

# THE WORLD'S EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

F Hale<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

British Christians reacted variously to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and crossed verbal swords in the campaign for the hearts and minds of the public over this heated issue at a time when many people believed that Western civilisation and the future of Christianity in Europe were hanging in the balance. Generally speaking, Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom, alarmed at the violence which anticlerical mobs inflicted on religious personnel in parts of Spain and concerned about their denomination's loss of its privileged status, supported the insurgency of General Francisco Franco, leader of the ultimately victorious Nationalist forces. In the Church of England opinion was divided. In various Nonconformist circles, there was considerable support for Republican Spain. The interdenominational Evangelical Alliance, founded in England in 1846 *inter alia* to promote Protestant interests internationally at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was perceived as a threat to religious freedom in Europe and elsewhere, lent its voice to the Republican cause. This was by no means a matter of ideological sympathy for the socialism of the Madrid regime, but reflected the Evangelical Alliance's traditional support of the Protestant churches in Spain, whose hard-won freedom, it was believed, would be threatened by a Nationalist victory and the restoration of Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the realm.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 was by no means merely an internal conflict between socialist forces loyal to the internationally recognised government in Madrid and a coalition of right-wing insurgents under the leadership of General Francisco Franco. Bringing to a boil a cauldron of seething disputes between political, social, ideological, cultural, ethnic, and other factions within a variegated society which was experiencing severe difficulties in coping with the vicissitudes of modernisation on a scale unprecedented in Iberia, the war soon rent asunder public opinion in many other countries across Europe and also overseas. Perhaps nowhere did it cause a deeper cleft than in the United Kingdom, where both belligerents in Spain opened offices which co-ordinated the dissemination of propaganda and

1 Prof Frederick Hale, Department of English, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 7600, South Africa.

actively recruited both military personnel and financial assets in support of their respective causes. As the Oxford literary scholar Valentine Cunningham has observed, "In no war before this one had the means of propaganda been used on so massive a scale. This was the war in which the military importance of forces not visible on battlefields got open recognition".<sup>2</sup>

The sustained efforts to sway British public opinion bore a bumper crop of fruit, much of it intensely bitter. "For many, it became the supreme moral issue of their time", wrote K W Watkins in his detailed study, *Britain Divided. The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion*. "Thousands upon thousands of men and women in Britain equated themselves [with people] in Spain who bore the same label or occupied, either nominally or in reality, a similar position in society. Thus the trade unionist in South Wales, the retired officer in Cheltenham, the small shop-keeper in Edinburgh, the minor civil servant in Bayswater, and the scientist in a research establishment identified themselves, from afar, with their opposite number in Spain without realising that in many instances the equation was totally unreal".<sup>3</sup>

The rôle of British Christian groups in this rhetorical campaign has not been entirely overlooked. Indeed, the murder of thousands of priests, nuns, and monks by anticlerical mobs, the destruction of a large number of religious buildings, and governmental restrictions placed on the public celebration of the Mass alarmed Roman Catholics on an international basis who feared for the future of their church in Spain and, by extension in Europe generally. In the main, they responded by lending at least rhetorical support to the avowedly Catholic Franco, who promised to restore the Church of Rome to its privileged perch in Spain. Nearly all retrospective scholarly enquiries into the religious factor consequently at work in the extensive British debate about the war as it raged have, quite understandably, focused on this general response. The embers continue to glow at some denominational campfires. As recently as 1999, for example, English scholar Kevin L Morris asked in a lengthy, two-part article published in the Dominican journal *New Blackfriars*, "How could cultured Catholics be even partially attracted to Fascism: what did they see to admire in it, and what were the conditions which permitted and provoked them to find good in it?"<sup>4</sup>

2 Valentine Cunningham (ed), *Spanish Front. Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xx-xxi.

3 K W Watkins, *Britain Divided. The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1963), p 13.

4 Kevin L Morris, "Fascism and British Catholic Writers 1924-1939: Part 1", *New Blackfriars*, LXXX no 935 (January 1999), p 32.

Almost entirely ignored, however, have been the positions taken by Anglican and various British Free Churchmen, many of whom staunchly supported either the Republican or the Francoite Nationalist cause. While Morris could wonder how seemingly well-informed Roman Catholics could lend the power of their pens to an unabashedly totalitarian ideology, it is equally relevant from the viewpoint of the ecclesiastical historian to ask why, during the dark days of Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union, a considerable number of Protestant clergymen and laymen in positions of religious leadership could persistently advocate the continuation in Madrid of a government which so manifestly undermined the principle of religious freedom, which British Nonconformity had largely attained through protracted struggles during the nineteenth century, and which was allegedly involved in the well-publicised desecration of church buildings. In the present article I shall take steps towards answering that question by examining the position of a major interdenominational agency, the World's Evangelical Alliance, towards key aspects of the war in Spain. The principal focal point will be on that organisation's long-term General Secretary, Henry Martyn Gooch, although the views of other leading figures in the Alliance will also be considered. Furthermore, to place this body's general pro-Republican attitude into even bolder relief, I shall contrast certain Alliance opinions with those of prominent pro-Franco British Catholics. It will be seen that the leaders of the World's Evangelical Alliance perceived the strife in Spain, especially the plight of that country's Protestant minority and Nationalist efforts to restore the Roman Catholic Church to a position of exclusive privilege, in ways that were fully consistent with and almost certainly a consequence of the Alliance's campaign to promote religious liberty on the Iberian Peninsula.

