

FAUSTINO PÉREZ
VISION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT
BEFORE 1936 THROUGH THE LETTERS.

We (the young Claretians) were aware of what was happening politically in Spain. Our letters attest to the fact that we knew what was happening in Spain as any other informed citizen could be.

During the Republic, we followed our long tradition in the Congregation of not interfering in politics; our regulations and constitutions forbade us to do so. However, this constitutional requirement did not prohibit us to have a proper political and social awareness of the time we lived in and act accordingly pastorally. Our decision to confront the social, moral, and religious situation of the Church and the country apostolically was firm and despite the political difficulties at the time, we did give up our absolute will to vocational fidelity.

Things got complicated quickly with the Republic (1931-1936) given that the anti-Church policy was raised with great violence in the Parliament of Madrid. The aim was to end the traditions, rights, and privileges of the Church and religious orders, especially those dedicated to teaching.

J. Agustín Viela, like other colleagues, followed the country's political events very attentively, and as a reasonable observer, he was worried about the legislations promulgated against the Church. He wrote to his mother in a letter (Solsona, 29-9-1931): "Around here, we are calm but somewhat fearful because of what will happen soon. I am referring to the vote in parliament on article 24, that is to say, the one concerning religious orders...".

But he reassured his mother thus: "It seems that you are a little agitated by the question of article 24... be calm, for now, it does not affect us as Sons of the Heart of Mary. I want to tell you that the laws do not say anything for now about our Congregation."

Agustin also mentioned to his mother his concern about economic issues (Solsona 29-12-1931): "...we see ourselves in a certain want; although it is not drastic for now, if it continues for a long time, perhaps some colleges would have to be closed, especially that of the postulants with the dire consequences that would follow."

We were informed of the volatile political situation in the streets. We tried to understand the social problems such as immigration, unemployment, the poor living in

the countryside, the abandonment of the workers in the city, the sufferings, and injustices, but what we could not accept was the hatred towards religion, the aggression against the clergy and the burning of Churches.

Joan Baixeras writes thus to his brother Ramón, a Claretian resident in Catania, Sicily (Cervera, July 1935): "All is [not] well in Spain! Catholics are persecuted; the data are uncertain, but it is said that a town with 30 Churches has been reduced to having only 12; the remaining ones were burned; a nunnery was stormed, they were maltreated, murders... I do not want to tell you more because it is embarrassing to narrate this of such a Catholic country, at least, given its fame."

P. Juan Díaz Nosti in a letter to his friend, the Claretian Francisco Velasco, explained to him that the situation in Spain was going from bad to worse because of the fanaticism of the violent and the cowardice of many (Aranda de Duero, 20-5-1931): "A few days ago, your good parents were here, and we talked at length about you and your brother Ricardo and about the situation of Spain whose future appears dark and tragic. I tell you frankly that my presentiments are very pessimistic. Still, I also believe that the tremendous approaching upheaval will be followed by a glorious resurgence for our beloved Spain and even the whole world".

In 1934 he wrote to his friend José Pinilla at Christmas (Barbastro, 24-12-1934), thanking him for his greetings and added: "As for the general situation in Spain, the outlook is even more turbulent. I would not be surprised that suddenly, we would have another revolutionary attempt even bloodier than the one in Asturias. But if the salvation of Spain and above all, the complete and definitive triumph of the cause of Jesus Christ is to come from there, let it come as soon as possible."

In 1935 the Prefect of the future martyrs, tired of the situation of the country, begins to long for "another" world in his letter to his friend Juan Arranz (Barbastro, 19-12-35): "That up there, yes, it will be life, true life, happy life without fears or worries, stable life with time for everything and without rushing for anything, the life of the most effusive intimacy without painful separations, life totally in agreement in ideas, in feelings, in aspirations..."

Things got worse towards July 1936. This is how Sebastià Riera describes it to his parents by letter (Cervera 6-04-1936): "We will only abandon the house once the danger is seen to be near. Otherwise, we would run the risk of keeping it empty for a long time, thus making ourselves the laughingstock of a gang of anticlerical fanatics. But, in any

case, dear parents, do not grieve for me; everything will be all right with the help of God our Lord."

As you can see, despite the hopes and estimations, we were ready to face difficulties, persecution, suffering, and, if necessary, death for Jesus Christ.

Archconfraternity, Barbastro