Spain as a potential catalyst for increasingly violent incarnations of global anti-Semitism, as is illustrated in San Francisco newspaper *Emanu-El’s* printing of a letter to the editor entitled “Fate of Jewry Hinges on Turn of Spanish Revolution.”<sup>23</sup> For some Jewish newspaper editors, the necessity of stopping the spread of fascism perhaps outweighed the religious dissociation that accompanied supporting the Stalin-backed and therefore arguably atheistic Loyalists. Many American Jews read primarily Jewish newspapers, including Milt Wolff’s mother who, according to her son, only ever read the *Freiheit*, a New York City-based Yiddish newspaper associated with the American Communist Party.<sup>24</sup> General Jewish thought surrounding the Spanish Civil War was self-reinforcing; alarming news from both religious and secular sources would further separate Jews who felt detached from other sects of

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<sup>19</sup> Sam Levinger, “Final Letter to Parents,” letter, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed April 19, 2019, [drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpjj2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hrcnheRoQs98Tpgpjj2cqK9d9jVOXRlp/view).

<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to assess the level of religious piety among Jewish volunteers collectively, because all led different lives and often lacked the means to publicly articulate their views. It is clear, however, that both secular and relatively religious Jews were engaged in the Loyalist movements. For more information, see Zaagsma, “Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: A case study of the Botwin company.”

<sup>21</sup> Singerman, “American-Jewish Reactions to the Spanish Civil War,” 264.

<sup>22</sup> Joanna Merrill, “American Jewish Identity and Newspapers: the medium that maintained an imagined community through a change in identity,” *Undergraduate Honors Theses*, (Colorado College: 2012),27, accessed May 8, 2019, [scholar.colorado.edu/honr\\_theses/299](https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/299).

<sup>23</sup> Singerman, “American-Jewish Reactions to the Spanish Civil War,” 264.

<sup>24</sup> ALBA Videos, “Milt Wolff,” 1:37.

citizens, namely Catholics. Amongst those Christians who lamented the Jewish influence on the secular press, long-standing prejudices became particularly problematic during the Spanish Civil War and reinforced the religious divide between Catholics and Jews.<sup>25</sup>

Much of the American public understood that communism was inherently atheistic, and, according to some leading Catholics like popular radio personality Father Charles E. Coughlin, anti-Christian.<sup>26</sup> Coughlin exhibited a particular distaste towards Jewish volunteers and articulated the beliefs of some hardline Catholics when he urged the American government to prevent “members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, recruited from the Jewish and gentile communist youth, from participating in dragging Christ down from his cross and slaughtering His innocent followers.”<sup>27</sup> The dramatic imagery of Jewish participation in a Catholic massacre demonstrates the intense hostility that existed among America’s religious communities. Additionally, the anti-Semitic tradition of believing Jews responsible for Jesus’ execution was only formally rejected by the Vatican in 1965, and so that divisive theory also fueled some of the religious estrangement during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>28</sup> Jewish affiliation with communism during the Spanish Civil War also sparked religious animosity, with some Catholics conflating all Jews with communist beliefs, and therefore with anti-God sentiments. The claim of Jewish association with communism was powerful ammunition for anti-Semitic tropes precisely because it was predicated on truth.<sup>29</sup> The Spanish Civil War widened the

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<sup>25</sup> David Valaik, “In the Days Before Ecumenism: American Catholics, Anti-Semitism, and the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Church and State*, no. 3, vol. 13 (Autumn 1971): 468-469, accessed April 24, 2019, [www.jstor.org/stable/23914187?seq=13#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23914187?seq=13#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>26</sup> Charles E. Coughlin, “Persecution - Jewish and Christian,” book, November 20, 1938, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, 42, accessed April 23, 2019, [resources.alba-valb.org/wp-content/uploads/Coughlin\\_Excerpt.pdf](http://resources.alba-valb.org/wp-content/uploads/Coughlin_Excerpt.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>28</sup> John Hooper, “Pope finds Jews not to blame for death of Jesus,” *The Guardian*, March 2, 2011, accessed June 9, 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/02/pope-jews-jesus-death-crucifixion>.