## 2. THE WORLD'S EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Founded in London in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance facilitated co-operative efforts of ecumenically inclined Anglicans, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and members of various other Protestant denominations in the United Kingdom, North America, and Continental Europe. From its offices in central London, it was engaged in the distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature, evangelisation of various kinds, and, not least, endeavours to secure a greater measure of religious liberty on an international basis.<sup>5</sup> The organisation was unabashedly Protestant, and from

5 For the general history of its first century, see John W Ewing, *Goodly Fellowship. A Centenary Tribute to the Life and Work of the World's Evangelical Alliance 1846-1946* (London and Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Ltd, 1946).

its inception it bore an explicitly anti-Roman Catholic stamp. Indeed, the roots of the Evangelical Alliance lay to a large degree in the hostility of many Anglicans and Free Churchmen to the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism, of the early Victorian era and the perceived threat this campaign entailed to re-Catholicise not only the Church of England but British society generally. Edward Bickersteth, the Anglican divine who laid much of the foundation for the constituting of the Alliance, virtually proclaimed its rôle as a counter to the proliferation of Roman Catholicism in the many countries where it was represented before 1850. Writing only a few weeks after it was founded, he listed among its cardinal principles three which unmistakably underscored its anti-Catholic function, namely "the divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures", "the right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures", and, echoing the cardinal tenet of the Protestant Reformation, "the justification of the sinner by faith alone". As Bickersteth explained regarding the first of these precepts, "We need, in this day especially, to confess this truth with one voice against the Infidel on the one hand, and against the Romanist on the other". Furthermore, concerning individual discernment in interpreting the Bible, he argued that because "the Papacy has, by a recent encyclical letter, afresh excluded the Scriptures as injurious to the laity in general", their availability to all Christians was a particularly current issue.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE AND SPAIN

The anti-Catholic strain remained a distinct *Leitmotiv* in the mentality of the Alliance's leadership for a century. Perhaps more than anything else, the organisation's endeavours in the area of religious freedom, aimed primarily at securing toleration for small Protestant minorities in predominantly Roman Catholic countries, gave this refrain its staying power. Spain, which from a British Evangelical perspective had long been the path, the thorns, and the stony ground all in one for the sowing of the Gospel, remained a focal point of the Alliance's international attention. After political liberalism gained a foothold there during the 1860s the nation's minute Protestant presence grew noticeably, and Spanish and Anglophone members of some of the resulting embryonic churches established a committee which served as a liaison with the headquarters in London. In 1913 a full fledged

6 E Bickersteth, *A Brief Practical View of the Evangelical Alliance; in Regard to Its Character, Principles, Objects, Organization and Christian Spirit* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1846), pp 13-15.

affiliate of the World's Evangelical Alliance, the *Alianza Evangélica Española*, was established in Spain, in large measure as a means of defence against the ongoing perceived threat of a reassertion of religious intolerance under the traditional national Roman Catholic aegis.<sup>7</sup>

In the United Kingdom, leaders of the World's Evangelical Alliance watched with alternating hope and apprehensiveness the course of religious freedom in Spain and reported both signs of progress and incidents which suggested that relatively little had been achieved there. On the positive side of the organisation's ledger, the first national congress of Evangelicals in Spain was held in Madrid in 1919. Six years later two of the Alliance's British leaders toured that country and found thriving Protestant churches in Barcelona, Madrid, and other cities. The proliferation of Evangelical schools seemed particularly encouraging. After returning to England, J Chalmers Lyon reported with no mean national condescension that "the Spanish people are becoming aware of their backwardness, and the desire for education in very real. The Protestant schools are mostly so crowded that they cannot take more children". Increasing literacy heartened this visitor, who saw in the printed word one key to unlocking the door to full religious liberty. "The people are beginning to read much more than formerly", declared Lyon. "I saw many tracts and gospels distributed in Madrid. Only once did I see one refused". In terms reminiscent of Kipling's clarion call to take up the "white man's burden" to propagate Western civilisation globally, this Englishman challenged his compatriots to assist their fellow Christians in Catholic lands: "We have found a freedom which neither Italy nor Spain has ever known", he concluded. "We shook off the Papal chains at the Reformation..."<sup>8</sup>

This refrain of anti-Catholicism still reverberated not only among British Evangelicals but also in the words of their Iberian counterparts early in the twentieth century. "From a land that is spiritually a desert, the Spanish Protestant Churches of every denomination beg their English brethren to resist at all costs the introduction into their National Church of doctrines and practices that have proved fatal here", wrote the presiding officers of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance and five affiliated denominations to the organisation's headquarters in London in 1925. "Millions of people in all priest-ridden countries have seen in you that Christianity is in itself good, and that Roman Catholicism is simply a deviation from it".<sup>9</sup> When Fernando Cabrera, long the head of the branch in Spain, addressed delegates to the festivities concluding the eightieth anniversary of the World's

7 "Address by Rev Fernando Cabrera (Spain)", *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1927, p 115.

