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"To resign oneself to injustice without protesting against it and without fighting it is not worthy of a man or of a Christian."
(Card. Saliege)

It is now a long time since a document signed by Basques priests has been produced. Before the facts and events that demand a frank and open attitude on the part of those of us who feel ourselves obliged to proclaim the postulates of truth, justice and the freedom and dignity of man, our silence could be badly interpreted and attributed to our lack of responsible conscience. We do not wish to be accused of complicity with these events because of our silence before them.

We respond to an order from our conscience and in this document we refer to the abyss which day after day opens wider between ourselves and the souls whose care has been entrusted to us.

Because the accusations directed against us are many and vehement, they constitute a true clamour. Those which reach our ears contain a varied spectre of disappointment and of mixed reactions that truly reflect the hostile atmosphere around us and are a worrying sign in the spiritual horizon of our country.

We hope that our testimony, that of the priests who daily live in close contact with the people, will not be cast aside. It would be a grave error to underestimate the gravity of the situation which could affect the future of the Church in our country for many generations.

To undermine the importance of the present situation and to consider it as a passing current which the Church can ignore, is to expose our faithful to grave consequences and risks.

Our purpose is to make a rigorous examination of conscience; a sober, objective and dispassionate search into the evils that surround us; to publicly recognise them because they affect the Christian way of life of our people and also to put to service all our efforts in making the necessary rectification.

The Basque priests who have signed this document have chosen this path after deep and sober thought, assuming full responsibility for this writing which only engages our persons.

We found our analysis on the well-known doctrine of the Church concerning the natural rights of man and countries. It is not necessary to quote here the innumerable texts and documents written by our ecclesiastical hierarchy expounding and developing this doctrine. Having recently been published and because it applies to a social condition in some way analogous to that of our country, we shall only quote the following lines from the collective letter written by the Bishops of the Dominican Republic. The Prelates of that country declared:-

"The root and foundation of all rights is to be found in the inviolate dignity of the human being. Every man, even before he is born, carries with him a set of rights anterior and superior to those of any State. They are intangible rights that not even the sum of human powers can impede in their free practice, nor diminish or restrict their sphere of activity."

And from this inviolate dignity of the human person spring all the natural rights of man and countries. These are the right to life, the right to found a home, the right to work and to emigrate. Such also are the rights to freedom of conscience, of the press, of association etc.

Freedom is one of the most sacrosanct and inviolable rights that the State should recognise and respect.

Inviolability of conscience must necessarily exist if we maintain the integrity of the Christian concept, and this we publicly proclaim. We affirm that it is not legitimate to rule the human conscience be it by entering into its secrets through violence or loading it with foreign elements by methods divorced from all rational procedure; it is not legitimate to torture, to drug or brain-wash, nor to subject public opinion to the pressure of a super-propaganda founded on psychological techniques which deny respect to the fundamental dignity of the human person.

In order to exercise this freedom and to form an opinion it is indispensable to have the previous knowledge of all the facts. This is moral law. Hence the right of man to truth. A partisan limiting of the broadcasting of truth or its falsification is a true and sacrilegious mutilation. Hence the affirmations of Pious XII with respect to public opinion:

"Public opinion is, in effect, the heritage of any normal society made up of men who are conscious of their personal and social conduct, and who are intimately joined to the community of which they form part. After all, public opinion is everywhere the echo in mind and soul of the occurrences and of the present situation..." "To drown (the voice) of the citizens, to reduce it to forcible silence acts, in the eyes of every Christian, against the natural right of man and is a violation against the order of the world established by God..." "We believe that this Catholic concept of public opinion, its function and the services lent to it by the press, is absolutely just and necessary in order to pursue our ideals and show the path of truth, justice and peace."

(Pious XII to the Newspapermen 18/2/50)

And while we defend freedom as the sacrosanct right of every man we also defend the right of every country, every ethnical group, every physical or moral personality to freedom and self-determination within the lines established by natural law and positive divine right.

Remind yourselves briefly, as we have done, of the foundations on which our attitude is based, and we shall then pass on to the analysis of the existing situation.

We sincerely believe that the individual, the classes and even the peoples who comprise the Spanish political community do not enjoy sufficient liberty.

It suffices to open one's eyes to see that this is a sad reality. We see then that persons have been arrested because their temporal activities do not agree with the one-way political thinking imposed by the State. Arrests are made for public and even private voicing of political opinions against the Government, even in matters where differing opinions are valid. Since the normal means for expressing the truth are missing, what is no more than the exercise of a right is turned into a crime; that is why persons have been arrested for having distributed non-authorized leaflets, in which nothing false or unjust was said, but on the contrary, the things the very Government should say or allow to be said. The Law therefore, which is infringed by these people is an unjust law and this is where the problem stems from.

