

# THE OBLATE SPANISH MARTYRS

Antonio Jambrina Calvo



OBLATE  
HERITAGE

9



# THE OBLATE SPANISH MARTYRS

by

Antonio Jambrina Calvo

9

Oblate Heritage Series  
O.M.I. General Postulation  
Rome, Italy  
1998

## PRESENTATI ON

This booklet is a very brief synopsis of a full work by the same author, and because of this it requires close reading. His book, "Memories of My Oblate Years" was published in Spain in 1992. All through its 320 well-packed pages Antonio Jambrina speaks of what he lived through in those heroic years, with all the warmth and objectivity of someone who was a true eye-witness. He was at that time an Oblate scholastic, and was arrested with the whole community of Pozuelo. Sent to a different prison than that of those martyred, he was not summarily shot like them, but was tried by a Republican tribunal and condemned to five years of forced labour in a concentration camp . Three years later, he was released by the National forces of Franco and, due to a variety of circumstances, his life took a different direction. He joined the police force, became the father of a family and is an involved Christian layman.

We, as Oblates, are grateful for his enduring love for the Congregation, and for the valuable research work that he has done over a number of years in the cause of our martyrs. We use the title of "martyrs", because, like him, we are fully convinced that those 22 men are authentic Christian martyrs. We hope and pray that the Church will recognise them officially as such, since, just as in the case of many other Spanish religious already beatified, we believe that these Oblates were shot out of hatred for the faith.

Joaquhn Martínez, O.M.I.  
Provincial of Spain

Translated by Joseph La Belle, O.M.I.  
and David Ullrich, O.M.I.

Adapted by James M. FitzPatrick, O.M.I.

Cover: Claude Tardiff, O.M.I.

Printed by: Tip. Città Nuova  
Largo Cistina di Svezia, 17  
00165 Roma (Italia)

## THE OBLATE SPANISH MARTYRS

### Origins of the Scholasticate of Spain

The Scholasticate of Our Lady of the Pilar, located in the region of the Station of Pozuelo of Alarcón, near Madrid, was opened officially on January 2, 1930.

On that day the Church in Spain celebrates the appearance of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in Zaragoza to strengthen the Apostle St. James, our Father in the faith, to give him the assurance of conversion of the Spanish people. The founders of the seminary arrived in Pozuelo three days before, on December 30, on which date is commemorated the transfer of the Sacred Body of the Apostle James to the “Campus Stellae”, its final resting place.

The community consisted of:

Rev. Valeriano de Anta. Superior

Rev. Delfín Monje.

Rev. Anastasio Pérez.

Rev. Eustaquio Martínez.

Fourteen scholastics in first and second courses of philosophy.

Two Brother coadjutors.

A total of twenty Oblates.

The students of second course in philosophy had studied during the first year at San Giorgio Canavese (Turin, Italy) and returned to Spain at Christmas-time of 1929. The first-year students were at the juniorate of Urnieta, awaiting the opening of the Scholasticate.

### Establish- ment of the Vice- Province of Spain

The Provincial of Texas, to whose province the Oblate houses of Spain belonged, while journeying to attend the Oblate General Chapter meeting in 1932, visited the houses of Spain that preceding August and announced the new formation appointments. They were : P. Vincente Blanco as Superior of the Scholasticate, replaced as novice master by P. Anastasio Pérez; while P. Francisco Esteban would continue as Superior of the Urnieta mission.

P. Teodoro Labouré was elected new Superior General of the Congregation at the General Chapter in September of that year. He, better than anyone, knew the problems experienced by the Oblate communities of Spain and Uruguay, and he made an historic decision - the formation of the Vice-Province of Spain, composed of the Oblate houses of Urnieta, Las Arenas, and Pozuelo in Spain; and the Uruguay foundations of Salto, Paso de los Toros, the one soon to be established at San Gregorio de Polanco, as well as many foundations that would come into existence within the region of Hispano-America.

On December 8, 1932, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Vice-Province of Spain was officially proclaimed. P. Francisco Esteban was named Vice-Provincial; P. Vicente Blanco first assistant and bursar; and P. Anastasio Pérez the second assistant.

Ora  
et labora



*Fr. Francisco Esteban  
Vice-Provincial*

This was, in few words, the motto of each one of the scholastics, the future Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate - “pray and work”.

Historically, the times were very difficult. Fifteen months after the inauguration of the Scholasticate, the Spanish Republic was proclaimed, the fruit of Masonic and predominately Marxist inspiration. One month later, on May 11, 1931, convents and churches were burned in

Madrid, Alicante, Malaga and other localities. It was the first warning for the Catholic Church and for Spanish society. The phenomenon of atheism and the war against the Catholics would be repeated twice more: in Asturias in 1934; in Madrid, Malaga, Alicante and other localities in 1936. When the civil war broke out, the Reds

celebrated by burning the Cathedral and fifty churches and convents in the capital. The same occurred on the following day in Alcalá de Henares. The Constitution was approved in December of 1931, in which Article 28 institutionalized religious persecution and the secularization of Spain. Moves against the Church began to materialize in 1932.

The Society of Jesus was suppressed, and its members were threatened with expulsion. The crucifix and all religious symbols were removed from the universities, institutes and centers of teaching and study. Religious and catechetical teaching were prohibited at all academic levels. The walls separating the civil cemetery portion of Camposanto were knocked down. A statute was established that, in case of death, the deceased would have to have specified the desire for burial by the Catholic rite; in all other cases burials were performed civilly, and automatic assistance by a Catholic priest was prohibited. A law establishing divorce became effective on 2 May.