<sup>29</sup> Goldstein, “Transcending Boundaries.”

existing chasm between the two religious groups, as it was seen by some as representative of a battle between Christianity and atheistic, Jewish-led communism.<sup>30</sup>

Within the American Catholic community was a wide array of opinions on the Spanish Civil War, but the pro-Franco faction held the greatest political and cultural influence. Catholics comprised roughly one fifth of America's population, and many Catholic immigrants gravitated towards East Coast cities.<sup>31</sup> Cardinal William O'Connell was a prominent leader within the Irish Catholic enclave in Boston, a community which spoke frequently about the war.<sup>32</sup> The lack of a vocal pro-Republic faction in Boston allowed conservative Catholics like O'Connell to dominate the political discourse. Throughout the early twentieth century, O'Connell emphasized the divide between Catholics and the rest of the American population; he capitalized on the near-feudal structure of the Church, trusting local parishes to disseminate his messages.<sup>33</sup> O'Connell highlighted to his followers that their Catholicism and Irish heritage made them a distinct ethnic group, and limited the discourse with the Jewish community and other political movements.<sup>34</sup> When the Spanish Civil War began, O'Connell and Coughlin together promoted Catholic unity for the Rebels. They equated the Nationalists with Catholic redemption in Spain and accused the Loyalists of atrocities against clergy members, defining their victimhood and further dividing American religious groups.<sup>35</sup>

The Catholic press, especially the *Boston Pilot*, also contributed to the religious divide; newspapers represented the perspective of the Church establishment and sculpted leading Catholic

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<sup>30</sup> Valaik, "In the Days Before Ecumenism," 466.

<sup>31</sup> There are few statistics on the exact number of Catholics in the United States in any given year; however, given historical data from 1910-2015 and the influx of Irish and Italian immigrants in the early twentieth century, the number is approximately twenty percent. "See the Change in the Catholic Population Around the World," *TimeLabs*, September 21<sup>st</sup> 2015, accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2019, [labs.time.com/story/catholic-population/](https://labs.time.com/story/catholic-population/).

<sup>32</sup> Donald F. Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936 - 1939," *The New England Quarterly*, no. 1, vol. 44 (March 1971): 89, accessed April 22, 2019, [www.jstor.org/stable/364944?seq=5#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/364944?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>33</sup> Goldstein, "Transcending Boundaries."

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Crosby, "Boston's Catholics," 87.

thought.<sup>36</sup> Many of the sentiments in Catholic publications came directly from the Vatican; indeed, the *Pilot* reprinted in full Pope Pius XI's 1937 *On Atheistic Communism*.<sup>37</sup> The *Pilot* believed itself at odds with the mainstream American press, which to some was synonymous with the Jewish press, claiming to more accurately represent the plight of Spanish Catholics and the atrocities of the Republican forces. Disregarding the ideological diversity of Loyalists, the *Pilot* instead branded them consistently as communists or Marxists.<sup>38</sup> The *Pilot* primarily focused on the purported massacre of Spanish Catholics, as the paper printed exaggerated statistics which held that in the first eight months of the war, communists had killed nearly half of priests and frequently raped nuns.<sup>39</sup> In fact, approximately 4,184 of Spain's 55,000 priests were killed during the war, totaling around 7.6% of Spain's pre-war number compared to the *Pilot's* reported 50%.<sup>40</sup> The Catholic press similarly overstated accounts of sexual violence against nuns.<sup>41</sup> Another popular topic was Franco's piousness and apparent daily Mass attendance, and the *Pilot* conflated the Catholic beliefs of Franco's soldiers with the assertion that devout men could not have "indulge[d] in... [the] mutilation and slaughter" of Loyalist soldiers.<sup>42</sup> Even beyond defending the Nationalists, some papers advocated for the implementation of Franco's policies in America.