8 "Deputation to Spain and Portugal", *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1925, p 123.

9 Untitled letter from the Presidents of the Spanish Reformed Church, the Spanish Evangelical Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Spanish Assemblies,

Evangelical Alliance in June 1927, he could report ample proof that Protestantism had gained a foothold on the religious landscape of his country. Among other institutions, Cabrera cited the existence of 250 chapels, schools, and mission stations, as well as an interdenominational theological seminary, two hospitals, a weekly newspaper, four monthly periodicals, six branches of the Young Men's Christian Association, and thirteen Christian Endeavour societies. Yet he also cautioned that "the work in Spain is a difficult work" and insisted that "we have no real liberty of worship at present, and the power of Roman clericalism is strong".<sup>10</sup> Feedback of this sort from Spanish Protestants as well as personal observations made against the background of a general awareness of the pervasive influence the despised Roman Catholic Church had exercised in Spain for many centuries confirmed the perception of the Alliance's leadership in England that the general viability of the toleration Spanish Protestants had achieved by the 1920s was precarious at best.

#### 4. HENRY MARTYN GOOCH

No voice in the British headquarters of the Alliance was more prominent during the 1930s than that of Henry Martyn Gooch, who served as its General Secretary for more than four decades. His pedigree placed him squarely into the interdenominational Protestant milieu of Victorian England which had spawned the organisation. Born in East Anglia of Puritan stock, his father, William Fuller Gooch, had become a Wesleyan Methodist as a teenager during the late 1850s and served that denomination as a lay preacher but was married in a Congregational chapel. At age twenty-six, he joined a Baptist church and eventually was ordained to the ministry in that communion. His youngest son, Henry Martyn, named after an Evangelical Anglican missionary to India, was born in 1874.<sup>11</sup> This younger Gooch became General Secretary of the Alliance, on whose Executive Council his father served, in 1904 at the relatively young age of thirty. John Wood, who then edited its periodical, assured readers that the new man at the helm already "has had as wide experience at that age as a man could have".<sup>12</sup>

and the Spanish Evangelical Alliance, dated 10 March 1925, *Evangelical Christendom*, March-April 1925, p 61.

10 "Address by Rev Fernando Cabrera (Spain)", p 116.

11 Henry Martyn Gooch, *William Fuller Gooch. A Tribute and a Testimony* (London: The World's Evangelical Alliance, 1929), pp 1-2, 19-20, 26. Unfortunately, the chronology in this filial biography is unreliable.

12 John Wood, "Editorial Notes", *The Evangelical Alliance Quarterly* no 22 (1 October 1904), p 454.

Gooch travelled extensively on behalf of the Alliance, especially in Europe both before and after the First World War. He and several of his colleagues in the organisation's leadership gave high priority to publicising the plight of the Protestant minorities in Spain and other Roman Catholic countries as well as in the Soviet Union. Gooch participated, for example, in the previously mentioned tour of affiliated Spanish churches in 1925. While editing *Evangelical Christendom*, the bimonthly organ of the Alliance, he wrote with confidence and at times in considerable detail about religious persecution in these distinctly un-Protestant lands. Gooch also dipped his pen deeply into the organisation's traditional well of anti-Catholicism.

The hearty response which Gooch and the Alliance gave the proclamation of the Spanish Republic in April 1931 and the liberal constitution which its parliament, the Cortes, approved before the end of that year was a natural consequence of these activities and attitudes. The separation of church and state, demotion of the Roman Catholic Church from its position of privilege to a status of legal equality with other religious bodies, and the removal of Catholic orders' privileges all harmonised with the Evangelical vision of religious freedom in the modern world. During the final months of the reign of Alfonso XIII in 1931, Gooch sensed imminent victory for the democratic political forces in Spain and also perceived the emergence of genuine spiritual liberty as opposed to tenuous toleration of Spanish nonconformist churches. "The Bible is circulating with more freedom and the close alliance between the Roman Catholic Church and the Dictatorship has weakened the authority of the Church in a land that looks back on the Dictatorship with feelings of hostility", he reported with unveiled glee in a leading article. "The Evangelicals of Spain live no longer with the threat of extermination hanging over them".<sup>13</sup>

The advent of the Republic a few months later prompted Fernando Cabrera, the President of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance who had earlier repeatedly bemoaned the plight of his fellow Protestants in Spain, to rejoice in like manner. Writing in *Evangelical Christendom*, this seasoned ecclesiastical leader noted that while they had hitherto been despised by their Catholic compatriots as "citizens of the lower class", they could now stand tall as fully fledged members of their society. Gone were the days, he believed, when Spaniards who accepted Protestant doctrines refused to convert publicly "because they were afraid of the opinion of their families, the mockery of friends, the losses in business, etc."<sup>14</sup>

13 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, January-February 1931, p 34.