## The first Ordinations

The scholasticate of the Spanish Vice-Province had reached the point of bearing its first fruit, producing for the Congregation and the Church its first priest missionaries. Mons. Guyomard, missionary bishop of Jaffna on the island of Ceylon, ordained to the diaconate the first two scholastics, Simeón Gómez and Lázaro Sáez, in early February and, after a few days spent in spiritual exercises, raised them to the priesthood on the Oblate feast of February 17, 1934. They were the first from the vine of Urniera which promised an abundant vintage, a successful harvest into the future. *“The grain is plentiful,”* claimed that Apostle, *“and the workers few. Pray to the harvest master to send workers into his field”* (Mt 9,37-38).

Angel Vega and Vicente Pérez were ordained priests during the week of Pentecost. They, and Fathers Simeón and Lázaro, were ready to receive their first obedience. *“Go and teach all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”* (Mt 28,19).



General elections were held on 16 February 1936, which saw victory by scant margins for the communist-socialist, left-wing republican and Popular Front parties. It was, by judgement of historians, the triumph of the Revolution. Exactly one month later, 16 March, saw a new wave of burnings of churches and convents. Religious persecution worsened along with the parliamentarian annulment of the national Catholic Right. Within a five-month period, there were official reports of 160 destroyed churches, with another 251 damaged or partially destroyed. On 13 July, the Government intended to wield a decisive blow: assassinate all heads of right-wing parties. They were successful only with the chief of the National Bloque, José Clavo Sotelo. It was the end of peace, and the beginning of the Persecution, euphemistically called the Civil War.

This was declared in all parts of the country on 18 July 1936. Two days later, authorities in Madrid were celebrating the capture of the mountainous region. As part of the celebration, on that night 50 Churches and convents in the capital, most notably the Cathedral of San Isidro were burned. The following day, in Alcalá de Henares, the Magistral of San Pedro was razed, and the Church of Santa Maria also was destroyed. In all this, the Catholic Church was the primary and most important victim. The Scholasticate of Pozuelo was confiscated on 22 July and the Oblate residents were detained within their residence, renamed by forces as the “House of the People” and also serving as a jail for “enemies of the Popular Front”.

The Oblate martyrs were killed on four specific dates during the year 1936: Seven Oblates in Aravaca on 24 July; P. José Vega in Paracuellos on 7 November; Serviliano Riaño in Soto; and thirteen Oblates in Paracuellos on 28 November.

Arturo Porras, head of the socialist party in Pozuelo, president of the committee of the “Frente Popular” and head of the railroad syndicate of the General Union of Workers, had been searching for a sufficient reason to execute the brothers, according to a House register entry of



July 24, 1936

Sunday the nineteenth verifying this. He evidently searched for arms, with no success.

The scholasticate community was awakened at 3:30am, gathered in a corridor, and the following Oblates were forced into two black cars as their names were called; Juan Antonio Pérez, Pascual Alaéz, Manuel Gutiérrez, Cecilio Vega, Francisco Polvorinos, Juan Pedro Cotillo, Justo González.

There was also Cándido Castán, a layman, hiding in the house, and he was brought out personally from a room beside the stairway by the head of the squad, accompanied by civil police from Pozuelo, who called out to him, "*You, present yourself!*" Castán was an ex-councillor from the time of the dictatorship of D. Miguel Primo de Rivera, a known Catholic employed as a government inspector by the Company of the North, of the Railroad. He was for many years a head of the "Comunión Tradicionalista" and head of this affiliation within the railroad system.



*Cemetery of Aravaca*

As the group moved out, Porras saw P. José Vega in the line and reprimanded him, saying, "*You, why are you not with this group?*" "*I haven't been called*". Vega replied. "*Ah well, no matter, we will see each other soon.*" This foreshadowed the events of the next night which would witness other Oblates being taken to their deaths.

We know neither how nor where the first Martyrs were murdered.

red. The most likely location was behind the cemetery of Aravaca.

The seven first Oblate martyrs probably died in this location, in the adjacent town of Aravaca, where the railroad workers who had been removed from a group of residences in the town were executed by militiamen of the U.G.T. What is certain is that in 1939 the remains of Candido Castán were found. These were recognized by his wife, daughter and various town residents. It is reasonable to suppose that the bodies of the seven Oblates who died with him around 4.30am on the day of July 24, 1936 remain buried in that field.

Who were these first executed Oblates?

**Juan  
Antonio  
Pérez Mayo  
O.M.I.  
Professor of  
Philosophy**



During his last year of studies, he was named as a group monitor, a position of trust and responsibility. He was one of the best in his course for his talent, capacity, seriousness and behaviour. He made his profession at Las Arenas on August 15, 1927, and pursued philosophy and theology in Rome. He received his obedience for Las Arenas in 1934. In 1935 he was named professor of philosophy at Pozuelo. Beginning with the results of the February elections, the situation

worsened and until July Juan Antonio was deeply upset. He headed the list of the first martyrs and was able to give absolution to the others "in articulo mortis".

