

## Settimo Cielo



di Sandro Magister

05 nov

## Analysis. Why Franco's Memory Is Putting the West and the Church To the Test



&gt; Italiano

&gt; English

&gt; Español

&gt; Français

&gt; All the articles of Settimo Cielo in English

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Published as received, with a marginal note at the end. The author, a former professor of religion at the University of Florence, philosopher and historian by training, has for years been well known to and appreciated by the readers of Settimo Cielo.

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## ON THE RELOCATION OF FRANCO'S BODY

by Pietro De Marco

I think that many have overlooked, particularly in Spain, the significance of the **relocation** of the body of Francisco Franco from the Valle de los Caidos, the deep public ethical framework in which it is set. The event, in fact, presupposes and circularly aggravates the removal of the tragic complexity, and of the human lesson, of the Civil War as event, from its preconditions to the long civil peace that followed it, intended by the General and, by paradox, due to him. With victims and costs, but peace, after the fratricide.

The removal, if not of the history then certainly of its significance and sacredness, is the effect of the post-Francoist civil "reconstruction" and of the "democratic" ideological pedagogies. Unfortunately the reconstructions of democracy necessary for freedom devastate nations: but we should be more aware that, as democrats, we prefer these devastations to the lack of freedom and rights. We would be more watchful.

Those who read "Thus has evil its beginning" (2014) by such a wise narrator as Javier Marías, generation 1951, run up against a vindictive attitude of memory, a paradigm of the past that is surprisingly simplified for a Spaniard; a paradigm with no self-awareness that not by coincidence pervades a recent novel. It would not surprise us [Italians], accustomed to dealing with the hubris of the "anti-fascist" pedantry embodied in books and in public speaking. This is a matter, however, of an inverse process. Contemporary Spain is alienated from the awareness, still alive in the 1970's, of having left behind a drama whose victors and vanquished emerged with the memory of a dirty heroism of too much innocent blood and too absurdly spilled. With a certain analogy with our lesser 1943-1946 civil war, of which today, however, we alone are aware.

And in this tragic loss of awareness Spain itself becomes spiritually subordinate to the ideological activism of the PSOE, to the armchair extremism allied with the anticlerical subcultures. These took eighty years after celebrating their political processes (on phantoms) and their posthumous purges to accomplish at a distance that which in Italy took place in 1945-46. But in Italy that settling of scores arouses today, in most people, horror and shame. They are not things to be repeated in order to make political advertising, howbeit with symbolic acts.

Reading journalism and essay writing from recent years on the monumental complex of the Valle de los Caidos (inaugurated in 1959, at the twentieth anniversary of the end of the conflict, in historic Guadarrama) one gathers well how the desecration underway, of which the exhumation of Franco's body is a sign, is taking place at the instigation of historians and ideologues in whom postmodern apathy has obscured the idea, and the very plausibility, of what it is to fight with weapon in hand for something.

In general, in democratic narratives, there are only victims, "ours," and butchers, the "others," because "ours" could not have been butchers, at the most virtuous executioners. Thus, ideally, the others should all be chased out of the shrine. The latest generation of Spanish bishops also seems to live in the simplification of this subtle fog, in which the Catholic martyrs of the Civil War are no longer visible, if visible unrecognizable, and if recognizable embarrassing; perhaps also for the bishops a "cursed legacy" as for the political parties. Not so for John Paul II, who decisively launched the canonizations that even Pope Francis has continued.

And yet everybody knew it. In the tragic knot of a conflict between ultimate values, the essence of civil war, those martyrs found their butchers precisely on the "right side" and had in Franco someone who kept the Catholic martyrs from multiplying and the Spanish Church from anticipating the fate of those socialist countries. The martyrs were on the wrong side? Because, Bolsheviks and anarchists, everyone for his side, would be the right side? With what indiscretion of historical-political judgment, today, can one adopt such a parameter?

If then it is necessary to contextualize the collective hopes of the thirties in the communist revolution and in the USSR, it is just as necessary to contextualize the decision, and sometimes the sanctity, of those who oppose them, and the political seriousness of those who rose up against a facade of legality and a husk of a state in the hands of subversion. The legitimacy of the "uprising" is an issue that I have always wanted to discuss with calm. One can defend it with good reasons, better than those that celebrate on the left the armed insurrection for the seizure of power, in the Asturias (1934). It is striking that now the Francoist "uprising" should appear "obviously" illegitimate, as said in a recent report on Italian television. This is possible only in forgetfulness of the complexity of the past, not to mention the problem of evil in history. Forgetfulness of a past where heroes and monsters and victims are everywhere, on which it is not simple to reflect; unacceptable for the progressive discipline of public awareness.

Even the unifying religious sign of the monumental complex of the Valle today appears to be only tolerated. In fact, not only is it a sacred expression of the civil, but it is an explicitly Catholic monument, with the big church of the Holy Cross, the accompaniment of sacred art, the monastery; nor could it be otherwise because forgiveness is under the cross, and the enormous cross nudges men, of themselves not inclined to forgive. The great Pietà that overlooks the doors of the basilica is, moreover, a precise viaticum. In the shrine everything is inseparable from the rest, if it still has a meaning. The dead are not separable from the buildings, nor these from the dead, perhaps almost fifty thousand. Nor was Franco's tomb, underground, beneath a simple slab, near the main altar, in the somewhat gloomy half-light of the great nave. The Valle de los Caidos is not far from the Escuriale.

Only a wayward civil postmodernity in search of some dignification could want the abandonment and the alteration of a religious-civil complex of such power and humility. Thus Francisco Franco, not a man of forgiveness in 1940 when the work was begun but the protagonist of the pacification (authoritarian, to be sure) until today accepted by the Spanish, is sacrificed, or concealed and normalized, for a new pacification, wordy and vindictive. I wonder and I will ask Spanish friends, certainly occupied with other things, if they are aware of this.

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[On the Holy See's position, see on **Vatican News** the statements of the cardinal secretary of state, of the nuncio in Spain, and of the director of the Vatican press office - editor's note].

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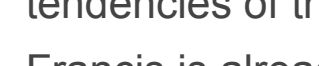
## A MARGINAL NOTE

(p.d.m.) This reflection on Franco is not accidental. Mine is an old, long battle - with Kojève, with Voegelin, with Besançon - against the sentimental degradation of the West, or against that attitude of benevolent openness and understanding for all positions incapable of going beyond general moralistic appeals, such as to produce, in the face of the problems, only theoretically and politically confused compromises, on a low level.

The excess of good sentiments, evocative but inconclusive, which we call bleeding heart, is in reality a conception of the world dominated for decades not by charity but by humanitarianism and nonviolence, associated today with all the battles for individual rights, ethical and anthropological status and options, such as they may be, against regulations and sanctions. Even euhannistic perspectives are such, and even the ethics of the good life (against those of duty), tendentially hedonistic, converge on this.

The Christology that opposed the theology of the redemptive sacrifice belongs to this "nonviolent" decline of Western Christianity, in the progressive falsification of the Old and New Testament. Today this takes place out of fear of facing the humanitarian visions and sensibilities of the culture of the "enlightened" and judgmental nonbelievers. One should, as was done until Vatican Council II, face and explain, in profundity, the profundity of the mystery of God and of evil. On the bleeding heart path - as an ideology of the entropic process of humanity toward peace and tranquility, ends in themselves - Catholicism accommodates at the deepest and neo-Christian tendencies of the nineteenth century and of more recent pacifism. Pope Francis is already this.

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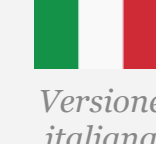
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