During the 24 years of the present regime's existence, these people have been jailed "sine die" for months or for years, and then, after a delay which is left to the judgement of a Governor, a Director of Security or a Minister, they are brought before a court where they are most gravely accused of "Rebellion against the State" only because they had the courage to believe that those who govern them are neither impeccable or infallible. Once they are jailed, their relatives live in fear, ignorant as to where they are and not knowing when they will be tried. This has reached such extremes that many are frightened even to visit the prisoners for fear that they too will fall under suspicion. High personalities and authorities of moral order consider it as asking for too much to beg them to take the necessary steps in defence of those jailed. The guarantees for an impartial trial are thus seen so reduced that it is imperative to take all possible steps to impede the whim or the servility of a judge from committing a grave injustice. The "Fuero de los Espanoles" is a document without life and its display before the world is a reflection of the insincerity of the Spanish climate. The truth is that all official elements, all the posts that carry responsibility and civic influence, from the Ministerial portfolio to the Mayorship of a town, from the Chairmanship of any University to the Head of any business concern, are granted by a sole and unappealable will. Under this climate it is impossible to avoid servility.

Even the criminal is not deprived of rights for being a criminal. He is guaranteed a trial where he can even lose his right to life but not before a juridical sentence is passed in accordance with the demands of natural right. It is imperative that this sentence should comply with certain guarantees, that is to say "juridical security", without which the aspired aim cannot be reached or in the words of Pious XII: "a concrete sphere of law protected against all arbitrary attack". This implies, among other things: "clear juridical norms that cannot be defaced".

And nevertheless we can affirm that in Spain the Executive power interferes with juridical life, orientating, leading and dictating to it according to the political norms of the Chief of State.

In police stations of our country torture is used as a means of exploring and investigating the transgression of a law which is often intransigent and many a time unjust. A malevolent suspicion is enough to allow the police of the civil guard on duty to flog irresponsibly, to torture and wound any citizen who is often innocent of the crime attributed to him. We do not speak of isolated incidents. Seeing that the authorities are aware of these facts and tolerate them, it is in fact the system. A system evidently in discord with the elements of law. We do not wish to hear generalities about the use of such methods throughout Europe or in Algeria. Historical unanimity on the use of such methods would still not justify them because they are totally immoral. Man can never lose his right of inviolability of conscience. This right belongs to the soul and the soul belongs to God.

No one can deny that the facts we have detailed, without including them all, are true to Spain, and we have documents as well as concrete proof of this. These are the facts that have not only moved the country but also the Western world. Foreign legations either of members of the diplomatic corps or delegations of political parties have visited Spain assisting at trials, visiting jails and opening enquiries, in short, to try to inform and restrain by their presence, the attitude and the injustices of the Spanish State against the human person.

It is a moral norm that if a man is to be responsible for his actions he needs not only freedom of action but also the previous knowledge of the facts he is called upon to judge. Any coercion, either physical or moral, is against personal freedom and renders unnatural any human action. Brain-washing, super-propaganda, the unilateral diffusion of facts also prevents his previous knowledge which is a fundamental condition by which man can accept responsibility for his actions.

In Spain, the State is "totalitarian and at the service of the integrity of the country". The country is the "supreme reality" and the Head of State, therefore, holds every faculty in his hands. He is the incarnation of the State and of the National will. Copying religious dogma, this establishes the infallibility of the Head with all the consequences this implies.

We can say that this programme, established by the regime from the very beginning, is carried out in all its breadth. Neither the lengthy speeches that today affirm the contrary, nor the articles directed towards public opinion, can deny the blatant facts about the institutional life in Spain today. The super-propaganda, the control of the press, radio and any other media used for diffusing ideas and the almost idolatrous cult of the Head of State are a reality. That explains why a delegate of Press and Propaganda can correct the professors of Economics, Sociology or Pedagogy as if the whole of Spain were a secondary school. And that a Minister of a Catholic State should publicly dare to argue with a member of the Catholic Hierarchy in his role of teacher of morals, and that the Church should be denied to spread its teaching unless it is done in strictly chosen publications.

"Public opinion is necessary to show man the path of truth, justice and peace". "It is a fact that the press is one of the main factors which contributes to the forming of public opinion". (Pious XII)

In Spain the authorities have shaken the very roots of public opinion, by means of controlling and interfering with all the means of expressing public feeling and suppressing, through the Military tribunals, all attempts at political manifestations that do not follow the political line of thought exclusively imposed on Spaniards. If there is no law which guarantees the press its function and if it remains wholly subject to a strict control and censure which depends solely on the interests of the State, then it is humanly impossible for it to accomplish its mission as it should.

The Spanish press, because it inverts the order established by God is an instrument used for deforming public opinion. It does not give the individual the capacity to rule public affairs; it does not capacitate him to soberly judge the conduct of the economic or social powers of the State. It does not go against unilateral nor does it allow the forming of ideologies compatible with natural and divine law. It arbitrarily reduces the right to express one's opinion and

does not allow the citizens public control in the function of public affairs. Instead of founding and spreading it, they cold-bloodedly drown any spontaneity of public opinion, reducing it to a blind and docile conformism with ideas and judgements.