**Manuel  
Gutierrez  
Martín**

Manuel was of an affable character, open, expansive, a friend to all, a good student, a worker. Upon finishing his third year of theology, he received the subdiaconate. Manuel was well suited to be a preacher. These skills showed forth in his various theatrical presentations, but without a doubt, "The Divine Impatient" by José Maria



Pemán had a profound influence upon him. From the time of Christmas of 1933 when he played the role of Saint Francis Xavier in an outstanding manner, he was more firmly convinced of his missionary vocation. Manuel Gutiérrez was a man of profound piety, of great love for the Congregation and of a marked passion for the missions.

**Cecilio  
Vega  
Domínguez**

The idea of a religious vocation awakened early in his life for Cecilio - specifically, a vocation as a Missionary Oblate, which was influenced by his countryman and friend, P. Angel Vega, OMI. Corpulent, strong, a good student although not brilliant, disciplined, of a somewhat reserved character, Cecilio was an excellent companion, an untiring worker, not very talkative, always disposed to help one in need and whoever would request his help.



**Francisco  
Polvorinos  
Gómez**



At ten years of age Francisco indicated to his mother his fervent desire to become a religious and one day to be a missionary; but his mother kept resisting him for the next five years. The parents of Francisco were very simple. His was a very poor family, but hard-working. His father was a shepherd and tended the livestock of the village; the two oldest children were servants of families in the town, and

Francisco... wanted “*to go and be a religious*”. But he couldn’t, as he had to help his father on the small property and the care of the sheep was entrusted to them. His sister Calixta, once she had received her basic education, had in turn to help her mother. Francisco, respectful of his parents, felt very firm in his vocation and asked for the help of D. Carlos Fernández, pastor of Calaveras de Arriba, who made contact with the Oblates and found the way to rescue Francisco from his poor household and his field work and to set him on the way toward the priesthood which he so desired.

Francisco was professed as an Oblate on August 28, 1932, entering two days later into the scholasticate at Pozuelo. He was an affable character, expansive, very inquisitive, but of an attractive and affable personality. He had a determination to complete every task given him - whether it be his studies or his spiritual growth. He was a good worker, disciplined, with a growing affection for cultural works, a good companion.

### Juan Pedro Del Cotillo Fernández



Juan Pedro was raised in a thoroughly Catholic home, and had his first Oblate contact through the magazine “*Purísima*”. Others from his region, such as Fr. José Vega, had become Oblates. All of these circumstances brought him to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who inspired a great love in him. Persistent and self-giving, Juan Pedro was not of notable intelligence, but his tenacity helped him to secure

sufficient marks in all of his examinations.

### Justo González Lorente

Son of a deeply Catholic family, his vocation was awakened early. He became a friend of Demetrio Aláez, who one year before had entered into the Oblates of Urnieta, and this influenced his choice of religious congregation.

In 1932, being then in the Juniorate, he wrote a type of personal account or diary which he sent to his brother Bernardo. It contains light notes which occurred to him during vacations, which promised new chapters which never came to be. His notes show us an intense family life. Justo would have proved to be a good writer, as his talents were just beginning to blossom. He was dedicated, deeply sentimental, very open with friends, and sociable.



In Pozuelo he was, as he had been in the juniorate, a model student, given with heart and soul to his intellectual and especially his spiritual and missionary formation. *“When I get to be a missionary”*, he used to say to his close friends, *“I won’t forget to give the names of my brothers to the Eskimos that I baptize, so to unite my natural family with my spiritual one”*.

**Pascual  
Aláez  
Medina**



From the time that he arrived at Urnieta, he gave proof of his intellectual capacity, his love for the congregation, his joyful character. Pascual was enthusiastic and enterprising and very popular with his brother Oblates because of his good disposition. He pursued to advantage his first year of philosophy, which ended in June of 1936.

During the night of June 24, 1936, he was interrogated and seriously threatened. He was one hour later one of the first martyrs of Aravaca. These seven young men died on June 24, 1936, but they were not to be the last.



**Martyrdom  
of P. José  
Vega Riaño.  
November 7,  
1936  
Paracuellos**



On November 6 of 1936, the red government of Madrid abandoned the capital and fled to Valencia, because the troops of Franco had already reached the “Casa de Campo” and were working their way along the line of Manzanares. General Miaja was left as military chief of the centre, and the young Santiago Carrillo Solares, President of the Socialist Unified Youth, was now Delegate of Public Order.

According to records of the International Red Cross, on 7 November, from the evening until the following day, some 1,600 detainees were taken from the Modelo jail of Madrid and executed at various sites such as Paracuellos del Jarama, Soto de Aldovea, as well as within the confines of the Modelo itself. In the first group to Paracuellos from the Modelo was P. José Vega Riaño, who had been detained on 10 October. He, as did many others, “left in liberty” from his cell, but was conducted to the provisional gallery from where his group departed to meet their deaths.



*Corner of the Cemetery, Paracuellos*

Different suppositions have been made, and a difficult legend woven regarding the death of P. Vega in Pozuelo at

the hands of Arturo Porras and his henchmen. It is impossible to say just what happened. Pozuelo was evacuated (by the military) on 2 November, and all its citizens were sent to Hoyo de Manzanares because Madrid could no longer be entered, the enemy having taken the Cuesta de Las Perdices on the highway of La Coruña, and the bridge of San Fernando in El Manzanares. We can deduce from the testimonies gathered that P. Vega was shot to death with more than 1,000 prisoners at Paracuellos del Jarama. Among these were 29 priests of different religious orders and congregations. The evening of 7 November, was to be the first of many expeditions during that month that would stop at Paracuellos del Jarama, carrying prisoners for execution. The remains of P. José Vega were found in the common cemetery in the first sector of the Camposanto de Paracuellos, northwest of the existing chapel.

