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## THE BROTHERS

### MARTYRED IN SPAIN

Around 1930, there began a very difficult period for the Church and Catholics in Spain. It was a time of great political, social and religious tension. At certain stages, legal measures enacted against the Church were particularly vicious. The outcome of all this was a civil war which lasted from 1936 to 1939. However, as early as 1934, a revolution broke out in the Asturias region of north Spain, and it quickly took the form of a violent persecution of priests, religious, militant Christians and the destruction of their property. It was during this period that the eight Brothers from Turon were martyred simply because they were religious. Once the civil war started, religious persecution became widespread and extremely violent. The thousands of people martyred – bishops, priests, men and women religious – included also 165 Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The first martyrs of this period have already been beatified, and so we hope the Causes of other groups will soon reach a successful conclusion. This is the case of our own Turon martyrs: the examination of their Cause, it appears, will be completed very soon.

And so we thought it would be interesting to reproduce here the Circular Letter the Superior General, Brother Junien Victor, wrote to the Institute at the time, as an introduction to the biographies of all these Brother martyrs.

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*Rome, March 15th 1940,  
Feast of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows.*

Very Dear Brothers,

May the grace and the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always!

We were filled with great sorrow when the forces of evil swept down on Catholic Spain in the summer of 1936. In the powerful words of the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius XI, these forces-"destroyed and ruins all that was most humanly human, and most divinely divine: people, sacred institutions and objects; holy lives dedicated to the service of others and entirely given over to prayer, study and charitable works. And the forces unleashed were so irrational, savage and cruel that one wonders how they could possibly exist". (Speech, September 14th 1936).

These terrible events caused us even more suffering because, ever since 1904, with the enactment of the Combe laws in France, Spain had become in some sort of way our adopted country, offering a fraternal welcome to our Brothers from the south of France. These events have been disastrous for our Institute: it has deeply suffered: many of our houses have been destroyed, our young Christians scattered, many of our Brothers massacred, a great many others imprisoned and destined to suffer atrociously, while others have been obliged to go into hiding, "with a price on their heads", as Pope Pius XI said, "sheltering in

villages and towns, in people's homes and on wild mountain sides, like the first martyrs whom St. Paul admirably described in the following proud and magnificent words: The world was not worthy of them".

The Pope had also this to say: "This was the apotheosis of Christian and priestly virtues, of heroism and true martyrdom in the sacred and glorious meaning of the word, martyrdom of innocent lives, of venerable old age and of budding youth".

More than 150 of our Brothers made this glorious sacrifice of their lives. Now that the storm has subsided and Spain, with the burden of its memories is working for a better future, we think it is time we published the official account of these glorious deaths. As is traditional, we will mention also the virtues these Brothers practised while they lived peacefully in our midst.

You have been waiting for these obituaries with some impatience. It has not been easy to gather all this material together, and it has entailed a fair amount of travelling. We offer it to you today, convinced you will read it with the respect we owe to the memory of these "witnesses of Christ". It is a tribute they have deserved by their heroic death. "In the eyes of the unwise, they did appear to die, their going looked like a disaster, their leaving us, like annihilation... slight was their affliction, great will their blessing be. God has put them to the test and proved them worthy to be with him" (Wisdom, 3, 2-6).

They share now in the glory of the eternal Church, guardian of the promises of Jesus Christ. They have shown that "the torch of faith handed on by Dominic, Ignatius, Teresa, Isidore, Pascal and the whole hosts of Spanish saints has neither grown weaker nor has it been extinguished by the wind of the Abomination of Desolation in the Holy Place: on the contrary, it is burning even more brightly in the hearts of true Spaniards, yearning in their hearts, overburdened with sorrowful me-

mories, for a rebirth and renewal of religious life which enables the Christian to triumph over misfortune and suffering". This is what His Holiness, Pope Pius XII said while he was still Cardinal Pacelli. (Address given in the presence of the Holy Father on September 14th, 1936).

They are also the glory of our Institute, ennobled by their blood. What a joyful welcome must Saint John Baptist de La Salle have given them in Heaven, he who had such great admiration for the holy martyrs, as we see in his Meditations. In them we see the real enthusiasm with which he describes for us St. Andrew's joy at seeing his cross ready for him. He goes into great detail as he describes the sufferings endured by St. Laurence, saying: "What can we say about such fortitude? Will such an example make us love suffering?"

Our dear respected confreres who shed their blood in witness of their faith certainly understood the Founder's words. How eloquent, therefore, is their death! What a crown to reward a life consecrated entirely to the service of our Lord and to souls redeemed by his blood!

These examples should urge us, Brothers, to serve God and devote ourselves to young people with greater fervour and generosity than ever before. "Not having the good fortune, nor the opportunity to suffer martyrdom for the faith, make yourselves martyrs for the love of God by practising mortification", says our holy Founder.

May we bear all these thoughts in mind as we read the account of the deaths of our glorious martyrs, and let us pray humbly and fervently for the grace of final perseverance!

With confidence that our prayers will be granted,

Your very humble and devoted servant,

**Brother Junien Victor.**