14 Fernando Cabrera, "The Dawn of a New Spain", *Evangelical Christendom*, May-June 1931, p 101.

It is difficult to ascertain whether Gooch and his colleagues in the United Kingdom were fully committed to a policy of universal religious freedom. From his editorial chair, he reported with obvious concern late in 1931 that Communist candidates had been elected to the Cortes of the Republic and believed "there is a growing danger from this influence" as it could factionalise the neophyte government. Gooch wrote without the slightest hint of sorrow that the government in Madrid had disestablished the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently decreed "the expulsion of the Jesuits, the nationalisation of their property, and the termination of the budget for the [Roman Catholic] clergy within two years". He appears to have been troubled that "religious processions and demonstrations are forbidden" but thought "there is likely to be some exception in regard to certain festivals...". In any case, quite absent from Gooch's commentary at that stage is any indication that he believed that Roman Catholics' religious freedom, including that of the Society of Jesus, should be guaranteed, or any fear that such a measure as the banning of the Jesuits could set a precedent of intolerance that could work to the detriment of Spanish Protestants. The dawning of "a day of Evangelical opportunity" in Spain apparently blinded Gooch to any such eventuality.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, the following year Gooch told an audience in Cambridge that the Roman Catholic Church, notwithstanding the complaints of some of its members to the contrary, was not suffering persecution in Spain and that that country had not become "a second Russia". He ascribed lamentations to the fact that after several centuries of not only religious but also cultural and social domination, the erstwhile Catholic establishment had lost much of its status in Spain and that in its new situation of legal equality with other denominations it merely felt relatively persecuted. In fact, Gooch contended, Roman Catholicism continued to enjoy a privileged position there. He adduced as evidence the fact that Spanish governmental officials had recently attended the funeral Mass of the Bishop of Cadiz but declined invitations to attend the dedication of the new Evangelical Temple in Barcelona.<sup>16</sup> In November 1935, a few months before the Republic was challenged by Franco's insurgency, Gooch perceived a high degree of religious liberty in Spain and averred that "the heroic work of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance" deserved much of the credit for the progress made in this respect during the previous five years.<sup>17</sup>

15 "The Present Position in Spain", *Evangelical Christendom*, November-December 1931, p 234.

16 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, May-June 1932, p 104.

17 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, November-December 1935, p 237.

## 5. THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR IN SPAIN

The eruption of hostilities in 1936 created an acute crisis for Spanish Protestantism and caused considerable consternation at the headquarters of the World's Evangelical Alliance. Many Protestant ministers and lay people fled their homeland before the end of that year, some of them British missionaries who took refuge in the United Kingdom. No space had been devoted in *Evangelical Christendom* to the tribulations which Roman Catholic priests, monks, and nuns had suffered beginning a few months before Franco's uprising, but on behalf of the country's Protestant minority Gooch sounded an alarm. "As regards the political aspects of the crisis in Spain, the situation is full of anxiety", he warned in September 1936 as Franco's Nationalist troops advanced on Madrid. "If, as may be likely, the Government forces in Spain are defeated a situation full of danger to religious freedom may arise".<sup>18</sup>

Interpretations of the overall significance of the war peppered the British Christian press virtually from its outset and strongly influenced journalistic coverage of the conflict. Both politically and theologically these underlying explanations varied immensely. Generally speaking, Catholic commentators, with the exception of those of socialist bent, viewed the conflagration as primarily an assault on their church and "Christian civilisation", an attack from which General Franco was seeking to save not only Spain but, by extension, western Europe from atheistic communism. Far from being merely a civil war between socialist and arch-conservative Spaniards, it was thus the focal point of a much broader ideological and cultural struggle. Some Catholics carried this perspective to an eschatological extreme, arguing that it was a battle between Christ and Antichrist.

Such a commentator standing near one pole of the interpretive spectrum was Father Joseph Keating, a theologically conservative Jesuit who had served as editor his order's periodical *The Month* in London since 1912. He declared in August 1936 that "the issue is primarily moral and religious – whether a godless tyranny inspired by Marx is to prevail in the Peninsula or the Catholicism which is the guardian of civil and political rights as well as the rights of God".<sup>19</sup> Before the end of the year, this elderly editor was perceiving an unholy alliance of natural and supernatural powers on the attack in a spiritual war: "Antichrist is abroad in Spain – bent on destroying religion by wrecking churches, murdering priests, banning the worship of

18 "Headquarters Notes", *Evangelical Christendom*, September-October 1936, pp 166-167.