**Fr. Riaño.  
Professor of  
Dogmatic  
Theology**

Fr. Riaño pursued advanced studies of philosophy and theology in Rome, earning a Doctorate in Theology at the Angelicum. He was professor of dogmatic theology in Pozuelo from September 1930 until the Oblates were detained in 1936. A Thomist at depth, he knew the writings of Aquinas by heart. He was always ready to give answers and his formidable intelligence and preparation resulted in classes full of content. With his tranquil bearing, hands interlaced on his stomach, occasionally twirling his thumbs, his lecture would unfold, which at times had a monotonous result due to the timbre of his broken and cracked voice, but in which you could not lose yourself because of his clarity. P. Vega was not an orator, but his short presentations during the monthly exercises of the community were lessons in mystical theology which warranted meditation for the entire month.

**Martyrdom  
of Serviliano  
Riaño.  
8-11-36.  
Thicket  
of Aldovea**

In the early hours of 8 November 1936, the lights in the fifth gallery of the Modelo prison were switched on, and a menacing voice shouted, "*Attention!*". Names were subsequently called, and an order for those named to leave. Porfirio Fernández, OMI recalls, "We heard Serviliano Riaño; he passed by the front of the cell of P. Martin: '*Give me absolution; this is my hour.*' I could see him through a





peep-hole, standing in a line in the nave. [Perhaps] they are calling for volunteers to go for the breakfast. I was able to say good-bye to him. *'If you see my parents, greet them for me.'* They took him away. Porfirio was the last one who saw the martyr during that early hour. His recount is as simple as it is emotional. There was serenity in Serviliano's face; he was at peace with God and to Him he offered himself; there was a memory imparted for his beloved

parents. Porfirio had to wait two and a half years to give the news and the embrace to those sorrowful but fortunate parents of the glorious martyr.

The remains of almost a thousand of those fallen for God and Spain were discovered on 28 December 1939 in the Thicket of Aldovea. The body of Serviliano Riaño Herrero was found among them, recognised by an identifying paper which he was carrying in his pocket. His body was, as were the others, transferred to the Camposanto of the Martyrs of Paracuellos del Jarama. Their remains are found at the head of the great tomb that is at the entrance of the cemetery, in the zone that extends toward the left, above and near the chapel.



*Soto de Aldovea*

**Martyrdom  
of 13  
Oblates.  
28-11-36.  
Paraquellos**

Serviliano was, in the words of his teacher, “a Saint Louis Gonzaga”. Frequently as a child he would go to the church and there remain in silence. He made his first communion at six years of age and received Communion each Sunday and feast day. When his teacher asked the children what they would do when they grew up, Serviliano always gave the same reply, “*I will be a religious missionary.*” And it was something to see his “devouring” enthusiasm (as they say in his region) each time that he explained the work of Spain in America, or when he would analyse the missionary work in India. For our little missionary that was the supreme mission that one could aspire to, and to which he decided to offer himself. He took vows as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate on 15 August 1933. The young Scholastic who arrived at Pozuelo that summer had those characteristic traits of ‘Saint Louis’, a youth who brought to his formation and sanctification his notable application to studies and his religious spirit and fervour for perfection, which increased daily.

When the prisoners were evacuated from the Modelo, there were fifteen Oblates at San Antón prison. Two, P. Delfín Monje and the scholastic Juan José Cincunegui, went up with fifty-eight prisoners to Paracuellos on 27 November at 11 that night. They were saved from the firing squad at the last minute by a cavalry captain who passed by with his squadron and who obliged the “thugs” to leave the prisoners at the military jail of Alcalá de Henares. On the following morning, 28 November, the thirteen Oblates who were remaining in the jail of San Antón departed for the place of martyrdom. They were the following:

Rev. Fr. Francisco Esteban Lacal. Vice Provincial.  
Rev. Fr. Vicente Blanco Guadilla. Superior of Pozuelo.  
Rev. Fr. Gregorio Escobar García. Scholastic priest  
Juan José Caballero Rodríguez  
Justo Gil Pardo.  
Publio Rodríguez Moslares  
José Guerra Andrés  
Daniel Gómez Lucas  
Clemente Rodríguez Tejerina

Justo Fernández González  
Angel Bocos. Coadjutor  
Marcelino Sánchez Fernández  
Eleuterio Prado Villarroel

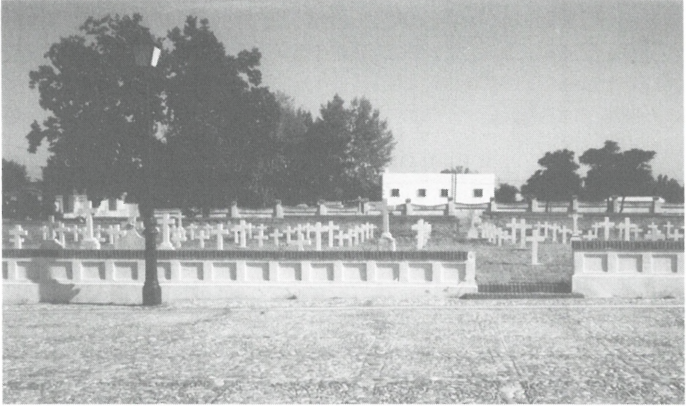
The group were driven along the highway of Aragón. On arriving at the junction of the town of Barajas the trucks crossed the town, and arrived at the Jarama river. They passed the bridge, wound to the left by the highway that borders the river, and at the slope of one of the hills, halted and “dropped” the captives, there near the highway.