Father Coughlin's anti-Semitic radio show and his magazine *Social Justice* was one such source that promoted fascism in America, and it presented the most extreme wing of American Catholic thought. He claimed that the "tell-tale fingerprints of Jewish racial revenge can be traced to the

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<sup>36</sup> Although Father William O'Connell was not officially associated with the *Boston Pilot*, he often used the paper as a mouthpiece and consistently ensured that the paper's perspective aligned with his own opinion. Indeed the articles in the *Pilot* often reflected the content of O'Connell's public addresses. For more on the relationship between O'Connell and the *Boston Pilot*, see Donald Crosby's "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936 - 1939."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Goldstein, "Transcending Boundaries."

<sup>40</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 235.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Boston Pilot*, April 3, 1937, quoted in Crosby, "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War."



present cataclysm in Spain” and outlined in sixteen points the steps that America ought to take towards a more just society, including quasi-fascist policies like the nationalization of “important public resources.”<sup>43</sup> Given that in a 1939 poll, two-thirds of American Catholics chose fascism over communism, it is perhaps unsurprising that Coughlin appealed to many Catholics.<sup>44</sup> The anti-Semitism, too, of *Social Justice* might have resonated especially with Boston’s Catholics, as rumors of a Jewish communist conspiracy circulated unchallenged in their isolated community.<sup>45</sup>

O’Connell and Coughlin represented only one branch of Catholic opinion; several groups of Catholics dissented from dominant conservative thought for both personal and political reasons. Beyond those like Anita Yglesias and her family, who personally opposed the war, a few newspapers differed as well from the pro-Franco establishment. *The Commonweal* and *The Catholic Worker* were both New York City-based publications which remained neutral during the war, making them unique among Catholic newspapers.<sup>46</sup> When announcing its stance on the war, the *Commonweal* pointed to the press as perpetuating a “dangerous disease” of partisanship and destroying the nuances of the situation beyond fascism and communism.<sup>47</sup> *The Catholic Worker*, a left-wing paper, explained its stance against both the racism of the fascists and the Loyalists who sought to destroy religion, instead advocating compassion and peace.<sup>48</sup> Both of these papers demonstrate that diversity of thought existed within the Catholic community. Perhaps, since both papers are New York rather

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Coughlin, “Anti-Semitism is a Shield,” *Social Justice*, December 5<sup>th</sup> 1938, accessed May 4<sup>th</sup>, [archive.org/details/SocialJusticedec.51938](http://archive.org/details/SocialJusticedec.51938).

<sup>44</sup> Goldstein, “Transcending Boundaries.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *The Catholic Worker* was neutral for the war’s entirety, while *The Commonweal* was originally supportive of Franco for the first year of the war, until June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1938, when they printed a letter explaining their new stance on neutrality. Both of these papers are remarkable since they were the only ones among the Catholic press who did not officially support Franco. For more analysis of the dissenting Catholic press, see Allen Guttman’s *American Neutrality and the Spanish Civil War*.

<sup>47</sup> Allen Guttman, *American Neutrality and the Spanish Civil War*, Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1963, QuestiaSchool, accessed April 27, 2019, 71, [www.questiaschool.com/read/9428679/american-neutrality-and-the-spanish-civil-war](http://www.questiaschool.com/read/9428679/american-neutrality-and-the-spanish-civil-war).