19 "Civil War in Spain", *The Month*, CLXVIII no 866 (August 1936), p 106.

God – and Soviet Russia and Socialist France, by a thousand unofficial channels, are aiding and abetting him”.<sup>20</sup>

Near the opposite end of the spectrum, Ernest Harry Jeffs, a Congregationalist layman and advocate of political Liberalism who edited *The Christian World*, a weekly newspaper which served several Nonconformist denominations, saw in the Spanish Civil War a natural consequence of an oppressive, backward, and unjust society. “Political ideas probably form a very small part in the motives of the rebel leaders”, he wrote of Franco and his military cohort in July 1936. “They have revolted because they are Spanish generals, brought up in a bad old tradition of disloyalty and self-seeking”. Having earlier – like many other British Protestants – lauded the Spanish Republic and its constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, Jeffs lamented the “attempt to dignify the rising by calling it a patriotic Fascist movement against a Government moving dangerously towards Bolshevism”. He thought such a depiction was not only a caricature but also potentially dangerous to European security as it entailed the risk of drawing Stalin’s Soviet Union, Hitler’s Germany, and other countries openly into the Spanish struggle, thereby escalating it into another general European war.<sup>21</sup>

It must be emphasised that neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants in the United Kingdom perceived the Spanish Civil War from a single perspective, and neither camp spoke univocally about it. Among British Dominicans, for example, there was considerable scepticism about Franco, and a stance of cautious neutrality characterised commentary about the war in *Blackfriars*, the order’s monthly periodical. On the other hand, many Protestants, both Anglicans and Free Churchmen, agreed with Keating and other pro-Franco commentators that Christianity as such was threatened in Spain and formed an interdenominational front to aid in its defence, a matter to which we shall return shortly. Nevertheless, one can justifiably generalise that the positions represented by Jeffs and Keating were fairly representative of British Protestant and Roman Catholic reactions, respectively, to the war.

20 “Christians of the World, Unite!” *The Month*, CLXVIII no 870 (December 1936), p 481.

21 “Spain’s Ordeal”, *The Christian World*, LXXIX no 4139 (30 July 1936), p 8.

## 6. EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE OPINION OF THE WAR

As one might expect against the backdrop of its more than half-century of involvement in the campaign for religious freedom in Spain and its perception of the Roman Catholic Church there as an obdurate foe of the same, the leadership of the World's Evangelical Alliance rejected out of hand the contention that Franco and his Catholic forces were God's agents to oppose the Antichrist of the Republic. In this it received considerable impetus from Spain. Indicative of the prevailing Spanish Protestant interpretation of the war, the September-October 1936 issue of *Evangelical Christendom* carried a lengthy article by Juan Orts Gonzales, a Protestant minister in Barcelona, titled "The Civil War in Spain: Its Significance to Spanish Protestantism". Without adducing any evidence to substantiate his conjecture, this divine averred that "the Roman Catholic Church entered into a conspiracy of rebellion with the military leaders, because she hoped by this means to regain the supremacy which she enjoyed for centuries in Spain but lost when the Republic proclaimed religious freedom and the separation of Church and State". Gonzales also sought to kick the stilts out from beneath the theory that the Spanish government was inherently opposed to Christianity as such. Giving short shrift to the restrictions which had already been imposed on the public celebration of the Mass, he argued that "Evangelicals in Madrid and in many other places are conducting their services as usual". Gonzales conceded that large numbers of Catholic religious personnel had been killed by mob violence – murders which more than anything else in 1936 had convinced many of their co-religionists globally that demonic forces had been unleashed in Spain – but even their deaths failed to move this zealous defender of the socialist regime. Asking rhetorically whether "the Spanish common people have become more irreligious and more cruel during the five years of the Republic?", Gonzales answered his own question by placing the blame on the victims' own shoulders. Again failing to present the slightest proof to cover a provocative allegation, he insisted that "the Roman Catholic Church, her hierarchy, friars, priests and even nuns, forgetting their sacred mission as ministers of God, have become soldiers and fighters against the legal Government" and that "her cathedrals, churches and convents have – in many instances – been made strongholds of the rebels". Playing consciously on the emotional strings of his anti-Catholic readership, Gonzales asked: "Can my readers imagine a more hateful provocation to the proletarians than to see priests and friars with guns in their hands and to know that thousands of them are fighting to destroy the legal Government?" Far from being rejected as a