We have accurate first-hand information about the fate of this group of Oblates because we have the testimony of an exceptional witness, a resident of Paracuellos D. Gregorio Muñoz Juan, a “Falangista” (trooper/soldier), who witnessed the shootings and who, because of this, was punished by being told to dig the graves and to bury the bodies. He affirms:

*“I am completely sure that on November 28, 1936, a priest or religious requested of the militia that they should permit him to go to all his companions and to give to them absolution. This they granted him. The said priest or religious was embracing each one of them and, kneeling on the ground, he gave them absolution, at least he made over them the sign of the cross as when penitents are absolved in confession. When he finished, he pronounced in a loud voice these words: “We know that you kill us for being Catholics or religious; so we are. I, as well as my companions pardon you with all our heart. Long Live Christ the King! !VIVA! VIVA ESPAÑA! !VIVA!”*

Moments later the captives gave over their souls to God, mowed down by the discharge of the firing squad in Paracuellos del Jarama.

In the enormous tomb of the entrance, next to the streetlamp, to the right and the left, lie the twelve Oblates who died with the Fr. Provincial. The common grave, in Paracuellos, where the bodies of the Oblates repose, is found at the entrance of Camposanto to the left, at the level of the third streetlight.



*Cemetery of Paracuellos:  
Mass Grave of Thirteen Oblates*

Fr. Emilio Alonso OMI, on examining the testimony of D. Gregorio Muñoz considers it absolutely worthy of belief and adds that D. Gregorio described the priest giving the absolution as: “About fifty years old, vested in black, also quite short and a little bald”. That is a good description of Fr. Esteban. Further, those who had the fortune to know Fr. Esteban knew that the gesture of asking permission for the farewell and final absolution fits well with character. He alone was capable in those terrible minutes of confronting his executioners, of soliciting permission to give absolution and of bidding farewell to each one of the Oblates. It was his final responsibility as a priest and as religious superior of the group.

Here is a brief note on each of the men executed that sad night.



Among the written assessments of Francisco Esteban when he was still a theology student at San Giorgio Canavese Scholasticate we read:

*“An ideal religious. Considerate in all his relations. Above all, a slave to duty”*. This is a true description of Fr. Esteban, who was always one bound to his duty, right till the time of his heroic death. If one had to indicate only one of his many virtues, one would say that Fr. Francisco Esteban

was a man of total discipline, almost as second nature, in his carrying out of responsibilities. This self-discipline was total and sincere, and marked with trust in Divine Providence. As Vice-Provincial residing nearby in Madrid, he would come to Pozuelo for the grand feasts of the church and celebrate with the community. The last visit which he made to the scholasticate in Pozuelo, was in Holy Week of 1936. During that time, without a doubt, he was edified to see the good order and sincerity of his students in the seminary. The students in turn, as they received his blessing rejoiced in having such a good man as their provincial.

Fr. Esteban was a human man, down-to-earth, very close to each Oblate, yet at the same time very firm with himself and one who took his obligations seriously. One person compared him to the Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, as to his honesty, discipline and charity. Who does not remember the event which Fr. Monte relates, which occurred in the Modelo prison, in those last days of October and November 1936? The weather was cold, very cold that year in the Modelo. Fr. Esteban received the gift of a coat. Seeing that Fr. Monje was passing day and night shivering and trembling with cold, Fr. Esteban gave him the new coat. Fr. Esteban continued putting up with the rigours of the inclement weather until his death.

With the arrival of war, fate began to demand more of him. Disguised as a “paisano” (peasant), he continued his apostolate, without complaint. On July 19 1936, Brothers Pavillet and Astier were detained at the Hortaleza novitiate

of the Sisters of the Holy Family, in spite of their French nationality. The revolution was reaching to all. The fate of the novices and the sisters worried Fr. Esteban greatly. When he knew the truth and that everyone was safe and secure, he rushed to tell Fr. Delfín Monje and the scholastics of Pozuelo, who had been taken out of the house and imprisoned.

August 9, 1931 dawned. The red soldiers threw Fr. Esteban out into the street and seized the residence of Diego de León. Taking refuge with ten scholastics in the “Pensión San Jerónimo”, he went out constantly to attend to those in spiritual need. “*Don’t go out so much, be careful!*”, Doña Petra would say to him, *alma tutelar* of the Oblates at that time. “*It is my duty*”, he would answer. On October 15 he was detained with the Oblates. When the Police requested his documentation, he responded: “*I respond for all of them. I am a Catholic priest, we have been thrown out of our house and for this we are here*”.

In jail, he met up with his fellow Oblate detainees from other places, and shared with them those grave days, the bad and limited food, their mutual consolation and prayer. He was a good and courageous shepherd who cared for his charges until the end. He fell like the person he was - a soldier of Christ, encouraging others in the martyrdom which they suffered with him that pre-dawn in November, shouting “*Long Live Christ the King*”.

