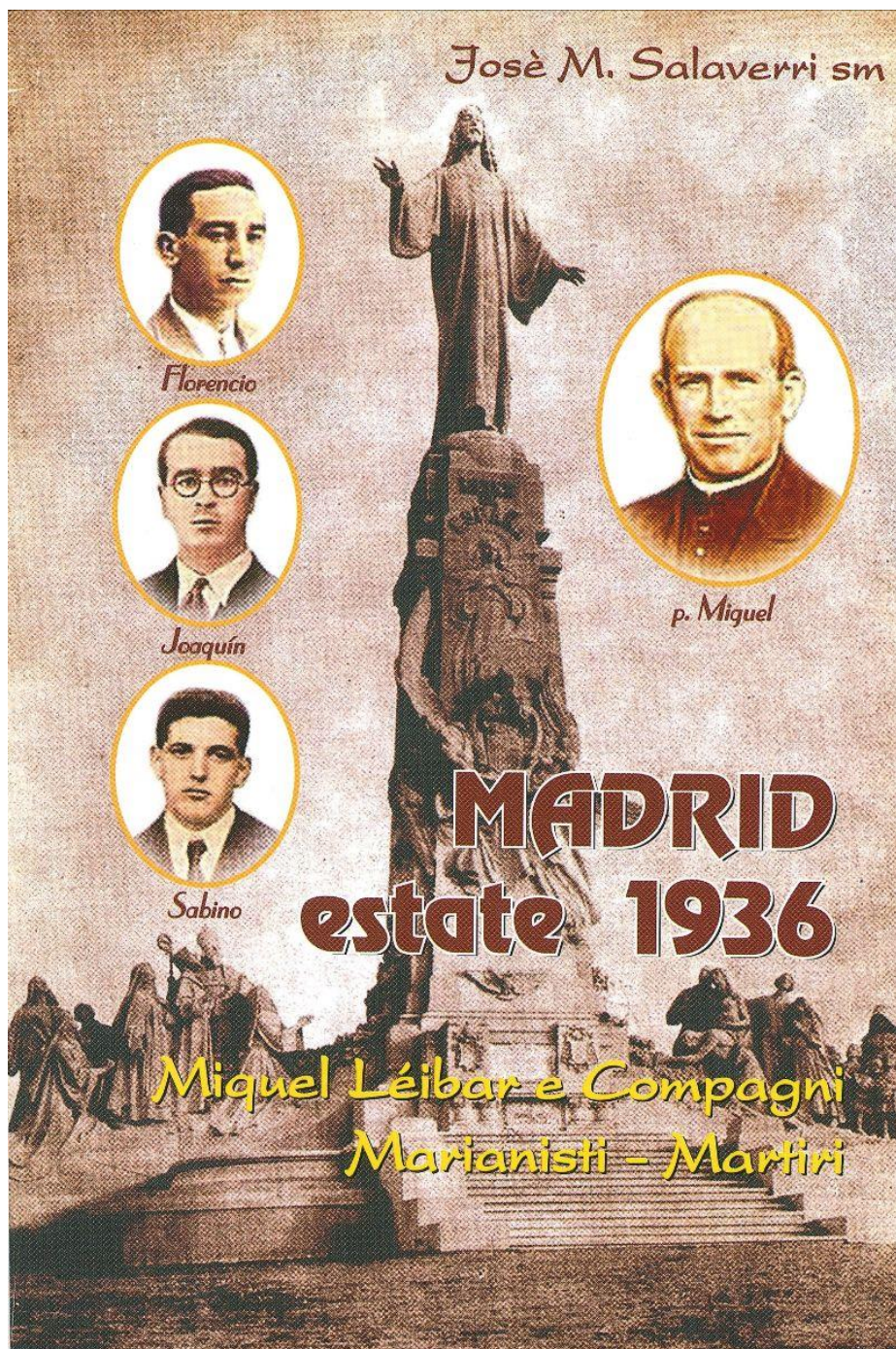


Martyrs and Persecuted Persons

In two millennia of Christianity, an estimated 70 million Christians have been killed for their faith; of these, 45.5 million (65%) in the 20th century. These are shocking figures from the so-called "short century" (1914-1989) where more than 200 million human beings were victims of the violence of two atrocious world wars and of the extermination camps that arose for ideological and political reasons. The main reasons for the martyrdom of Christians in the last century were hateful ideologies, violent atheistic systems of thought and totalitarian political regimes: liberal nationalist, communist and Nazi-fascist. The Church of the 20th century has become a Church of martyrs, surpassing in number the martyrs executed during the Roman Empire (around 150,000). Never before have so many Christians had to pay with their lives for their fidelity to Christ as happened in the twentieth century.

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), the religious persecution caused no less than 7,000 ecclesiastics to be murdered (17.5% of 40,000), according to Monsignor Vicente Cárcel Ortí's estimate. In Madrid, the anarchist labor movement, communist and socialist militias killed some 426 priests and seminarians and 661 religious men and women (without counting the lay faithful, of whom 104 causes of martyrdom have been opened so far). These are numbers that offer an incredible insight into the victims of that religious persecution that tried to exterminate the Spanish Church following the slogans coming from the Soviet Union.

Among the Spanish martyrs, already beatified, there are three Marianists in Ciudad Real: Carlos Eraña, Fidel Fuidio and Jesús Hita; and four in Madrid: Father Miguel Léibar, Joaquín Ochoa, Sabino Ayastuy and Florencio Arnaiz; plus another 8 religious whose causes were not opened at the time. Today, the Cause of martyrdom of the Marianist Don Juan Vergareche is underway.



When a coup d'état was declared on July 17, 1936 by part of the Army against the Republic, the rulers thought that all the military and security forces were united with the plotters of the coup. Then, they decided to arm the militias of trade union groups and political parties of the extreme left (anarchists and communists) and the left (socialists and republicans). They took control of the street and the government lost control of its ability to remain in power. The armed militias implemented terror and extermination of all those they considered "fascist" or "anti-revolutionary" (judges, lawyers, university professors, rich landowners, landowners...); among them, all the clergy (bishops, priests and religious) and significant Catholic Groups (Catholic Action and other