Satanic paroxysm of violence against Christianity, Gonzales concluded, the war, though undeniably bloody, should be seen as a kairotic moment in history which was revealing an enormous cleft between the disaffected masses and the Mass. The Roman Catholic monolith had been shattered. "Does not such an attitude [of disobedience and disillusionment] on the part of millions of Catholics constitute a providential opportunity for Protestants?" he asked. Probably revealing the importance which the leaders of the Evangelical Alliance placed on his views, Gonzales's essay was published without editorial comment on three pages of the journal.<sup>22</sup>

Before the end of 1936, *i.e.* within the first six months of the war, the progress which the Nationalist forces had made in their advance on Madrid forced Gooch and other officials of the Alliance to sing a less spirited tune about the possible outcome of the hostilities. The eventuality of the defeat of the Republic and the suppression of the Spanish Protestant churches began to loom large. Particularly the treatment meted out to Evangelical pastors and church buildings in territory which the Nationalists had wrested from Republican control prompted a new direction in wartime reportage. Basing his comments largely on the witness of Protestant refugees in Britain and elsewhere, Gooch described the state of the Spanish Evangelical churches in mixed terms. In Madrid, they continued to worship freely. In Castile, however, the situation seemed vastly "more gloomy", and religious persecution reminiscent of the darkest monarchical days had undeniably resumed: "The pastor in Valladolid is apparently imprisoned, and his colleague in Salamanca has been confined to gaol for some weeks on no definite charge, while the church buildings have been appropriated. An evangelist at Villaescusa has not been heard of since the beginning of the troubles". In Catalonia, though, which would remain under governmental control for two more years, there was still "considerable freedom" for Protestant worship. Gooch noted that a mob had torched a Protestant church believing it to be a Catholic edifice, but "when they discovered their mistake they helped to put out of the flames". He attached a comment about political neutrality which would soon become a *Leitmotiv* in the Alliance's wartime reporting on the precarious existence of Spanish Protestantism: "It is desirable to add that neither the evangelical churches of Spain nor the foreign organisations interested in their work have attempted at any time to take political sides in the present tragic conflict".<sup>23</sup> To the extent that Gooch's claim was ingenuous, it obviously did not apply

22 Juan Orts Gonzales, "The Civil War in Spain: Its Significance to Spanish Protestantism", *Evangelical Christendom*, September-October 1936, pp 181-183.

23 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, November-December 1936, pp 233-234.

to the lending of rhetorical support to the Republic or the expression of unveiled aversion to its Nationalist foes.

Anxiety over the plight of Protestants in areas which the Nationalists controlled continued to grow for the duration of the war. Speaking at Oxford in late 1937, one pastor named Fliedner whom the Evangelical Alliance supported admitted the difficulty of obtaining a comprehensive picture of conditions in those territories. According to reports which the headquarters of the Alliance had received, Plymouth Brethren missionaries from the United Kingdom and their congregations in Galicia were "scarcely molested"; he speculated that a reluctance to provoke British authorities may have held potential persecution in check. Elsewhere in Nationalist Spain, however, "we cannot doubt any longer that several Spanish pastors have been shot, other have been banished, and others put into prison as for instance the pastor of Salamanca, because 'he seemed to be half a socialist'". Fliedner added his own conspiracy theory to explain this anti-Protestant terror: "This has been no surprise for us, because the Protestants in Spain knew from the beginning that the rebellion was the work of the Jesuits, who will not tolerate religious liberty in their very own domains".<sup>24</sup> This calumny, it should be emphasised, did not become part of the World's Evangelical Alliance's rhetorical tradition about the war, however typical it may have been of Spanish Evangelical opinion, but for the duration of the conflict much of the attention in the organisation's London offices shifted from short-term joy over the triumph of religious liberty to deepening concern over the well-being and indeed the lives of Protestants in both Republican and Nationalist Spain.

The leadership of the Alliance in London repeatedly heeded the pleas of their counterparts in Madrid to aid them in their hour of distress. In one typical request, for example, the President of the Spanish Evangelical Alliance wrote from the Spanish capital in late 1937 that the city's Protestants needed "immediate help", especially those who for undisclosed reasons had not been able to flee and thus were "in constant danger and need". He suggested that assistance could be most expeditiously rendered "by sending provisions, such as condensed milk, sugar, chocolate, dried vegetables and other articles of nutritional value, all of which are extremely scarce in Madrid", and gave his assurance that a locally organised committee would ensure that "the distribution was just and fair". Another heart-rending letter from an unspecified man in an undisclosed Spanish city corroborated the need for aid. He and his then pregnant wife had been compelled to leave

24 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, November-December 1937, p 214.

their home temporarily because Nationalist forces had bombed their neighbourhood. Worse than the bombardment, however, this writer professed, was the nagging shortage of essential foodstuffs and the resulting threat of malnutrition: "For months we have had no meat, potatoes, beans, nor [*sic*] sugar. We can only obtain oranges, rice and bread, but never in sufficient quantities. Although we have a medical certificate ordering milk for my wife and baby, we cannot obtain any". The Alliance's leadership in the British capital responded to these and similar pleas by publishing appeals in *Evangelical Christendom* and other Christian and secular newspapers. Readers were implored to contribute to its Spanish Protestant Relief Fund.<sup>25</sup>