<sup>48</sup> Dorothy Day, “Explains the CW Stand of Use of Force,” *The Catholic Worker*, September 1938, The Catholic Worker Movement Archives, [www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/306.html](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/306.html).

than Boston based, they also indicate the value of reaching beyond a single religious enclave into a more varied setting. Unlike Boston, New York's numerous and diverse ideological factions loudly voiced their perspectives. Nonetheless, the Catholic establishment met dissent within their community with harsh criticism and accusations of apostasy. Michael Williams, an editor of *The Commonweal*, rejected vehemently to his paper's neutrality, claiming that his support for Franco was the rightful Catholic opinion, and that the majority of American Catholics agreed with him.<sup>49</sup>

Unlike Jews and Catholics, many American Protestants did not feel religiously motivated to participate in the Spanish Civil War, and so ideology often became more significant than identity. Within Spain, neither Catholic Nationalist sentiment nor Loyalist liberalism fully resonated with the largely conservative Protestant church.<sup>50</sup> The Protestant minority did not directly threaten either ideology, and violence against the community was real but uncommon.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, Protestants represented a majority in America and typically held moderate liberal views, supporting the Loyalists but rarely tending towards communism. Many Catholics felt marginalized by the Protestant majority and so the rift between the two American communities widened. Spanish bishops explained their support of Franco in a 1937 letter, which American Protestants widely criticized.<sup>52</sup> In their response, 150 Protestant leaders expressed their disappointment with the bishops' justification of Nationalist violence and highlighted their view of the Spanish Civil War not as a conflict of religion, but as a question of democracy or fascism.<sup>53</sup> Unlike Jewish and Catholic Americans, leading Protestants did not link their ideology to issues of identity. The particular American belief in democracy primarily influenced the centrist politics of Protestants, rather than a feeling of personal stake. The perspective

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<sup>49</sup> Guttman, *American Neutrality and the Spanish Civil War*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Vincent, "Ungodly Citizens: Protestants in National-Catholic Spain, 1939-53," *European History Quarterly*, no. 1, vol. 45 (2015), accessed May 6, 2019, [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/80827/](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/80827/).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>52</sup> Crosby, "Boston's Catholics," 89.

<sup>53</sup> "Open Letter of 150 Protestants," *New York Times*, October 4, 1937, QuestiaSchool, accessed April 27, 2019, [www.questiaschool.com/library/1326974/american-neutrality-and-the-spanish-civil-war](http://www.questiaschool.com/library/1326974/american-neutrality-and-the-spanish-civil-war).

of American Protestants ranged, spanning pacifism to interventionism, and encompassing both fervent Republicans supporters and tentative fascist proponents.

For Jewish and Catholic Americans, the Spanish Civil War highlighted both the long-standing association between religion and politics and the dangers of insular communities. Today's debate surrounding identity politics, the question of how much someone's personal life and religion should dictate their ideologies, is a heated one, and proves how starkly divergent identifiers can separate groups of people. Such conflict fuels much of today's animosity, religious or otherwise, as historical questions of identity still ripple in our modern consciousness. Though Spain became a republic once again upon Franco's death in 1975, old religious tensions still simmer. In 2013, Pope Francis beatified 522 Spanish priests killed in the war, sparking fresh debate about the Church's support of a fascist regime.<sup>54</sup> Is the Catholic Church merely remembering the dead, or does decision indirectly honor the fascist government which many of the priests supported? Though the influence of organized religion undoubtedly remains strong, political views seem to divide modern Americans more than ever. Our press is polarized; exaggerated stories now circulate rapidly and anti-Semitism foment in dark corners of the internet. There is no check on the extremism and hatred espoused in far right publications and chat forums, mimicking to some extent Father Coughlin's own echo chamber of prejudice. Many Americans often read only those papers which bolster their current ideas, leaving them not only unable to uncover the truth, but also to sympathize with those whose plight is different than their own. Only through engaging with the varied, multi-dimensional realities of our world can we hope to foster empathy and cooperation across all identities.

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<sup>54</sup> "Church Beatifies 522 'martyrs' of the Spanish Civil War," *Telegraph U.K.*, October 13 2013, accessed May 9<sup>th</sup> 2019, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/10376/Church-beatifies-522-martyrs-of-Spanish-Civil-War](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/10376/Church-beatifies-522-martyrs-of-Spanish-Civil-War).

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