Christian movements). In the republican zone, the entire population lived under a regime of terror; with the threat of being shot on suspicion of sympathizing with the plotters of the military coup.

On July 24, 1936, the Colegio del Pilar in Madrid was seized by members of the Republican Left and the 18 Marianists who still remained in the community had to take refuge in the homes of former students, friends and relatives. Father Miguel Léibar (51 years old) stayed in the apartment of the Provincial Administration, in a house at 21 Velázquez Street. There he established a private oratory and served the faithful of the neighborhood. This lasted until July 28 when anarchist militiamen attacked the apartment, and took Léibar and the two servants and shot them on the outskirts of Madrid, on Valencia road, km 7.

Also in Madrid, the young Marianists Sabino Ayastuy (24 years old), Joaquín Ochoa (26 years old) and Florencio Arnaiz (27 years old), took refuge in the house of the Bazán sisters, at 40 Castelló Street. After a few weeks, two Dominicans joined them. However, on September 13, communist militiamen broke into the house and took them to the prison-quarters of the communist party at 72 San Bernardo Street. The detainees were interrogated under torture to make them confess their anti-revolutionary activities and after a sham trial before a revolutionary tribunal, they were condemned to death and at dawn, they were taken to be shot on the El Pardo road north of Madrid.

Both Father Léibar and the three young Marianists were betrayed by the doorman of their respective houses. Sabino Ayastuy's gesture of bidding an affectionate farewell to the doorman, knowing that he had betrayed them, shows his desire to forgive, a typical trait of Christian martyrdom.

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 42, teaches that the martyr is an imitator of Jesus, the Son of God, who manifested his love by laying down his life for us. Some Christians are called to give this supreme witness of love, especially to their persecutors. The martyr is a disciple who resembles the Master, who freely accepted death for the salvation of the world, and conforms himself to him by the shedding of his blood. This is an exalted gift, granted to few, and yet we must all be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him on the way of the cross.

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