What we have said of the press, and this we affirm, can also be said of the radio.

All this seems absurd but we assure and can guarantee that it is absolutely true.

And what can we say of freedom of association in both its political and social aspects?

When a country lives under civic freedom, there exist bodies that protect this freedom. Parliament, political parties and the labour unions act against possible abuses and misuses, and control the exercise of public power. We must recognise that man's acts are fallible, but the free play of civic rights is a factor which contributes to public honesty. Spain lacks this effective instrument. It seems absurd but there do not exist in Spain either a true Parliament, or political freedom, or labour freedom. The one party, the one Syndicate and the directed Parliament are the basic structure of the Spanish State. The Spanish Syndicate, as Mons. Pildain very well described it, "is neither a syndicate, nor is it Christian. It is the work of the State and defends the interests of the State whom it represents very efficiently. Under these conditions what guarantee can the collective meetings on Labour offer? What guarantee can the Syndicate offer in the defence of the workers' interests before their just and natural claims?

A true labour syndicalism, that is to say a free syndicalism, which would stem from the working classes and enjoy their trust, is not only a right which helps the working classes, but also, in our times, a more efficient and adequate means by which they exercise their responsibility in the economic and social life of the country. It brings with it duties as well as privileges. The present economic crisis with the consequent serious incidents that can follow, only strengthens the urgency for such a labour syndicalism. We fail to see how the workers of our country will be made to see the necessity for certain measures of austerity, and even less that they agree to them, if this right and this means is denied to them. We also fail to see how these reactions can be channelled in the case where they would feel unjustly abused.

And we can say the same for political freedom. Without political freedom there can be no participating in public administration nor the attainment, in a general way, to public posts. What guarantee can be offered for the defence of common property or for the respect of the human being by an administration that defies the Head of State and treats the individual merely as an instrument of the State.

We cannot refrain from speaking, in a more particular way, of our own country, the Basque country, to which we belong and where we exercise our apostolate. We, the Basque priests, love our country with the same right and with the same pious, natural and Christian obligation with which the Castilian priest loves Castilla and the Bishop of Uganda loves the human family which God deemed him to form part of. We Basque priests feel that to hold an opinion and to express a feeling over the temporal matters of our country is within our attributes. It is the same opinion and feeling that all the priests of the world allow themselves regarding their respective countries. Moreover, we believe that it is a biological duty and necessity. We the Basque priests know that our consecration to God has imposed upon us, among other things, the renunciation to temporal matters. But we are the Church and as part of the teaching church we uphold the right, which is also our obligation, to denounce any attempts made against the natural rights of our country committed either in error or bad will.

That is why, before Spain and the whole world, we denounce the policy of neglect and oblivion, when not of physical persecution, ruling in Spain today and which attacks the ethnical, linguistic and social characteristics given by God to the Basques. And this is done to the interest of no one and to the evident prejudice of our highest interests, spiritual interests.

If the stones of a National monument are preserved because of their architectural beauty and because of the reflection they bear of the period in which they were sculptured, EUZKERA, THE BASQUE LANGUAGE, A NECESSARY INSTRUMENT FOR THE EVANGELISING AND THE CULTURE OF THE BASQUE PEOPLE, has a right before the Church and before our civilization, the right to live and to be cultivated. The ignorance of this right would denounce within the Church an absurd and blatant contradiction, and within society a reactionary and anti-human policy reaching genocide.

This is the situation in Spain today. There is no historic or social reason that can justify such a crime.

We have exposed here, Your Excellency, in our humble opinion, one of the fundamental causes for the abyss which day after day widens between ourselves and the souls whose care has been entrusted to us. It is no other than the existing contradiction between the Christian doctrine on the Human Being and its lack of fulfilment by a regime that officially calls itself Catholic and to whom the Spanish Catholic Hierarchy lends its decided support.

We have tried to make our study of the real situation in Spain sober, objective and dispassionate.

We trust that Your Excellency will understand our bitterness and the deep worry that has moved us to take this step.

It is very painful for us as priests to give testimony of these facts but our sacerdotal mission does not allow us to remain silent.

No doctrine or wish is repeated more in Christian doctrine than the thought and the yearning for peace. In the great prophetic writings the future kingdom of God is shown to us as "a kingdom of peace, a work of justice." In a highly lyrical fragment the world under the rule of the Messiah to come will be so pacified that the beasts will be at peace with man "The infant will put his hand into the hollows of the rocks and the aspid will not bite him" (Is.II)

True Christianity is impregnated with the sentiment and the wish for peace.

This is what we aspire to and our greatest wish is the pacification of all souls. The pacification of souls through truth and Charity. Our country needs this and wants it.

Your Excellency, we beg you by God's charity Who wants us all to be a part of Him, that as Father, Shepherd and Principle of this our country, to find occasions and means in searching for an efficient but gentle formula to restore to our country the peace it has lost. Even when no more could be gained we would have the greatest gift that any country can yearn for because it is the fount of all good. We reverently kiss your Pastoral ring.