The response to this plea appears to have been fairly generous, not least considering the high rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom at that time. By early April 1938 four "large consignments of food" had been sent to Spain. The headquarters of the Alliance in London bore all the costs of administering the fund, readers of *The Times* were assured, so "every pound or shilling contributed will be spent on food".<sup>26</sup> On 20 July 1938 Gooch reported that a seventh consignment of food had recently been sent to Protestant churches in Barcelona, Valencia, and Madrid. Indicative of the geographical and denominational scope of the Alliance's plea for help, two-thirds of the donations used to purchase these provisions had come from Scotland and been donated through the World's Sunday School Association. Other donors had used the Methodist Missionary Society as their conduit, and employees of a firm in Belfast had given approximately 4 per cent of the funds for one of the consignments.<sup>27</sup> At no time, however, did Gooch and his colleagues suggest or imply that a few lorries laden with food could solve the nutritional shortage amongst Spanish Protestants. In May 1938 readers of *Evangelical Christendom* were informed that far from being "relieved", the crisis in Spain had worsened, particularly "in Government-controlled areas, as the number of refugees to these parts has of recent months increased, and the food situation is the more difficult".<sup>28</sup> Two months later Gooch wrote that many Spaniards had been compelled by a lack of meat to become *de facto* vegetarians; in Madrid and Barcelona "most people live on beans, garbanzos and rice". He also conveyed a report about one family that had to survive on cooked grass as its staple food. Others had been forced to slaughter a variety

25 "Help for Spanish Protestants", *Evangelical Christendom*, September-October 1937, p 169.

26 "Spanish Relief", *The Times*, 9 April 1938, p 8.

27 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1938, p 139.

28 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, May-June 1938, p 93.

of animals to fulfil their need for protein: "In some districts, cows, horses, donkeys, cats and dogs have been killed and eaten".<sup>29</sup> Most of these and related accounts were not accompanied by criticism of the Nationalists' tactics or other political commentary. Their emphasis was simply on meeting the immediate physical needs of Spanish Protestants.

Nevertheless, explicit hostility to Franco remained strong in the World's Evangelical Alliance and may have intensified as the war drew to a close in late 1938 and early 1939 with a Nationalist victory becoming more likely with each passing month. The formation in the United Kingdom of the United Christian Front in July 1938 especially irked Gooch. Under the leadership of the prominent Methodist layman Sir Henry Lunn and other ecumenically inclined Britons representing many points of the denominational compass, this body's pro-Franco stance won for it the approval of the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Arthur Hinsley. To Gooch, however, there was little Christian about this organisation apart from the fact that its members were Christians. He explained to readers of *Evangelical Christendom* that this "unworthy movement" was "directed to the interests of General Franco and the Insurgents in Spain" and would only prolong wartime suffering there. Gooch used the opportunity to disclose that "high illuminated literature attempting to espouse the cause of General Franco by statements concerning the Government forces, which if not untrue are misleading" had reached him. In practically the same breath, the General Secretary renewed his anti-Catholic diatribe by returning to the argument that had been put forth in *Evangelical Christendom* two years earlier regarding mass killings of Roman Catholic religious personnel. "Let one thing be understood", Gooch lectured, "the hatred of the common people of Spain is not for the minister of God or the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is for the political clerical". With the final collapse of the greatly diminished Republic only a few months away, he did not mince words in stressing the necessity of keeping in mind the interests of its citizens under "clerical fascist influences which seek to restore the union of Church and State and the supremacy of the Roman Catholic religion against any other". Gooch challenged as simplistic the cardinal tenet of pro-Franco rhetoric in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, not least in the British Roman Catholic press, that the vast majority of the Spanish populace and nearly all of the priests in Spain were united in the Nationalist cause. He asserted without adducing evidence of any kind that "thousands of the lower clergy and more of the common people side with the Government against the political

29 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1938, p 139.

influence and interference in Spain of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church".<sup>30</sup>

## 7. THE POST-WAR SITUATION

After the capitulation of the Republic, Franco's re-establishment of Catholicism as the official religion of the country confirmed the fears of Gooch and like-minded British Protestants. In mid-July 1939 the General Secretary published with alarm a report from a colleague in Spain who insisted that "fanaticism is rife and many Christians are being thrown into prisons. In Madrid and Seville the Evangelical churches were said to be functioning without harassment. In Barcelona, however, placards announced that Spain was to be "Una Grande y solamente Catolica".<sup>31</sup>

The leaders of the World's Evangelical Alliance not only felt deeply concerned about the rapid erosion of religious liberty but also betrayed by the Franco regime. In November 1937 Franco's representative in England, the Duke of Alba, had categorically promised Lord Phillimore, a retired British admiral who sympathised with the campaign against the Republic, in writing that "complete toleration now exists in National Spain for all Christian communions, and that complete toleration will continue to be the policy and practice of the National Spanish Government after the war". The Duke declared that he was making this undertaking "on the authority of General Franco himself".<sup>32</sup> To no avail, Gooch and other British Protestants reminded their readers that this promise had been violated but expressed little surprise that the *Caudillo* had not kept his word. To them, it all seemed of a piece with centuries-old Spanish Roman Catholic authoritarianism.