Vicente  
Blanco  
Guadilla  
Superior  
of the  
Scholasticate



“*Holy Fr. Blanco*” - that is the usual and frequent expression the Oblates in Spain used to refer to Vicente Blanco. He was the very symbol and epitome of the life of the Congregation.

Fr. Vicente was the first junior in Soto in 1895. He was the first novice in Our Lady of L’Osier coming from the house in Urineta. He was also the first Spanish



Scholastic in the international scholasticate in Rome. In 1908 he received his initial obedience for the juniorate in Urnieta. In 1911 he became treasurer as well as the master of novices for lay brothers. On August 15, 1917, Fr. Blanco became the first Spaniard named superior of the juniorate in Urnieta. From that time on, he had the role of superior until his death. He was the first master of novices in Spain, and it was he who inaugurated the novitiate in Las Arenas. In the summer of 1932 he was to become the superior of the scholasticate of Our Lady of Pilar in Pozuelo until his martyrdom. He was the pioneer par excellence of the Spanish Province. He was an exemplary Oblate, passionate in his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate. He knew how to instil these devotions in his subjects. He was always and everywhere “the man of the rosary,” as one young Oblate said. The beads never fell from his hands. How many rosaries must this holy martyr Vincent have prayed during his lifetime?

If the early years of the Republic were difficult ones, the difficulties only multiplied later. But Fr. Blanco, with his example and prayers, had only one policy - maintain harmony, charity, a religious spirit among his community and cultivate the spiritual and intellectual formation of the youth who had been entrusted to him. According to the unanimous testimony of all the Oblates who knew him and dealt with him, Fr. Blanco was a saint, and everyone treated him as such. His devotion and his edifying piety in Holy Mass, his visits to the Blessed Sacrament, his frequent prayer to the Immaculate Conception, and that rosary all confirm it.

On July 18, 1936, Fr. Blanco arrived at Pozuelo from the novitiate, where he had given the retreat for the novices preparing for vows. On the 19th the first search of the seminary took place and on the 22nd the entire community was detained. The morning of the 23rd the guards permitted the priests to “receive communion for a few moments.” Fr. Blanco starting consuming the Blessed Sacrament. Not being able to take it any more, he broke down. To Fr. Monje he said, “*What will become of this house especially now*



*that we no longer have our Lord with us?"* And he cried inconsolably.

This state of depression was to last him throughout his time in the prison in Modelo and especially months later in San Antón. A few days before suffering martyrdom, Fr. Blanco, as though sensing the end of his life and his sufferings, recovered his optimism and, in the face of the growing persecution, encouraged everyone to die well. He died at peace.

**Gregorio  
Escobar  
García  
Scholastic  
Priest**



When Gregorio was 5 years old, he lived with his grandmother and took great care in giving alms to the poor who called at their door. One day an elderly pauper came and received alms like all the rest. Stopping and looking at Gregorio, he said to him, *"You will be a saint."*

At the age of six he entered the boys' kindergarten run by the daughters of Charity in Estella. As one report had it, *"He was an exemplary child, quiet, obedient, respectful to the sisters and not all pretentious."* When he reached elementary school age, he stayed on as an altar boy. He gave the same example he had given as a small child, always polite and punctual at 7am. Snow and rain notwithstanding, he never failed a single day. Just seeing with what care he made his genuflection and the respect with which he served at Mass filled one with devotion. Given the poverty of his father, who was the sacristan of the parish church of San Pedro, the pastor José María Sola paid his way to the Oblate Juniorate at Urnieta. In April of 1930 he wrote to José María, *"When I think of all the circumstances that paved the way for my entrance into the junior seminary at Urnieta, that convinces me that God wants me here. If not, why were all the efforts to put me in the (diocesan) seminary fruitless? Why was it that when you inquired, there was no room? I have no doubts that God wants me here and no place else. He will give me*

*the strength I need.” Again he wrote to José María on May 26, 1936: “At last the news you have been waiting 12 years for! I have passed my canonical exam for the priesthood and will receive it, God willing, next June 6.”*

Later on Fr. Sola sent a copy of Gregorio’s letters and wrote, “I keep a memento of his priestly ordination. It’s a photo of the Virgin of Puy on which he wrote, ‘*In your hands, Holy Mother of Puy of Estella, I place the priesthood I have received from your Divine Son. Gregorio Escobar Garcia. Memento of such a splendid day*’. Fr. Sola continued, “*I have kept it for the illustration of so many virtues it contains and as a memento of the very simple beginning of a vocation which, responding to grace, ended in martyrdom. I am satisfied that heaven will not forget one who sets out so gloriously to reach. And so it was. Gregorio did not and could not know that there on the banks of the Jarma River his much loved Virgin of Puy awaited him with a martyr’s palm to lead him to Paradise*”.

**Juan José  
Caballero  
Rodríguez  
Subdeacon**



He was the prototypical gentleman from Extremadura, prudent, reflective, methodical and enterprising. Phlegmatic by temperament, his manner inspired calm, reflection and a decisiveness which undertook even the most difficult things calmly. In his dealings with people he was agreeable and accommodating as well as dignified and abounding in charity. In the seminary it was his task to approach missionaries and visitors and ask their economic assistance for the students’ needs - a job he accomplished marvellously with aplomb and with the natural nobility that captivated everyone.