After the German invasion of Poland beginning on 1 September 1939, British public attention was riveted on the hostilities there and elsewhere in Europe as the threat of a Nazi attack on the United Kingdom caused increasing anxiety. Neutral Spain largely vanished from the public consciousness, but from time to time protests emanated from the Alliance's headquarters about the imposition of ecclesiastical uniformity in Franco's regime. In one typical protest, Gooch wrote to *The Times* in January 1940 that the promise given to Phillimore was "far from fulfilment" and adduced

30 "Continental Evangelical Life and Work", *Evangelical Christendom*, November-December 1938, p 205.

31 "Religious Conditions in Spain", *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1939, pp 152-153.

32 "Religious Toleration under Franco", *The Times*, 19 November 1937, p 12.

33 "The Churches in Spain", *The Times*, 23 January 1940, p 4.

rudimentary statistics to demonstrate that it hardly applied to the churches with which he was in contact. "In 147 centres of evangelical work recently made the subject of inquiry, religious liberty of any kind was withheld in 109 centres, the work being entirely closed down", he reported with undisguised alarm, "while of the remaining 38 centres 33 were under some measure of toleration, and five were doubtful". The closure of all the Protestant schools, "notwithstanding their fine record before the Spanish war in helping education in Spain", especially distressed the General Secretary.<sup>33</sup>

Such gloom at the headquarters of the World's Evangelical Alliance stood in marked contrast to the elation in British Roman Catholic circles. In one illustrative example, Professor Mina J Moore of the National University of Wales, writing at almost the same time in *The Dublin Review* in 1940, expressed great relief in Franco's rapid restoration of Catholicism and the permeation of its authority in various areas of life. She did not mention the concomitant suppression of the other denominations, a fact similarly overlooked or passed over in silence by many other Catholic commentators in the United Kingdom. Moore particularly lauded the new rôle of the Roman Catholic Church in both primary and secondary education as a means of ensuring that all Spanish youth received some grounding in religion, classical antiquity, Spanish literature and history, and other subjects. The closing of the several dozen Protestant schools apparently did not figure in her reckoning.<sup>34</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSION

Considered in the general context of British Christian and secular responses to the Spanish Civil War, that of the World's Evangelical Alliance was remarkably narrowly gauged. Nearly all of it rotated around the pivotal issue of the prospective loss of religious freedom in Spain. One will search the columns of *Evangelical Christendom* and other writings of Henry Martyn Gooch and his colleagues for any mention of such issues to which many of their compatriots devoted a great deal of time and journalistic space, such as the corporate state which Franco planned to implement partly on the model of Mussolini's Italy, the destruction in 1937 of the Basque city of Guernica, which allegedly was of very little or no military significance, by Nationalist and/or German bombing, the ethics of aerial bombardment in general, Basque and Catalan separatist movements, and the perennial

34 Mina J Moore, "For God and Spain", *The Dublin Review*, CCVI no 413 (April, May, June 1940), pp 261-280.

question of maintaining the British policy of neutrality *vis-à-vis* the war in Spain. The absence of these matters from the Alliance's published discourse about the conflict is conspicuous.

No less apparent or revealing of the mentality of the Alliance's leadership is the consistency of certain attitudes which emerged in 1936 and were still obvious three years later. Gooch in particular denied throughout the war that there had been a wholesale slaughter of Catholic religious personnel in 1936. Furthermore, he probably projected his own attitude and that of his associates to the British populace in general by perennially maintaining that most people in the United Kingdom sympathised with Republican Spain and rejected Franco. Such an assertion is simply not empirically demonstrable. Finally, the confidence of the Alliance in the leadership of the Republic remained unshaken. Undoubtedly owing in large measure to the position which bitterly anti-Catholic Spanish Protestant leaders had taken and were propounding in Britain, Gooch and his colleagues never appeared to understand that the government in Madrid encompassed some socialists who were hostile to Christianity, a demonstrable fact which, for example, the British Catholic press was quick to point out in support of its overarching claim that Franco and his *Falange* and allied forces were saving Spain from atheistic communism. In the end, the leadership of the World's Evangelical Alliance, no less than conservative, pro-Franco Catholic counterparts such as Joseph Keating, interpreted the Spanish Civil War in terms of its expected outcome for the particular forms of Christianity which they espoused and failed to grasp the complexities and moral ambiguities of that brutal conflict.