He dreamed of the missions. He corresponded with everyone - bishops, priests and missionary brothers. His activities in the scholasticate multiplied. He lived an intense missionary spirit. He was the soul of the Mission

Magazine and, in fact, it was his idea to publish it and to celebrate a mission week for the surrounding area. But the revolutionary tide and the war ruined all these hopes, works, and apostolic dreams.

**Justo Gil  
Prado  
Subdeacon**



He early showed signs of a religious vocation but his parents' humble social position postponed a decision for several years. Once again the pious priest from Navar, Fr. José María Sola intervened, as he had with the parents of Gregorio Escobar. So Justo was able to enter the juniorate at Urnieta and commence his studies which should have led to ordination.

He was of docile character and simple. He was a good student, naturally hardworking, cheerful, of a good spirit and cordial to all. Justo had two notable qualities: his attraction for music and his passion for missions. The latter he put into practice working eagerly in the academy of missions with his good friend Juan José Caballero. What a pair of missionaries they would have been! Praise God! But we have instead two heroic and glorious martyrs.

**Publio  
Rodríguez  
Moslares**

Publio was a man of open character, curious, fun-loving, simple, compassionate. By sheer persistence he was able to follow an Oblate missionary vocation in spite of the resistance of his mother who loved him so, and the adverse circumstances of the times. He was in love with music and poetry, so much so that he frequently wrote home in verse with the same skill that he could in prose.



The pastor of Fromista wrote to Felix Moslares, *“I have sounded out your nephew and have understood that he [has] a great vocation and has every desire to be a missionary, and an Oblate. This is the congregation, and no other, he wishes to enter.”* Publio’s mother wrote, *“My own mother also told me this and it encouraged me that she would [be] very happy if her grandson had such a beautiful vocation.”* His mother took him to Urnieta, and in the summer of 1931 to the novitiate in Las Arenas. Publio on entering the novitiate gave to her his junior (seminary) cross and said to her, *“Kiss it often. And no matter what happens, remember that all that we suffer for Him, no matter how much it seems, will be very little in comparison to how much he loves and suffers for us.”* With his open and generous spirit, Publio became a point of unity among everyone in the scholasticate.

**José  
Guerra  
Andrés**



When José had to come home after the burning of religious houses in June 1931, his mother thought they would not re-open the juniorate in Urnieta. So she placed him in a carpenter’s workshop in Leon as an apprentice. He thought this compromised his determination to become a missionary so he spent morning till night seated on a bench in the garden praying the rosary.

The young Guerra was of a peaceful character and happy in his dealings with people. He spent his free time and vacations in painting, for which he was admirably suited. He never lacked good humour. He was deeply pious and a man of prayer.

**Daniel  
Gómez  
Lucas**

From childhood Daniel was simple, affectionate, ready to do any job. He did not refuse to do domestic chores at home and he continued this in Urnieta. He helped in everything with great alacrity. He was happy, a great fan of sport and especially gifted for soccer. He remembered

greatly his cousin, the great soccer star of Urnieta and missionary, Simeon Gomez, OMI. He kept at home a few modest trophies he had won in Urnieta. His dynamism was contagious. Wherever he was happiness always ruled. His good humour dominated every situation. He was quiet, very dedicated in his studies, pious and a great companion.



**Clemente  
Rodríguez  
Tejerina**



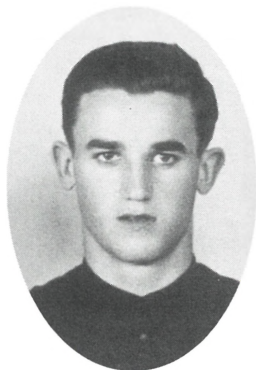
*“...and in the fertile garden of suffering Spain, lies dead a martyr: the best of your brothers.”*

So sings the poet Mariano Martin, OMI in his book “*Closed Garden*”, sent to Fr. Miguel Rodriguez, OMI. And so it was in real life. That family from “the house on the corner”, with 12 children, gave the Church 3 daughters in the Congregation of the Holy Family,

two sons in the Capuchins, and two in the Oblates. Clement was pious, humble, attentive, full of charity and of deep religiosity. The grace of such a martyr deserved the goodness of God.

**Justo  
Fernández  
González**

In the mountains of Guelde, amid the crests of Europe, grew the vigorous innocence and candour of a young man. His name was Justo, just like that lad from Complutum who with his brother refused to worship the emperor and died martyrs. Justin also refused one day: *“I will not return to the sheep. I want to be a priest like Tomas.”* That Christian married couple from





Huelde gave the church 8 religious. This lanky highlander, smiling and affable, accustomed to the climate of the mountains, felt cramped in Pozuelo and went around barefoot playing ball in the garden. His mother, Maria, when she could do nothing but pray the rosary, would call out: *“My martyr, Justin.”* Sr. Alfonsa attributes to Justin and his fellow martyrs the miraculous cure of her nurse in the clinic of Dr. Galvez in Malaga and another one in the clinic of San Ignacio of Loyola four years earlier, where she herself worked.

**Ángel  
Bocos,  
coadjutor  
brother**



From the high plains of Valderredible, beyond the mountains of Cantabra, an “angel” came to Urnieta. He had no formal education but desired to dedicate himself to the Congregation as a lay brother and made his profession of vows a year later. Assigned to Diego de Leon, he left ten years later for Italy where he remained for a long time and eventually was sent to the house at Lyon in 1922. In 1926 he returned to Urnieta leaving

wherever he went the unforgettable memory of that bearded Spanish brother of great humility and burning charity.

**Marcelino  
Sánchez  
Fernández,  
coadjutor  
brother**

His first assignment when he was professed in 1930 was the novitiate in Las Arenas. At the end of that year, the founders of the scholasticate left for Pozuelos and he accompanied this founding group to serve as porter, mailman, and messenger in the new house as well as to care for the chickens and doves. He was a hard worker and very reserved with the scholastics whom he served and cared for with great affection. He was devoted to



the Rosary and of solid piety. He was an example of humility and charity for the scholastics.

**Eleuterio  
Prado  
Villareal,  
coadjutor  
brother**



He made his vows April, 1935, and was assigned to Pozuelo as his first obedience. "Teyin", as he was called, was charming in play in his own way with his family and especially with children. He used to play at being a priest and saying Mass. He dreamed of being a missionary one day like his brother Maximo, OMI. But he came to realize that studies were not his gift and decided to be a lay brother. He

was cheerful, loved work, and humble and very affectionate. He was a master cabinet maker despite his young age, and was known above all for his affability and truly edifying piety.

**Twenty-two  
Martyrs**

These 13 men who died together at Paracuellos del Jarama on November 28, 1936, brought to 22 the number of Oblates of Mary Immaculate who died at the hands of atheistic revolutionary forces.

**Return  
to the  
Scholasticate**

When the Spanish conflict ended, the scholasticate building at Pozuelo was returned to the Oblates by the military. Until





then it had been used as a general barracks during the war in the sector closest to Madrid. The area around Pozuelo station was a sad sight to see with its chalets and stately houses, with not even doors or windows remaining on the great mansions, a large part of which appeared to be destroyed by the bombs and vicissitudes of the war. All the homes around the scholasticate had been destroyed. Only the school of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, which was under the protection of the French embassy from the start, and the Oblate seminary, remained standing.

The scholasticate is through and through a symbol of memories. During the war from 1936 to 1939 it was a general barracks for the Red and Blue Troops. Everything around it was destroyed but divine providence did not let one single shell fall on the house. However in August of 1939 a 15.5 shell was removed from the well on the compound without damage. For the author and many scholastics, it was the Oblate martyrs who had watched over their home and kept it unharmed.

## The Cross of the Martyrs



November 28, 1939, the third anniversary of the killing of the thirteen Oblates in Paracuellos was commemorated in Pozuelo with a solemn funeral for all those fallen in the war. At 10:30 a nocturn was sung, with a solemn high Mass, prayers of

*Memorial Cross,  
Pozuelo  
Commemoratin  
22 Martyrs*



*Pozuelo Recognises the Oblate Martyrs  
in a Local Street Sign*

committal and then the erection of a cross as a provisional monument in the patio of the north side of the building.

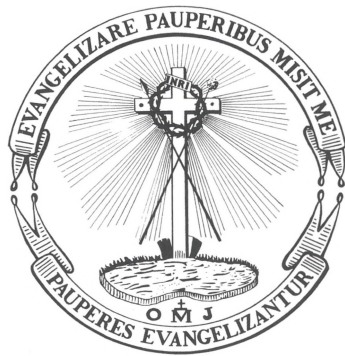
Fr. Superior blessed the cross, led a prayer for the dead, and the choir sang “*De Profundis.*” Present were the community of Pozuelo, the greater part of the parents and relatives of the martyrs, various friends from Madrid and many people from Pozuelo.

Since the beginning, that site, blessed with the Cross, was a special place for the scholastics. They went there every day. They prayed the breviary there. Many prayed the rosary there. And there the community gathered every Saturday evening to sing the “*Salve Regina*”. How many memories, how many tears, how many praises and private blessings of the Oblate martyrs that cross brings to mind!

The sentiment and conviction that the Oblates slain in the war are martyrs was widespread. Even the city administration of Pozuelo, adopting the opinion of many in the area, gave the name “Oblate Martyrs” to a street which runs from east of the seminary to the highway from Madrid.

## Conclusion

The twenty-two Spanish Oblates who died during these terrible months of 1936 were graced by God with an exceptional calling. For most of them, their lives as religious were just beginning: for all of them, they were born into eternal life as witnesses to faith. That faith was sorely tested. The Oblate Province was deprived of a generation of young religious. The Church was enriched by their passing. And, as so often happens, even from the worst evil can come great good.









## **OBLATE HERITAGE SERIES II**

### **1998**

- 7. Oblate Witnesses: 1831-1997**  
Sixty-eight Oblates who lost their lives in connection with their ministry
- 8. The Oblate Cavalry of Christ**  
Early mounted Oblate missionaries in Texas and Mexico
- 9. The Spanish Oblate Martyrs**  
Twenty-two Oblates shot in 1936 during the troubled times of Spain
- 10. Oblate Brothers Amid the Snow**  
Some Oblate Brothers who by example and work were outstanding missionaries
- 11. Oblate Victims in the Far North**  
Five Oblates - a Brother and four Priests - killed in the Canadian missions
- 12. Five Oblates of LaBrosse**  
In the intrigues of World War II, these five men were summarily executed
- 13. German Oblate Resistance**  
Faced with Nazism, forty-two German Oblates suffered for their resistance
- 14. Oblates Along the Mekong**  
Six Oblates shot as Communism spread throughout Laos

**Oblate General Postulation**  
**C.P. 9061**  
**00100 Roma-Aurelio**  
**Italy**